

# Lifestyle

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Two horses play in their paddock close to the small Bavarian village of Puchheim near Munich, southern Germany, during cold winter weather with temperatures by minus eight degrees. — AFP

## All the wild horses are extinct

All the world's wild horses have gone extinct, according to a study Thursday that unexpectedly rewrites the horse family tree based on a new DNA analysis of their ancestry. What most people thought were the last remaining wild horses on Earth—known as Przewalski's horses—were actually domesticated horses that escaped their owners, said the report in the journal *Science*. "This was a big surprise," said co-author Sandra Olsen, curator-in-charge of the archeology division of the Biodiversity Institute and Natural History Museum at the University of Kansas.



### A new quest

According to Beth Shapiro, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of California Santa Cruz, the findings are "super interesting." "Certainly, it is surprising to see that Przewalski's horses are descended from early domestic horses, as this is not what people tended to believe," Shapiro, who was not involved in the study, told AFP.

"Swapping the word 'wild' for 'feral' is a semantic change that may better reflect their evolutionary history but should not change their status. We should continue to protect Przewalski's horses as a population of wild horses." Przewalski's horses are considered an endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The round-bellied, short legged, reddish brown to beige horses roamed Central Asia, Europe and China in prehistoric times. They were listed as extinct in the wild in the 1960s, but a number of breeding programs and reintroductions have helped bolster their numbers. The findings have also sparked a new quest—to uncover the true origins of today's domestic horses.

"Current models suggest that all modern domesticated horses living now descend from those first tamed in Botai, in the north of present-day Kazakhstan," said a statement from the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) scientist Ludovic Orlando. "Yet this genomic analysis yielded unexpected results." Since the Botai horses did not give rise to today's domesticated horses, "the origin of modern domestic horses must be sought elsewhere." — AFP



This file photo taken on January 22, 2016 shows wild Przewalski's horses on a snow covered field in the Chernobyl exclusions zone. — AFP photos

"This means there are no living wild horses on Earth—that's the sad part," said Olsen. The study is based on archaeological work at two sites in northern Kazakhstan, called Botai and Krasnyi Yar, where scientists have found the earliest proof of horse domestication, going back more than 5,000 years. To further dig into these roots, international researchers sequenced the genomes of 20 horses from the Botai-based on teeth and bones unearthed from the sites—and 22 horses from across Eurasia.

Then, they compared these ancient horse genomes with already published genomes of 18 ancient and 28 modern horses. They discovered that Przewalski's horses descended from the earliest-known domesticated horses, kept by the Botai people of northern Kazakhstan some 5,500 years ago. That means what people thought were wild horses were actually feral, meaning they had escaped from domestication but were not originally wild.



## Missing Monet returns home to Japan



These handout pictures taken in Tokyo and released by Japan's National Museum of Western Art shows a severely damaged study painting of French Impressionist painter, Claude Monet, titled 'Water Lilies: Reflections of a Willow Tree' (1916). — AFP photos

A painting by French Impressionist master Claude Monet that belonged to a Japanese collector but was lost for decades after WWII is now back in Tokyo, a museum official said Tuesday. The oil painting, around two meters long and 4.2 meters wide, was unearthed in the Louvre Museum in Paris in 2016 but the discovery had not been made public until now. "The painting was recently returned" to the National Museum of Western Art in the Japanese capital, a spokeswoman told AFP. The painting—entitled "Water Lilies: Reflections of a Willow Tree"—is dated 1916 and depicts bright flowers floating on a lake.

The museum said it was a study painting for his famous series "Water Lilies" but the work is severely damaged with half of it destroyed. It will be necessary to restore the canvas "with extreme care", the museum said in a statement. "But the remaining painting is still very large. It has the potential to show Monet's wonderful work if handled with the proper care," it said. The

painting had belonged to Kojiro Matsukata, a businessman who collected Western art between 1916 and 1927 with the proceeds amassed from a shipbuilding fortune. It is said Matsukata directly purchased the piece from Monet at his atelier in 1921, according to the museum.

His art collections including the painting were moved to Paris for safekeeping during WWII and later requisitioned by the French government at the end of the war as enemy property. In 1959, the French government returned to Japan the majority of 400 pieces in the Matsukata collection. "The existence of the painting might have been forgotten given the tremendous damage caused by bad storage conditions during the war," the Tokyo museum said. The museum plans to show the painting to the public in June 2019 following restoration work. — AFP