

EXMOOR

Summary

A hardy native breed of pony, the Exmoor appears to have inherent capability and intelligence to do well on conservation sites, particularly when kept in extensive situations. As a rare breed, it also has high aesthetic appeal and is well worth consideration for use on sites with public access.

Hardiness - possibly the hardest of British breeds.

- *Maintains condition well* - mature non-breeding animals can do well on poor forage; less likely to need supplementary feeding. Breeding animals and young stock (< 3 years) may need extra feed in severe weather or when keep is short.
- *Can withstand extreme weather* - very tolerant of rain, snow and cold winds, but needs to be able to stand in the lee of some form of shelter.
- *Intelligent* - particularly in semi-natural, free-ranging habitats. For example, able to break ice on frozen drinking water.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – a breed with characteristics well suited to extensive grazing situations.

- *Good hooves* - strong & slow growing, able to cope with wet conditions. Unlikely to need trimming if areas of rock or stony ground present.
- *Laminitis* - rare if kept away from improved or semi-improved grassland
- *Handling* - animals which are unbroken or not head collar trained are extremely strong and difficult to handle. Consequently, grazing schemes involving semi-feral Exmoors work well until an animal needs to be treated and proper handling facilities should be in place.
- *Summer* - needs shade and has a high water requirement in hot weather. Sweet itch can occur; once a pony has the condition, it requires daily treatment during summer months for the rest of its life.
- *Worming* - Research (Baker, 1993) indicates if used in extensive systems, Exmoors may be able to break parasitic cycles by moving from area to area. However, regular worming may be necessary and is generally recommended.
- *Appearance* – medium sized, with individuals' colouring ranging from light to dark brown, with a mealy muzzle and pale around the eyes.



Matthew Oates

Grazing Characteristics - a highly suitable breed for grazing low quality keep on nature conservation sites.

- *Strongly grass-based* - prefers finer, richer grasses, but will also take coarse grasses, notably rank Tor-grass.
- *Rushes & Sedges* - readily consumed with grasses, including Saw Sedge.
- *Browsing* - limited role as browsers depending on general food availability, except Gorse and Sloe. Will strip bark off broad-leaved trees and shrubs (including gorse) in winter when short of forage.
- *Coarse herbs* - for example, thistle buds and Hemp Agrimony are readily consumed.

Interaction with the Public – worthy of consideration for use on sites with public access.

- *Friendliness* - unless deliberately trained, inclined to keep away from people and it can be difficult to get within 25 metres of an unhandled pony.
- *Reaction to dogs* - generally oblivious, although adults are capable of seeing off or attacking dogs if pestered. Young Exmoors are likely to panic and run off.
- *Public appeal* - maintains condition well, so can be useful on sites where public perception of animal welfare is important.

Sites where Exmoor Ponies are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Burnham Beeches Berkshire Corporation of London	Wood pasture and wet and dry heath.	Grazing since 1992 with 2 mares year round (+ summer cattle and sheep). Head collar trained. Good control of rushes and sedges. Browse Beech and Brome; not Gorse or Juniper. Some bark stripping. Only eat Heather when very short of food during winter.	Helen Read 01753 647358
Denbies Hillside Surrey National Trust	Chalk grassland.	Grazing since 1994. Successful. Animals: 11 geldings, 1 mare (non-breeding). Some head-collar trained. Problems with lay-back land.	John Cranham 01306 887485
Exmoor Somerset Exmoor National Park	Moorland.	Various sites with free-ranging, breeding herds. Most schemes since 1960's. Schemes run for historical continuity and to conserve breed, although benefits to nature conservation.	Kate West 01398 323665 David Mansell 01398 341490
Haddon Moor Somerset Butterfly Conservation	Purple Moor-grass mire and some semi-improved pasture.	Started 1997, up to 4 ponies on the 5.5 hectares initially; 2 now used (privately owned). Grazing intended to be most of the year-round; in practice removal in late winter has occurred. Good results in habitat improvement.	John Davis 01929 400209
Mount Fancy Farm Somerset	Rush pasture, Bracken/acidic grassland and wood pasture / scrub.	Started 2000, up to 4 ponies due to graze the 6.4 ha, but only 2 used so far. Corral needed for handling. Effects beginning to be apparent; soft rush grazed, range widely in site, especially wood pasture; suspected browsing of cut Birch scrub regrowth.	John Davis 01929 400209
Hindhead Common Surrey National Trust	Dry and wet heath.	Site with Bracken. Grazing 36 Exmoor geldings since 1992. Successful at taking large amounts of Purple Moor-grass and Wavy-hair Grass. Take some Gorse, Holly and Heather in mid-winter.	Andrew Storey 01428 604040
Knettishall Country Park Suffolk County Council	Acidic grassland and calcareous grassland. Meadow.	With Heather. Grazing since June 1997 with 8 semi-wild Exmoor ponies (3 geldings, 5 mares). Use sedatives for handling. Successful, especially on acidic grassland.	Stephen Grimshaw 01953 688265 0498 877646
Langdon Cliffs Kent National Trust	Chalk downland.	Site with rank Tor-grass. Grazing since 1993 with 14 unbroken geldings. Highly successful impact, but with some handling difficulties.	Steve Judd 01304 202756
Lullington Heath East Sussex English Nature	Chalk downland, chalk heath and scrub.	Grazing since 1994 with 3 Exmoor geldings (& 3 New Forest ponies). Very successful impact. Some problems with sweet itch. Handled with A.C.P sedation.	Tim Beech English Nature 01273 476575
Murlough NNR County Down National Trust	Dune and dry heath.	Site with Bracken. Grazed since 1995 with breeding herd of 13 unbroken Exmoors. Highly successful. Benefits to Heather species.	Hugh Thurgate 01396 751467
Purbeck Dorset National Trust	Chalk grassland and dry heathland	Grazing of various sites since the 1980's (?). Range of 26 unbroken and head-collar trained animals, including stallion and breeding mares. Highly successful.	Geoff & Greta Hann 01929 450259
Toy's Hill Kent National Trust	Heathland.	Heathland restoration scheme with young Exmoors was abandoned as ponies failed to browse invading Birch and lost condition.	Matthew Oates 01285 884741
Other contacts:		Research papers (see below)	Dr Sue Baker 01398 341501
		Exmoor National Park Authority Kate West	01398 323665
		Exmoor Pony Society David Mansell	01398 341490
		Exmoor Ponies in Conservation (EPIC). Use 17 mares and one stallion on up to ten English Nature and National Trust sites.	Tim and Margaret Mackintosh 01524 701470
		Rare Breeds Survival Trust	024 7669 6551

References

BAKER S (1993) *Survival of the fittest: a natural history of the Exmoor pony* Available from Exmoor Pony Society
 BAKER S et al (1998) *Exmoor ponies – Britain's prehistoric wild horses?* British Wildlife 9:5: 304-313