

HIGHLAND

Summary

The Highland is one of the larger, heavier breeds of native pony. Very hardy, having evolved in the cold exposed uplands, it thrives on extensive rough grazing. Currently little used in conservation, the strength and docile nature of the Highland pony has made it a good working animal for deer carcass and timber extraction.

Hardiness - a hardy and resourceful breed.

- *Maintains condition well* - a naturally 'well-covered' pony.
- *Supplementary feed* - easily becomes over fat, so health benefits from some loss of condition during winter months. Additional feed may be necessary in very bad weather, particularly breeding mares.
- *Resourceful* - in snow will dig for forage; in exposed conditions, find shelter in hollows.
- *Hardiness* - copes well with extremes of climate in exposed upland areas. Able to withstand very low temperatures, high winds and snow.
- *Insects* - not unduly bothered by bot flies or horseflies, although chestnut coloured individuals seem to suffer more; this may be due to thinner skins.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry - a hardy, easy to keep breed, with much potential for use in conservation grazing.

- *Hoof care* - good hooves with few problems. Trimming necessary if kept on soft ground. Some individuals have extremely hard feet requiring little attention.
- *Laminitis* - can be prone to this on richer keep.
- *Handling* - generally very placid and trainable; appears to have an 'affinity to humans'.
- *Summer* - copes in situations with little shade. Sweet itch can occur, but not common.
- *Appearance* - common colours are dun and grey, some with an eel stripe, dark points and zebra stripes on the legs.



Les Street

Grazing Characteristics - potentially suitable for conservation grazing, particularly in extensive systems and where the climate can be more extreme. Little utilised in conservation so far.

- *Strongly grass based* - prefers areas of short sward, particularly where mineral-rich (e.g. riverside & coastal grasslands), feeding less on longer, tussocky grasses. On dune systems, grazes Marram Grass, even in winter when coarse and brown, shifting the community balance towards shorter grasses. Takes Purple Moor-grass and Fescues.
- *Limited role as browsers* - appear to take very little; some animals may develop a hairy top lip if browsing Gorse. May browse Hawthorn in winter and sometimes Holly.
- *Grazing in water* - will graze areas with extensive surface water and wade into quite deep water to forage for fresh bite.
- *Coarse herbs* - ignores or takes very little Heather. May take nettles in winter, including digging out the roots.
- *Latrine areas* - tends to use defined dunging areas, particularly stallions.

Interaction with the Public - a placid breed, suitable for sites where public access is supervised.

- *Friendliness* - at ease with people. Generally placid and with a small amount of handling when young, easy to train. May become aggressive if given too many titbits.
- *Reaction to dogs* - not afraid of dogs and will generally ignore them. Stallions in a breeding group, or mares with foals may become protective and attack pestering dogs.
- *Public appeal* - maintains condition well so tends to look good all year round.

Sites where Highland ponies are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Insh Marshes, Badgoch and Strathspey Highland Inverness RSPB	Wet grassland, marsh and fen.	Grazed with ponies for decades. Currently use approximately 40 Highland ponies. Graze the taller fen areas until too wet. Preference for grasses but take sedge and rush. Not bothered by wet ground. Create good varied vegetation structure suitable for breeding waders. Maintain condition well with hay in extreme conditions.	Tom Prescott 01540 661518
Isle of Rum Scotland Scottish Natural Heritage	Moorland, wet heath, and coastal grassland.	Long term history of being kept on the Island as a breeding herd to provide working animals for deer extraction. Free-ranging 10 months of the year; kept on in bye land when working. Few problems; occasional animals develop 'twisted feet' which can lead to deformity. Maintain condition well; a little hay & mineral block in bad weather. Docile and non-aggressive. Favour pockets of relatively species-rich Mat grass grassland but ignore rank Mat grass and heather. Little browse available.	Malcolm Whitmore 01687 462026
Other contacts:		Research based on Rum has found the Highland ponies have a strong preference for areas of short Bent/Fescue grassland adjacent to rivers. Grazed very short, increasing floristic diversity. Shifted to graze Purple Moor-grass in season but not when rank and brown; Marram grass even in winter when brown, gradually shifting the balance of vegetation to shorter grasses & leading to dune destabilisation. Little browse available and totally ignored Heather. Used definite latrine sites but little impact on vegetation because of high rainfall & run-off. Majority of animals maintained condition well.	Iain Gordon Macaulay Land Use Research Institute 01224 318611
		Long-term involvement with Highland ponies. Used to maintain a breeding group on the moorland. Ponies very hardy; out all year on the hills; shelter in hollows and behind gorse. May lose a little condition over winter without becoming thin. Hay in extreme conditions; will dig through snow for food. Favour grasses; sometimes strip trees of bark. Generally good feet. Some sweet itch when animals bred in Devon, possibly caused by the Devon 'Gnat'.	Betsy and Lewis MacRae Clerk and Chairman of the 'Achintee Common Grazings' 01520 722602.
		Highland Pony Breed Society	Mrs Fiona Roebuck 01738 451861
		Long-term breeder of Highlands. Breeding group which live out all year round, but not on particularly low quality keep. All ages, including breeding mares maintain condition well with hay in extreme weather. Some problems with laminitis. Placid and intelligent. Grasses preferred but will browse hawthorn in winter, nettles and sometimes holly. Will wade into open water to feed.	Sandy Stewart 01603 872602

References

GORDON I (1986) *The feeding strategies of ungulates on a Scottish moorland* PhD thesis, University of Cambridge. (Other published papers include: *Journal of Ecology* (1989) 26:8-79; *Ecologia* (1989) 79:383-389.)
 BOOTH M (1981) *Factors influencing the energy requirements of native ponies living outdoors in the UK.* PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh (using some of GORDON's data).