

KONIK POLSKI

Summary

An extremely hardy breed of good constitution, the Polish pony is well suited to extensive grazing within nature conservation situations. Although currently within the UK the breed is used in wetland systems, its adaptability and attributes are likely to be useful on other habitats.

Hardiness – extremely hardy and adaptable.

- *Extremely hardy* - able to out winter in severe weather conditions with temperatures as low as minus forty degrees.
- *Intelligent* – well able to make sensible decisions within the choices available on a particular site, thus allowing the breed to vary diet according to season, seek the best shelter and maintain good condition throughout the year.
- *Compensation of growth* – primitive feature which enables breed to delay growth in times of shortage, with no detrimental effect to overall growth pattern.
- *Adaptable and active* – cautious and intelligent. Will carefully explore and seasonally exploit whole of available area.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – within an appropriate grazing system is likely to have few husbandry requirements.

- *General health* – excellent, with good healing ability of cuts and wounds.
- *Temperament* – generally placid and curious, particularly if kept in family or social groups. Individuals and bachelor groups may keep a cautious distance if unused to humans.
- *Hooves* – strong and slow growing. Hoof treatment rare, particularly if hard, dry ground available.
- *Handling* – calm temperament but highly intelligent, thus unhandled individuals may be difficult to pen. Extremely strong and athletic; sturdy, high handling facilities required.
- *Parasitic burdens* – herds kept extensively will dung on definite latrine areas and will not graze these areas, thus avoiding infestation by worms. Research into worm burdens of this breed currently underway.
- *Laminitis* – unknown within the breed; able to put on considerable condition in the summer and lose up to one-third of body weight in winter with no ill effect.
- *Containment* – respects the simplest of fence provided it has adequate resources in the area within which it is contained. Respectful of wide ditches, but may well jump narrow ones.
- *Background* – a descendent of the ancient Tarpan horse; the Konik Polski has been reconstituted using Przewalski blood.



Matthew Oates

- *Appearance* – generally dun, with a black eel stripe along the spine, black mane and tail and black horizontal stripes on the legs.
- *Size* – approximately 12-13hh. Solid build, weighing around 500kg.
- *Flies* – tough, thick skins; highly tolerant of biting insects.

Grazing Characteristics - well adapted to making appropriate food choices in extensive areas.

- *Browsing* – readily browses a range of species, including Elm, Willow, Oak, Hawthorn, Brambles and Wild Privet on coastal dunes. Alder and Birch generally ignored. May actively seek wood if other browse material not available. Some individuals will take mature trees in preference to young scrub. Important part of diet in year-round grazing systems. Effectively controls the invasion of scrub into open habitat.
- *Grazing* - during spring/summer, prefers grasses. By September, takes more varied diet if available including sedges, rushes, seed heads of thistles, and reeds. Digs up and eats roots/rhizomes in winter, including those of Stinging Nettle and Common Reed.
- *Behavioural impact* – good learning ability; gradually adapts diet to include new food items not encountered previously.

Interaction with the Public – completely unhandled individuals may be suitable for public access sites.

- *Reaction to people* - a naturally placid and curious breed which may become a problem on sites with public access although if individuals have had no associations with humans at all, they will generally ignore people.
- *Reaction to dogs* – very curious and likely to follow and want to investigate.

Sites where Polish ponies are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Hickling South Norfolk Broads Authority	Fen, wet grass-land, scrub and woodland. 36 ha	Breeding herd on site since November 1996. 75% of site woodland/scrub. Year round grazing system. Minimal intervention. Research underway into parasites and genetic adaptations of breed. Use whole site on a seasonal basis. Opening up clearings within woodland which were becoming scrubbed over; and have prevented further loss of fen to scrub.	Sandie Tolhurst Sue McQueen 01603 610734
Hickling North Norfolk Norfolk Wildlife Trust	Fen, wet grass-land, woodland and scrub. 50 ha	Small male herd, three geldings, two stallions grazing wetland site since 1998. Year round grazing system over an area including fen, reedbed and woodland. Minimal intervention. Currently researching internal parasite burdens within this extensive grazing system. Site also summer grazed by cattle and winter grazed by sheep. Public access site.	Melissa Slote 01603 625540 John Blackburn 01692 598276
Sutton Fen Norfolk Broads Authority & private landowner	Species rich fen, reedbeds, set aside, wet grass-land, scrub and woodland. 150 ha	Grazing introduced to site in May 2000. Breeding herd. Research underway into parasites and genetic adaptations of breed. Also behavioural studies and impact on grazing. Moving into and carefully using and exploiting treacherous wet peat areas.	Sandie Tolhurst 01603 601734 David King 01692 580229
Redgrave and Lopham Fens Suffolk Suffolk Wildlife Trust	Short species-rich fen, mixed fen and tall herb fen, wet grass-land and wet heath, scrub and woodland. 125 ha	Breeding herd used on reserve since September 1995. Approximately 100 ha of reserve grazed; some year-round grazing, though mainly May-January. Winter holding land adjacent to reserve. Have helped encourage marginal plants to re-establish by open water. Sensible behaviour invaluable when grazing tall fen with arduous topography (water-filled peat diggings). Good at reducing vigour of Reed in mixed fen. Social grouping when handling affects safety and ease of operation. Rub off winter coats on fences, shortening fence life; solve problem through electric fencing along favoured spots.	Andrew Excell 01379 687618
Oostvaardersplassen Holland			
Westhoek Belgium University of Ghent	Dune grassland and scrub. 60 ha	Research site into grazing ecology. Year round observations into selection of plant species and plant parts; use of whole site, as well as consideration of impact on grazing animals. Measuring condition, weight, and analysing blood of herd of 9 Koniks.	Eric Cosyns 0032 03 224 62 48

References

COSYNS E et al (2001, in press) *Feeding ecology of Konik horses and donkeys in Belgian coastal dunes and its implication for nature management*. Belgian Journal of Ecology (submitted). Expected date of publication June/July 2001.