TWO HORSES · ONE SPANISH ORIGIN

The Mustang and The Marsh Tacky

Same Spanish Roots, Different Horses

Both descend from Colonial Spanish horses brought to the Americas by Spanish explorers and settlers in the 1500s and 1600s. Centuries of geographic isolation and different environments made them genetically distinct.





Mustangs from Arapaho Creek Wyoming

Open-range, feral BLM Herd Area horse. High-altitude, arid desert and brutal Wyoming winters: large lungs, thick bone, suited to long distances over hard, rocky ground.

Marsh Tacky Horses from The Carolinas

Hot, humid South Carolina swamps and Sea Islands: wide hooves, narrower chest, four-beat ambling gait (the "Swamp Fox Trot"), tolerance for humidity and biting insects.

What they share: Spanish roots

Iberian horses brought by Spanish explorers are the root stock for many feral and regional American strains. Both carry Spanish/Iberian ancestral DNA markers.

Where they split → genetics mixed and highly variable, Spanish blood heavily diluted.

Where they split → closed studbook, strictly Colonial Spanish.

FEATURE	WYOMING MUSTANG	MARSH TACKY
Genetic purity	Mixed / high variability	Closed studbook / pure strain
Primary influences	Spanish, Draft, Quarter Horse, Thoroughbred, Morgan	Strictly Colonial Spanish
Herd status	Open-range Herd Area (HA) / feral	Critically endangered (~400 left)
Home terrain	High desert, mountains, harsh winters	Humid swamps and Sea Islands

Marsh Tackies worked with Revolutionary War soldiers like Francis Marion.

The takeaway: the Marsh Tacky is a time capsule of the original 16th-century Spanish horse; the Mustang is a resilient North American melting pot.

Photo credits: Congaree, The Little Black Mustang from Arapaho Creek, Julianne Neal David Grant and Marsh Tacky DP, Daniela Snyder, Equestrian Images