

## Learning More

There are many sources of information about adopting, caring for and training wild horses and burros.

The BLM's National Wild Horse and Burro Program website, [www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov](http://www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov) contains helpful information and links to wild horse and burro mentor and adopter assistance organizations.

Your local cooperative extension office may have a large animal specialist, and your veterinarian can provide additional information.

Additionally, many horse trainers use gentle training techniques endorsed by the BLM.

Good luck on your adventure with your wild horse or burro.

**Congratulations on  
choosing a  
"Friend for Life!"**

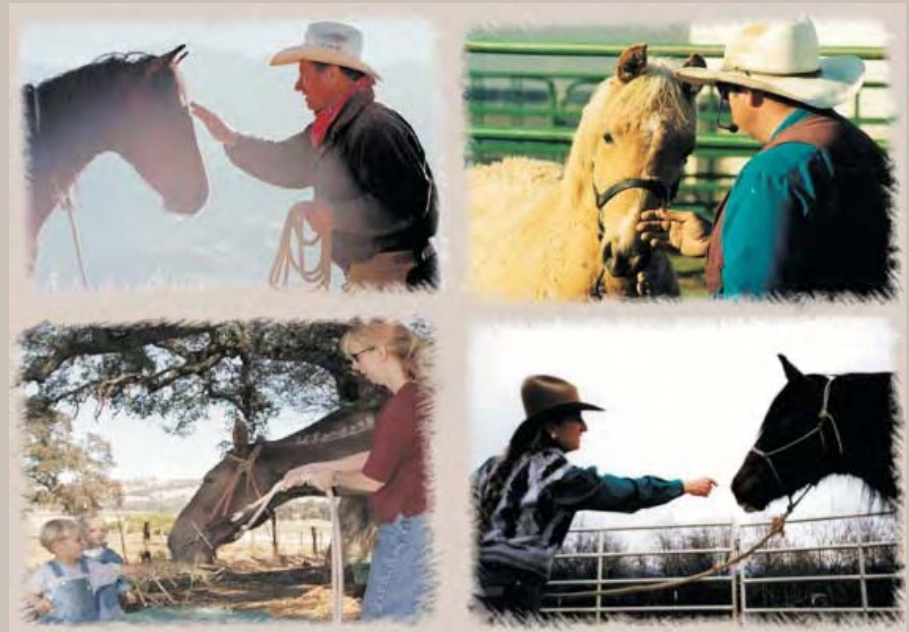
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# BLM

## California

### Making Friends

with your  
Wild Horse or Burro



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
2800 Cottage Way Suite W1834  
Sacramento, CA 95825  
(916) 978-4400  
[www.ca.blm.gov](http://www.ca.blm.gov)

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**"With time and patience,  
you will discover how to  
communicate with your  
animal, and how he  
communicates with  
you."**

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Land Management and not the individuals represented here.*

Cover photo: Clockwise from top left - Horse trainer Monty Roberts; Horse trainer Phil West; Horse trainer Lesly Newman; Kathy Caitano with Kyle Wood and Cierra West

Most wild horses and burros have no foot problems at the time of adoption. In captivity, however, the hooves will not wear as they did in the wild. You will need to have the animal's hooves trimmed regularly, beginning about eight weeks after adoption, or as soon as the horse can be safely handled. The frequency of hoof trimming will depend on the soil conditions in your corral. Contact a reputable farrier to develop a hoof care schedule.

Your animal's teeth will also need regular care. Horse and burro teeth grow continuously through their lives, and are worn down as they eat. If the teeth wear unevenly, they develop sharp points that cause pain and prevent the animal from adequately chewing food. Your veterinarian can file down these points (a process called floating) as needed. Have your animal's teeth checked regularly. Because of his diet in the wild, your horse or burro may show accelerated tooth wear compared to a domestic animal his age.



## Staying Healthy

When you adopt, you will receive a complete set of health care records for your wild horse or burro. It shows vaccinations, treatments and blood test results.



*You will receive a complete set of health care records for your animal*

Requirements to keep your animal healthy are similar to domestic animals with few variations. A veterinarian specializing in the care and treatment of large animals will help you develop a health program based on preventative medicine.

The vaccinations your horse or burro received at the BLM adoption center will not provide full immunity unless boosters are administered. Your veterinarian will tell you which are needed to protect your animal and advise you on a schedule for future vaccinations.

Parasite control is vital for your wild horse or burro. Although the animal was wormed prior to adoption, additional treatment should be administered about four weeks after adoption and on a regular schedule every three months or so. Again, your veterinarian can advise on proper methods and schedules. Feed additive wormers can be used until your animal is sufficiently gentled for tube or paste worming.

## Thank you for your interest in adopting a wild horse or burro from your public lands

Whether you are anticipating your first experience working with a wild horse or burro, or have previously adopted, you will find challenges and rewards in bringing your animal from the rangelands and into your family.

