

# The Horse

The horse belongs to a group of animals known as "hoofed mammals". More particularly it is an "odd-toed mammal", which in the horse's case means it has only a single toe, or hoof, on each foot. Horses have a long head and neck, a barrel-shaped body and long, slender legs. They are very strong animals and can run at speed. The fastest breed of horse is the Quarter horse, which can reach a speed of 50 mph (80 kph) over a short distance. The term "horsepower" was first used by the 18th century Scottish engineer and inventor James Watt, to compare the work of an engine and a horse. The term is still used today to describe an engine's power. The horse has good hearing and sense of smell. Though its eyesight is not as good as that of a human, it has a much wider range of vision as its eyes are at either side of its head and work independently of each other.

Horses are herbivore and need to graze on grass or hay for 16-18 hours per day, except when they are stabled or in training. Grazing is important for their digestive system. They also need to drink lots of water every day or they can become seriously ill.



## On the Hoof!

The horse's hooves are made from keratin, which is like hair, and they are constantly growing. They need to be trimmed approximately every 6-8 weeks by a farrier, who is trained to trim and shape the hooves with special tools. A horse may also be fitted with horseshoes, which protect the hooves, particularly if they are walking on hard ground.



## Work & Play

Humans have used horses for thousands of years, both as work horses and for pleasure. They have been used for transport, agriculture, warfare and recreation. Though machinery has replaced the horse in many areas, they are still used today in many areas, such as on farms, for policing, in forests, and for leisure (trekking, racing and jumping).



## In the Wild

Horses were domesticated in approximately 2,500 BC. There is only one species of wild horse in existence, the Przewalski's wild horse. Originally from Mongolia, it now survives in zoos and parks but there have been attempts to re-introduce it back into the wild.

The Mustang is a feral (or "wild") horse that roams free in the US. It is really a domesticated horse, which was originally brought to the Americas by the Spanish.

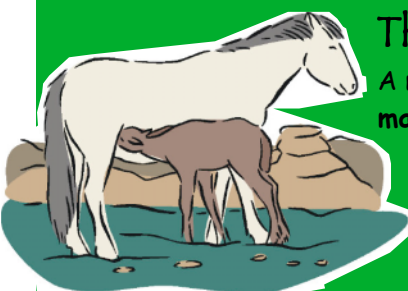
Courtesy of Joe Ravi CC-BY-SA 3.0



Przewalski's wild horse.

## The Relatives

Zebras and asses are closely related to the horse. Other "hoofed mammals" include reindeer, rhinoceros and hippopotamus, though these are more distantly related.



## The Family

A male horse is called a **stallion**, the female, a **mare** and the young, a **foal**. Mares usually have a single foal (and twins on rare occasions). The gestation period for a horse (the length of time the mother carries her young) is 11 months. The horse has a life-span of about 25-30 years.