

Three Salt River Horses Shot, Foal Killed; MCSO Seeks Suspect

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BY RAY STERN



A dead foal was found in an East Valley desert area the day after witnesses reported seeing someone firing at Salt River horses.

Maricopa County Sheriff's Office

Authorities are asking for the public's help to find a suspect who shot three wild Salt River horses on Friday evening.

At least one of the horses, a foal, was killed, possibly with a shotgun. The other two horses are believed to be injured or dead.

At about 6 p.m. on Friday, October 21, a witness saw someone wearing black shorts and a dark-green shirt in an area known as Pirate's Island shooting at the horses. The area is off Bush Highway between a tubing business and Pebble Beach.

The wild horses of Salt River live primarily in the Tonto National Forest near the convergence of the Verde and Salt rivers in the East Valley. In May, Governor Doug Ducey signed a bill into law that makes it a crime to harass, kill, or otherwise interfere with the horses.

"Witnesses saw one of the horses in the river down in the water thrashing about and witnessed two other horses get hit with rounds from a rifle or shotgun," according to the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office.

After shooting at the horses, the suspect reportedly followed the animals as they fled. Investigators believe at least two other people were with the shooter at the time.



The dead foal appeared to have been hit with blasts from a shotgun, authorities said.

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MCSO deputies with the aviation and lake-patrol divisions scoured the area after someone reported the incident, but couldn't find the suspect.

On Saturday, someone found a dead foal in the area; MCSO dispatched two deputies from the animal-crimes unit and a veterinarian to the scene.

The foal is believed to have been seven to 10 months old. It had apparent shotgun wounds to the side of the neck and head.

MCSO asks anyone with information about the crime to call Detective M. Trombi at 602-876-1011.

Thousands of Arizonans have worked to save the horses living along the Salt River on the federal national forest east of Phoenix since the feds announced plans in July 2015 to round up the non-native animals and auction them off. The plans were scrapped in December, but the horses' future on the land remains uncertain.

UPDATE: Attorney John Schilly has offered a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the suspect's arrest. Last year, a reward of \$8,000 was offered in the case of Dotty, a Salt River horse found shot to death — also apparently by a shotgun — but the culprit was never found.