As you begin to gentle, then train your horse or burro, you embark on a journey of discovery. With time and patience, you will discover how to communicate with your animal, and how he communicates with you. You will discover the amazing instincts and abilities of your horse or

burro, and instincts and abilities deep within yourself. You will discover, as renowned trainer Monty Roberts says, a “Friend For Life.”



*Reonna Miller with Frosty*

The following tips are only introductory, intended to start you on the journey toward selecting an animal, meeting its health and care needs, then gentling it safely, without inflicting pain or fear. Many trainers recommend using these techniques, and have produced readily available training materials that provide all the details you will need.

Professional gentling advice is also available specifically for burros.

## Deciding to adopt

Consider the decision to adopt a wild horse or burro carefully. Do you have the facilities that meet BLM specifications? Can you afford to care for a wild horse or burro? Do you have the time to spend getting acquainted, gentling and training? If you are unsure about the expense, and the time and patience you will need, the BLM can put you in touch with an adopter or mentor. Adopt only when you feel certain that a wild horse or burro is right for you.

## At the Adoption

BLM offers adoption opportunities at “satellite” events across the United States. A complete schedule is posted on the Internet at [www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov](http://www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov). You can also adopt at the various BLM wild horse and burro corrals also listed on the website.

When you have decided to adopt, experts agree it is important to take time to make a careful selection. If you are adopting a horse, know the advantages and disadvantages of yearlings and older horses. Consider how you will use your horse, whether for pleasure riding, packing, endurance riding or competition, and select an animal with the size and conformation to meet your needs. Talk with other adopters and mentors and make an informed decision, not a selection based on emotion. There are also adopters and mentors who can provide similar advice about burros.



him. Repeat the process over and over, petting and scratching more of him each time. Be extra careful when touching his legs and stomach. You will need to get him used to having his feet handled because your horse or burro will need to have his feet trimmed in the coming weeks. You will need to work toward this with the same slow, gentle process described above. When he finally lets you pick up a foot, hold it by the hoof, not the leg, as this is more comfortable for the horse.

## Time for Training

When you have gained the confidence of your animal and established physical contact you are ready to begin training. At this point he is much like a domestic horse and should be treated in a similar manner. There are many training techniques, including various forms of advance and retreat methods. All should be combined with patience, kindness, gentleness and consistency.

You can use books, videos and courses in horse training, or hire a professional trainer. Your local extension agent can assist you in learning more, or you can contact members of various mentor and adopter assistance groups that assist BLM adopters with training. Contact your nearest BLM office for information on these groups.

horses. Although the following guidelines pertain specifically to horses, the same routine should be followed with your wild burro.

Always remember that time and patience are the two major requirements here. Lots of time and lots of patience. While professional trainers demonstrate successful gentling techniques in only hours, it could be days or weeks before you can even pet your new horse. When that moment comes, however, you'll know it was worth every minute.

Having been in the corral for a few days, your horse should be tolerating your presence fairly well. Try sitting on a lower rail in the corral and talking or singing to him. He will eventually come over to you if you continue. If you want to approach the animal, lower your head slightly and round your shoulders, and he will see you as less of a threat. Always move slowly and continue talking. Don't stare directly at him, but be sure to watch the animal at all times. If he resists, retreat and try again. It takes time. Be patient.

When you are close enough to pet him and he seems willing to accept you, stay as close to his side as you can, always facing him, and slowly reach for his neck or shoulder. Do not reach for his face or toward his hind quarters yet.

Do not tap or pat your animal with your hand, as it may startle him. A slow, firm rub with your hand has a quieting and communicating effect. Scratch his neck gently and continue talking to



### Safety First!

When you adopt a wild horse or burro, safety — for you and the animal — is the most important consideration. The first few days after adoption will probably be the most tense. A wild horse or burro is just as the name suggests — WILD. As a result, you must use extreme caution when you are around the animal during this period.

Your animal will probably be quite frightened of you and the new, unfamiliar surroundings for the first several days. He may see you as a threat to his welfare and react defensively. Observe the following safety rules:

- Always maintain a safe distance between you and the animal. Keep an escape route in mind.

- Always speak softly to the horse or burro before approaching him. Do not attempt to sneak up to his corral — it will only frighten him.

- Keep young children and pets out of the corral. Do not let them tease or excite the animal.



