

DARTMOOR

Summary

The Dartmoor is a small, hardy breed of pony originating from the moorland and mires of Dartmoor. It has a proven ability to maintain itself on poor keep and in exposed conditions, although numerous introductions to the bloodline over recent years have reputedly reduced the breeds' survival ability. Bay, brown or black in colour, the Dartmoor pony is one of the milder, more biddable native breeds.



Fiona Freshney

Hardiness - a hardy breed in the absence of inappropriate breeding.

- *Maintains condition well* - mature non-breeding animals of traditional type thrive on low quality keep all year round.
- *Supplementary feed* - may be necessary for young stock and breeding mares in severe weather conditions and where forage is primarily browse material.
- *Withstands exposure and extreme weather* - coat adapted to a harsh moorland environment. Copes well on exposed coastal sites, although some shelter needed - e.g. gorse brakes or hedges.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry - little intervention required as long as the breed has adequate keep and suitable free-ranging conditions.

- *Good hooves* - small, strong and slow growing. Minimal foot care necessary for free-ranging ponies on poor keep with access to hard ground.
- *Laminitis* - rare if kept away from lush pasture.
- *Handling* - considered one of the milder, more biddable breeds of pony; potentially easy to train. Unhandled animals can be flighty and alarmed by enclosed spaces. Non-breeding and single sex herds are usually easier to manage.
- *Size* - variable, but the heavier set, smaller pony with short ears, a small head and solid-looking leg bones is often considered to be the most hardy.
- *Summer* - it has a high water requirement and may need some shade to escape flies.
- *Worming* - used in extensive systems, Dartmoors may be able to break parasitic cycles by moving from area to area. However, regular worming may be necessary and is generally recommended for animals kept in relatively small areas.
- *Teeth* - genetic abnormalities in individuals can manifest themselves in deformities of the jaw (undershot or overshot), which can reduce grazing effectiveness and increase tooth wear.
- *Latrine sites* - on extensive sites it dungs in an ad hoc fashion; on smaller sites, the Dartmoor tends to use defined latrine areas.

Grazing Characteristics - a breed suitable for grazing poor quality forage.

- *Strongly grass based* - favours both coarse and fine grasses including Cocksfoot, Fescues & Purple Moor-grass. Less keen on Bristle Bent-grass and False Oat-grass.
- *Sedges and Rushes* - readily eats smaller sedges and Soft Rush.
- *Browsing ability* - readily eat Brambles and if short of grass, may switch to feeding almost entirely on Gorse. Browse Heather tops if pushed. Some suppression of Willow, Birch and Blackthorn regrowth.
- *Coarse herbs and flowering plants* - does not normally select flowering plants, but may occasionally nibble Thrift leaves or Primroses.
- *Adventurous* - pushes into and opens out areas of dense vegetation, including Bramble and Bracken.
- *Sea cliffs* - the Dartmoor has a poor track record on unfenced sea cliff slopes. Incidents may be due more to flightiness, background and social group fighting than lack of sure-footedness or caution.

Interaction with the Public - unhandled ponies will generally avoid the public, but may be extremely flighty in the presence of dogs.

- *Friendliness* - untrained, unhandled Dartmoors will tend to keep their distance from people.
- *Reaction to dogs* - variable. Unhandled animals reared on the moor may be particularly inclined to flightiness or aggressive behaviour if introduced directly to a site with public access. A degree of socialisation on 'safe' sites may be necessary for moor-bred animals.

Sites where Dartmoor ponies are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Castle Drogo Devon National Trust	Heath, scrub and deciduous woodland on steep gorge slope.	Since 1992, 3 - 7 ponies grazed from October - March, successfully trampling pathways through Bracken and promoting Violets used by Fritillary butterflies. Definite switch from grasses to gorse, as main source of forage in late winter. Some browsing control of scrub. Recently noticed importance of dung piles for Hornet Robberfly.	Mick Jones 01647 433622
Coleton Cliffs Devon National Trust	Coastal acid grassland, Bracken & scrub.	Grazing by mainly entire males since 1990; recently replaced by Shetland ponies. Mostly year-round. Maintained condition well. Took coarse grasses and Bramble. Created and maintained desired vegetation mosaic. Adventurous, pushing in to less accessible areas. Some individuals proved flighty, particularly colts. Some worried by dogs.	Mike Ingram 01803 752776
Dartmoor Commons Devon Dartmoor National Park Authority	Moorland, heathland and mire.	Some 3,000 ponies free-range over common land on Dartmoor; many year round. Breeding groups generally lightly hefted. Mix of registered, non-registered and Dartmoor crosses. Minimal husbandry by most commoners. Some ponies checked over and wormed by owners in autumn round-ups. Minimal research on impact on vegetation and grazing behaviour. Trampling of Bracken benefits Fritillary butterflies.	Norman Baldock 01626 832093
Hembury Devon National Trust	Heathland, scrub, Bracken and acid grassland.	Up to 12 ponies (mainly mares) since 1992. Prefer grasses; both coarse and fine species; Bristle Bent-grass left until last. Readily eat Bramble; trample Bracken and eat some fronds. Gorse and Heather taken if pushed. Pure-breds maintain condition at all times; crosses more variable. Handle in pen, but some only just. Wormed in late summer and feet checked.	Lucy Morton 01626 834750
Pencarrow Head, Lansallos Cliff and Valley Cornwall National Trust	Neutral coastal grassland, scrub and Bracken.	Up to 30 ponies graze on 5 coastal sites November – April. First grazed in 1994; created a mosaic of scrub and grasses. Reduced dominance of coarse grasses. Eat Brambles and Gorse in early spring. Occasionally they eat Primroses and Violets. Now getting significant poaching during wet periods as sites revert to shorter grasslands. Late summer/autumn grazing would be preferable. Fairly calm, ignore people; no dog-related incidents.	Andy Simmons 01726 870146
Pentire Head and Port Quin Bay Wadebridge Cornwall National Trust	Maritime grassland and heathland; scrub.	Ponies, via the Dartmoor Pony Society (DPS) loan scheme, winter graze compartments on the cliffs. Successfully controlling coarser vegetation to promote conditions for rare spring flowers. Prefer grasses, but take Brambles, Honeysuckle and Gorse, particularly when young or after swiping. Some damage to Thrift and hedge banks. Purebred animals, including breeding mares maintain condition well; wormed by DPS. Popular with the public.	Simon Ford 01208 863046
Rhos Pasture Dartmoor, Devon Dartmoor National Park Authority	Acidic wet grassland, carr and Bracken.	Ponies and cattle on 8 sites; ponies in autumn/winter; cattle in summer. Stocking rates low. Partial control of young Birch, Grey and Goat Willow, European and Western Gorse and Blackthorn. Produce variability in sward height; avoid flowering plants. No foot problems as some hard ground is usually available.	Norman Baldock 01626 832093
Other contacts:		Dartmoor National Park Association (DNPA) - for information on their Dartmoor Pony Support Scheme.	DNPA 01626 832093
		Dartmoor Pony Society - for information on the Duchy Moorland Pony Scheme & their loan scheme.	Mrs V Brown 01487 822635
		Rare Breeds Survival Trust	024 7669 6551

References

- FARRANT L (1989) *Welfare of Dartmoor ponies - Roborough Down* Journal of State Veterinary 43: 126-134
 GILL E (1991) *Further studies of factors affecting body condition of free-ranging ponies* University of Southampton
 LEWIS A R (1991) *Husbandry and welfare of free-ranging moorland ponies* MSc thesis, University of Bristol