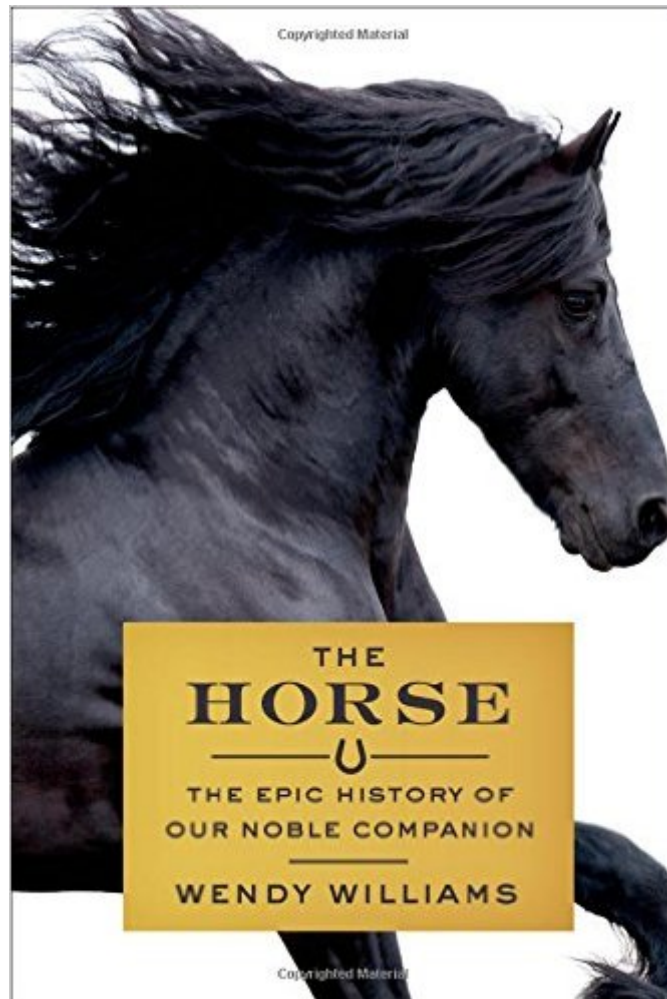


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# The Horse: The Epic History Of Our Noble Companion



## Synopsis

A New York Times Bestseller and New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice A Best Book of 2015, The Wall Street Journal "Love is the driver for Wendy Williams's new book, *The Horse* . . . [an] affectionate, thoroughgoing, good-hearted book." • Jaimy Gordon, The New York Times Book Review "Charming and deeply interesting . . . Ms. Williams does a marvelous job." • Pat Shipman, The Wall Street Journal

The book horse-lovers have been waiting for. Horses have a story to tell, one of resilience, sociability, and intelligence, and of partnership with human beings. In *The Horse*, the journalist and equestrienne Wendy Williams brings that story brilliantly to life. Williams chronicles the 56-million-year journey of horses as she visits with experts around the world, exploring what our biological affinities and differences can tell us about the bond between horses and humans, and what our longtime companion might think and feel. Indeed, recent scientific breakthroughs regarding the social and cognitive capacities of the horse and its ability to adapt to changing ecosystems indicate that this animal is a major evolutionary triumph. Williams charts the course that leads to our modern Equus—from the protohorse to the Dutch Warmbloods, Thoroughbreds, and cow ponies of the twenty-first century. She observes magnificent ancient cave art in France and Spain that signals a deep respect and admiration for horses well before they were domesticated; visits the mountains of Wyoming with experts in equine behavior to understand the dynamics of free-roaming mustangs; witnesses the fluid gracefulness of the famous Lipizzans of Vienna; contemplates what life is like for the sure-footed, mustachioed Garrano horses who thrive on the rugged terrain of Galicia; meets a family devoted to rehabilitating abandoned mustangs on their New Hampshire farm; celebrates the Takhi horses of Mongolia; and more. She blends profound scientific insights with remarkable stories to create a unique biography of the horse as a sentient being with a fascinating past and a finely nuanced mind. *The Horse* is a revealing account of the animal who has been at our side through the ages, befriending us and traveling with us over the mountains and across the plains. Enriched by Williams's own experience with horses, *The Horse* is a masterful work of narrative nonfiction that pays tribute to this treasure of the natural world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Young Mongolian Jockeys Young Mongolian jockeys await the start of a traditional horse race. (Greg Auger) [View larger](#)