*Remember - your adopted horse is wild. Work slowly and carefully.*

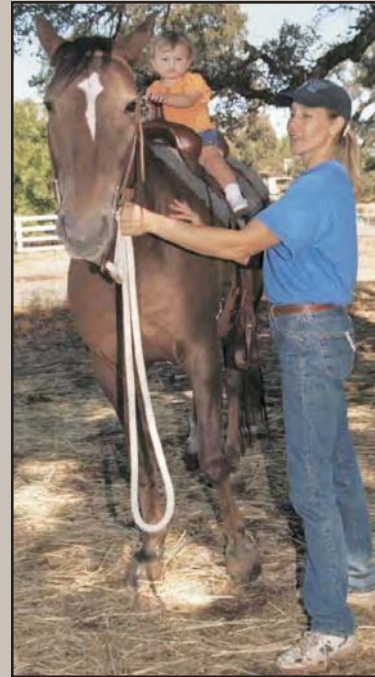
- Watch your animal's reaction to you and his surroundings. If he bares his teeth or lays his ears back, stop what you are doing.
- Consider using a round corral for gentling and training to avoid being trapped in a corner.

For your animal's safety, we suggest:

- Never tying a wild horse until he is gentled. In a struggle to free himself, he may injure his neck or back muscles.
- Keeping dogs and other small animals away from your wild horse or burro at first. Barking dogs, in particular, may frighten him.
- Using feed and water containers with rounded edges.
- Ensuring no bolts, nails or sharp objects protrude into the corral.
- Checking the lead rope frequently to be sure it has not become entangled in the corral or the animal's legs.
- Making certain the halter is the correct size for your animal's head, especially if he is still growing.



*BLM Ranger Rich Smith patrols on a trained wild horse*



*Julie Hueftle with Alyssa Shepard and Jake*

After your horse or burro is gentled, you may wish to turn him out to a pasture to graze. A legume/grass pasture in good condition provides most of the nutrients the animal will need. Unless you provide supplemental feed and exercise, you will need a minimum of two acres of cultivated pasture per animal to provide adequate food and exercise space, and to control internal parasites. Native pastures may need to be considerably larger than two acres to supply adequate forage.

Pay close attention to formulating a balanced diet for your animal. You must consider many factors, including the animal's age, sex, level of activity, and physical condition, and the availability of various feeds. Contact your local cooperative extension specialist or your veterinarian for assistance.

### **Making Friends**

Even if you have no intention of training your wild horse or burro to ride, pull a wagon or do any other kind of work, every wild horse or burro needs to be gentled sufficiently to allow people to work with him safely. In general, wild burros are much easier to domesticate than wild

Use only good quality grain, free of bugs, dust, mold and musty odors. Keep the grain supply stored out of your animal's reach. Accidental over consumption may cause colic, founder, permanent damage to feet, and even death in severe cases.

When he is accustomed to eating grains, an average daily diet for a 1,000 pound adult horse is 15 to 20 pounds of hay and four to eight pounds of grain. For a 375-pound adult burro, feed eight to 12 pounds of grass or mixed hay, and up to two pounds of grain. Use this only as a guide. Adjust your animal's diet according to his need to gain or lose weight.

A horse's digestive system is designed for small, frequent meals. Divide your animal's feed into at least two, preferably three, meals daily (morning, noon and evening). It is important to feed on a regular schedule. It is common to feed a third of the grain at each feeding. Half or more of the hay is usually fed in the evening, with the remainder divided between the other two feedings. If hay is fed only twice daily, feed about two thirds in the evening.



*Work with your vet or animal care specialist to develop a balanced diet.*

Safety is important long after your wild horse or burro is gentled. Follow these basic safety rules as part of your daily routine when working with your horse or burro:



*Use extreme caution around your animal during the first few days*

- Never approach an animal directly from the rear. He cannot see you if you are directly behind him. If you startle him, you might be kicked.
- Always walk around the front or rear of an animal with enough room so that stepping over the rope is not necessary.
- If an animal is gentle, always work as close as possible to it. You cannot be kicked by the animal if you are standing next to its shoulder. If the animal does kick while you are working close by its haunches or passing behind it, you will not receive the full force of the kick.
- Wear boots to protect your feet should the animal step on your toes. Wear gloves to prevent rope burns.
- When tying an animal, be sure the post is secure and cannot be pulled loose. Never tie an animal to a wire fence. Always tie the animal's

lead rope higher than the withers, with approximately two feet of slack, using a quick-release knot.

- Never tie an animal by the reins. He could be hurt, or break the reins, if he pulls backward.
- Never tie an animal inside a trailer before the tailgate is closed. Always untie before the tailgate is opened. Place a layer of sand or similar material on the trailer floor so the animal can maintain its footing.
- Never wrap the lead rope, halter shank or reins around your hands, wrists or body.
- Use a long lead rope and both hands when leading. If the animal rears up, release the hand nearest to the halter so you can maintain your balance.
- When leading an animal, walk beside it, not ahead or behind.
- Horses and burros are stronger than humans, so don't try to out pull them.

