

SAVING SOUTH CAROLINA'S RARE HUNTING HORSES

A crowd of nearly 10,000 turned out on Hilton Head Island February 27 for the third annual Marsh Tacky Beach Run. Honors went to Brittany Bowen riding her 22-year-old mare Molly to victory over a field of 22 competitors.

The diminutive Tackies, descended from lost horses of the Spanish conquistadores, were once common in the state's Lowcountry as mounts and draft animals until Henry Ford and John Deere put an end to their usefulness. Though prized by plantation owners for quail, deer and hog hunting, by the 1990s Tacky numbers had shrunk to less than 150.

In 2007, after DNA analysis conclusively proved their Spanish ancestry, The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy helped Tacky owners form an association, registry and studbook. In 2010 the Marsh Tacky was recognized by the South Carolina Legislature as the State Heritage Horse. Today, their numbers have doubled with the ultimate goal of 1,000 animals to assure the breed's survival. For more information visit www.marsh tacky.org. – *Roger Pinckney*