



Breed All About It: The Przewalskis Horse

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Native to Mongolia (where they are referred to as “takhi” meaning “spirit”) and considered the last true wild breed of horse, this Equine actually is not a horse at all, but believed to be a cousin of the modern-day domesticated horse that diverged from a common ancestor roughly 500,000 years ago.

Przewalskis horse is a critically endangered species that once Freely roamed much of modern-day Europe and Asia. Development by man and changes within the environment caused these equines to shift into what is now Mongolia. They are considered extinct in the wild, with

the only Prewalski’s horses being found on reintroduction sites in Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan. This breed is the last true wild breed, horses living wild in North America and other continents are domesticated breeds that became feral and are now considered wild. The Przewalskis horse has 66 chromosomes, and our domesticated horse breeds contain 64, breeding the two equines often results in a horse that certainly looks like a Przewalski’s horse, but generally they are sterile and unable to produce offspring. A DNA test run on these animals will find that they contain 65 chromosomes compared the 64 and 66 of the respective parents.

The natural habitat of these animals is unforgiving with summers has hot as 104° Fahrenheit and winters that are known to go 50 below zero, therefore the breed must be very hardy in order to survive. These animals are hind-gut fermenters so like their other relatives the zebra and donkey, they require a lot more water, and not necessarily high-quality forage as the domesticated horse.

The appearance of the breed is one that is short and stocky. They are 12-14 hands, dun in color, with markings similar to that of a zebra behind the knees, and an erect mane with no forelock.

Due to the Przewalkis horse’s status of being critically endangered, an effort to breed and bring back the breed has begun. The reintroduction of the breed into the wild was just the first hurdle, every single Prewalskis horse is derived from the same 12 stallions. This is extremely common with endangered and critical species as only the strongest of the gene pool is able to survive, however there is a lack of genetic diversity within the breeding programs which is also a large threat. The solution to this is a new program called the “Takhi” project where living cells that have been saved are being used to clone new Przewalksi’s horses to add into the gene pool. The first foal was born August 6, 2020. He will be introduced to the San Diego Zoo Safari Park to become a part of their breeding program.