### Going Home

You must transport your wild horse or burro in a stock truck or trailer that meets BLM specifications. BLM prefers stock trailers over two-horse trailers. It's best to check with the BLM office hosting your adoption event for any specific trailer requirements. You will need to provide a halter and lead rope so the BLM



*Provide food and water immediately in containers with no sharp edges*

Abundant clean water is essential. Adult horses need 15 to 20 gallons daily. Your animal may prefer to drink from a trough rather than a water bucket. Make sure the water container cannot be tipped over easily. Use tank heaters to keep water from freezing or becoming too cold to drink.

You may wish to introduce grains after your horse or burro adjusts to the all hay diet. We recommend starting with rolled, crimped or crushed oats, which your animal will find tasty and readily digestible. You may add ground corn later. It has more carbohydrates and lower fiber, which is useful for adding weight. Be careful to watch for digestive problems. Equal parts of oats and ground corn make a good ration. Commercial horse rations (often equal parts of oats and corn mixed with molasses) may also be used, but we don't recommend feeding grain sorghum.



moldy, because it can cause respiratory problems and colic.

Hay should be relatively weed free. The high moisture content of weeds often causes moldy hay. Thorny weeds can hurt your animal's lips and mouth, and some weeds are poisonous to horses and burros.

Your animal probably received alfalfa hay during his stay at a BLM adoption facility. It is the highest quality hay available in most parts of the West. However, alfalfa hay is hard to find in many areas of the East, and quality grass hays such as Timothy, orchard grass, brome grass and Bermuda may be used. Mixed hays (combinations of grass and alfalfa hays or other legume hays) also are excellent. We do not recommend feeding your animal fescue (especially to pregnant or lactating females) or Sudan grass because they can cause serious medical problems.

We recommend mixed hay or grass hay for your burro. If only legume hays are available, look for second cuttings or more mature harvests that have lower protein content.

Also provide your horse or burro with trace mineralized salt, fed on a free-choice basis. Pregnant or lactating mares and jennies, and immature animals may also need extra calcium and phosphorus. Dicalcium phosphate or ground limestone may be fed free-choice separately from the salt.

wranglers can halter and load the animal into your trailer.

Bringing your animal home presents some special considerations. Pulling a trailer containing an animal is challenging. These tips will help you have a safe trip home:

- Drive at reasonable speeds. Drive slowly on sharp turns. Horses and burros have good balance front to back, but not side to side.
- Leave plenty of stopping room between you and the vehicle in front. Apply the brakes slightly before stopping to allow the animal to brace itself. Avoid city rush hours.
- If you stop for a rest, do not unload the animal unless you have the proper facilities and have made arrangements with BLM. It's best not to feed or water your animal in the trailer.
- Have your animal's health records ready for inspection if you will be crossing state boundaries.

### **Home at Last**

Now that you've arrived at home you need to carefully unload your horse or burro into his new corral — the solidly-constructed facility that provides 400 square feet of living space per animal.

Back your trailer completely to the corral gate so your animal cannot escape around the sides of the trailer while he is being unloaded. If he is

hesitant to leave the trailer, stand in front of the trailer and motion toward him. He will probably back out simply to escape you. Immediately close the gate after he enters the corral.

Now, allow him time to adjust to new surroundings. Remember, in just a short amount of time, your animal was trucked from a BLM holding facility, spent time at an adoption site, and was then hauled to your corral. Give him some time to explore the corral and become familiar with the new sights, scents and sounds.

Give him food and water immediately in containers with no sharp edges. Keep flapping articles such as loose papers, laundry, etc. away from the corral. It's best to keep children, barking dogs and machinery away for several days to give the animal time to quietly adjust to his new surroundings. Don't turn your horse or burro out into a large pasture until he can be approached, haltered, handled and led.

### Meal Time

Proper horse and burro nutrition is a complex subject. Contact your veterinarian or cooperative extension agent specializing in the care and feeding of large animals to discuss a



*A short time ago, your animal lived in the wild and was rounded-up from the rangelands*

suitable diet for your region of the country. The following suggestions are general in nature.

Remember that wild horses and burros are accustomed to the grasses and shrubs from their western rangelands. Start your horse or burro on a hay diet. You will need to provide about 25 to 30 pounds per day for an adult horse, and about 10 to 15 pounds daily for a burro (about three percent of the animal's weight). Pregnant or lactating mares and jennies need diets with more protein, vitamins and minerals. Animals living in cold climates need more feed, as they burn more energy to keep warm. The hay should have at least a 10 percent protein content. Legume hays such as alfalfa supply more than enough protein to meet the standard. Many grass hays are deficient in protein, and you might need to add a supplement such as soybean oil meal.

The quality of hay is more important than the type. Hays harvested at the pre-bloom or early bloom stages have higher nutrient content than late-cut hays. Hay should be bright green and have a new-mown scent. Check on the inside of the bale for color. Sun bleaching on the outside will not affect the nutritional contents of the inside. Brown hay throughout the bale indicates a loss of nutritional value. Do not use hay that smells