[View larger](#) [View larger](#) [View larger](#) [View larger](#) McCulloch Mustangs

Three mustang stallions at McCulloch Peaks, not far from Cody, Wyoming. (Greg Auger)

Garrano Foal Horses can thrive in the wettest of climates, like the hyper-Atlantic coast of Galicia, Spain. (Greg Auger) [Lukas with World Record](#) Lukas, owned by the Californian Karen

Murdock, poses with his Guinness World Records certificate, awarded to him for the most numbers identified by a horse in one minute. (Joan Malloch, courtesy of Karen Murdock)

Kris Kokal Kris Kokal and his family rehabilitate mustangs at their farm in New Hampshire. Here, Kris and Belle, one of his rescued horses, enjoy a snowfall. (Greg Auger)

When Cortes invaded Mexico in 1519, his conquest was aided by the 16 horses he brought from Spain. The horse was unknown to the native Indians. So horses must have originated in Eurasia, right? Wrong. The earliest evidence of horses is from 56 million years ago, in what is now Wyoming. They flourished for 40 million years on the North American continent before a single one appeared in Asia or Europe. What happened? They became extinct in North America about 8,000-11,000 years ago. This coincided with the advent of humans on the continent. Human slaughter might have contributed to their demise, but there is no certainty and scientists are split on the cause. This is just one of this book's many absorbing facts about the only other creature, along with dogs, that humans have developed a special--even mystical--bond with. Some other absorbing facts: Horses have survived in cold and heat, altitude and flatland, lush plains and arid deserts, because they have been so remarkably adaptable. The earliest horses were about the size of a modern cat, and had four-toed soft paws, the better to navigate the hot marshy environment. This declined to three, then two, then one hard hoof when speed became their main protection against predators. Unlike other

mammals, who eat and store, horses have a "conveyor belt" digestive system that speeds the nutrients through. This is why they eat continually. They have "emergent teeth", imbedded deep in the jaw, that continue to grow throughout their lives. They not only can, but must, wear these down by grazing, or they will be unable to close their mouths properly. Horses have about 2/3 the visual acuity of humans--better than most other creatures. But they are almost color-blind, seeing no red and only washed-out blues and greens. This explains why they are sometimes startled by odd shapes that their human rider perceived long before. The most surprising fact, to me at least, is that horses and humans have a common evolutionary ancestor. The evidence is found in the similarity of our joints and skeletons. Is this the reason for our special communion with them? Williams surveys the science behind horse cognition. Much is still unknown. Do they really "think"? Not in the deductive way that humans do, but they have the capacity to learn by watching, and have good memories. They can, for example, figure out how to open a corral gate or turn on a water spigot by watching humans do it. Are they capable of true emotional bond with humans? Emphatically yes, Williams avers. While scientists are not unanimous, she comes down on the side of those who say that their sociable nature is key to their bond with humans. They don't respond to us just because we give them food and water and apply the stick to undesired behavior. They actually like being with us. I like believing that.

I bought this book from another source, so I am not showing up as a verified purchase. I am an everyday reader, not a scientist and not someone with a weird axe to grind. I did not read much about this book before buying it, so I did not know what to expect. So many books about horses boil down to: The horse is a noble animal, we all love horses. This book has a lot of information related to evolution and archeology, which I found fascinating. It could easily have been dry, but instead it's a pleasure because the author has a very fluid writing style and some lovely ways of phrasing things. Although more pictures would be nice, I find it easy to supplement the book with online searches, so that, for example, after reading about the archeological site Grube Messel in the book, I looked up images from it online. You don't have to be a horse lover to enjoy this book, just someone with an interest in the natural world.

This is a very thoroughly researched and well written look at horses. It traces from the very dawn of eohippus, the 4-toed diminutive predecessor of horses as we know them, through the changing global environments that shaped the evolution into the animals we have today. Wendy Williams combines her research and her personal experiences with horses in a very readable style. Frequent

reference to the science and to the scientists she interviewed provide support for the views in the book and are excellent leads for your own further study. Much of what is presented is contrary to what has become "conventional wisdom" ... and that's good because too much of today's understanding of horses is grounded in flawed information. She is able to capture the science in very accessible ways to shed light on how humans came to partner so closely with horses. These insights help to understand why our horses behave the ways they do. Highly recommended.

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