

NEW FOREST

Summary

Originating from the New Forest area, ponies of this native breed are generally hardy and thrive well on poor quality forage. The majority of New Forest ponies from a free-ranging background are well suited to grazing wildlife habitats, particularly heath and mire systems.

Hardiness - a hardy native breed, with some bloodlines producing ponies better adapted to a free-ranging existence than others.

- **Condition** - generally maintains condition well, although the breed has a natural tendency to lose a little condition in late winter/early spring.
- **Influence of genetic background** - those animals which readily switch to browse in winter (Holly & Gorse) and which develop the New Forest 'moustache' (hairy top lip), maintain condition most successfully. Genetic background may also affect coat and jaw development (see below).
- **Supplementary feed** - adult mares, stallions and geldings survive well on poor forage throughout the year, although may require supplementary feeding in extreme weather. Young animals and some breeding mares may require more regular feeding in late winter. Eat leaves, including dead ones, for minerals brought up from the sub-soil.
- **Hardiness** - tolerant of rain, snow and wind, but requires some form of natural shelter. Shade important in summer.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry - a breed well-adapted to free-ranging grazing situations.

- **Good hooves** - small, strong and slow-growing. Minimal trimming if on hard/stony ground.
- **Laminitis** - very rare away from improved pasture.
- **Handling** - a relatively placid breed, although some individuals excitable and nervous. With time and a calm approach, most are easily handled and headcollar trained. Less handled animals can generally be penned or boxed using food.
- **Insects** - not unduly affected by bot fly, flat fly, Blandford fly or ticks. Occasional individuals suffer sweet itch.
- **Teeth** - occasional individuals suffer jaw deformities (overshot or undershot jaws), thus reducing grazing effectiveness. Ponies grazed continuously on sandy sites (heathland or dunes) may suffer tooth wear.
- **Acorns** - some ponies develop a taste for acorns, with dire consequences.
- **Appearance** - bay, chestnut or grey in colour.
- **Background** - Arab, Thoroughbred and other bloodlines introduced have resulted in a modern breed which is variable in size, conformation and hardiness.



Matthew Oates

Grazing Characteristics - a good grazer of low quality keep, particularly heath and mires.

- **Grasses** - prefers grasses of short swards and of wet flushes. Most coarse grasses taken, including Cocksfoot, Purple Moor-grass, Tor-grass, Wood False-brome and Tufted Hair-grass. Common Reed is also favoured. Less keen on Fescues. If pushed will take brown, rank Tor-grass in winter, and effectively break-up established litter layer.
- **Rushes and sedges** - primarily the smaller, finer species are selected, but also Soft Rush and Pond Sedge. Does not graze Saw Sedge.
- **Coarse herbs** - may eat large coarser herbs such as Rosebay Willowherb and the heads of old Knapweed and Thistles. Takes little Heather unless no other suitable forage available.
- **Browsing** - takes cut or younger (<15 years) Gorse and Holly, Blackthorn shoots, Broom and a small amount of Bracken. Sometimes Bramble scrub. Little bark stripping except Dogwood in winter and occasionally Elder and Oak.
- **Latrine sites** - free-ranging ponies often prefer to dung on habitat less favoured for feeding (e.g. heath). Where less favoured habitat is adjacent, studies show that animals may move up to 20m onto heathland, enriching and potentially transforming it to grassland. On large areas of short grass, dunging tends to occur in an ad-hoc fashion.
- **Wetlands** - may not utilise areas of sites with extensive surface water.

Interaction with the Public - suitable for supervised public access sites, where condition is monitored and problems addressed swiftly.

- **Friendliness** - generally amiable and inquisitive. May pester and become aggressive if regularly given tidbits.
- **Reaction to dogs** - generally ignore. May approach to investigate; may run from an aggressive dog.
- **Public appeal** - generally popular, although its tendency to lose some condition in late winter can cause concern.

Sites where New Forest ponies are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Boxhill National Trust	Chalk grassland.	Restoration grazing. Several 3/4 yr olds grazed in Feb/Mar 1999 to tackle rank Tor-grass. Successful; ate the grass and broke up the litter through eating behaviour and trampling.	Peter Creasy 01306 885502.
Devil's Punch Bowl Surrey National Trust	Heathland.	Successful at developing vegetation mosaic and maintaining vegetation structure. Take Purple Moor-grass and Wavy Hair-grass, Gorse and Heather. Some problems with condition.	Andrew Storey 01428 604040
Hartland and Stoborough Heath Dorset English Nature	Wet and dry heath.	New Forest and crosses of various ages grazed all year. Favour roadside verges, wet flushes and acid grassland. Take Purple Moor-grass and rushes but not Bog Myrtle. Monitoring of fixed transects showed NVC change over 4 years. Maintain condition well.	Tim Brodie-James 01929 556688
Lucombe Downs Isle of Wight National Trust	Heathland and bracken on clay with flints.	Used to maintain Heathers and open Bracken stands. Originally 15 animals grazed April-December but now 8 year round. Take grasses and Gorse. Heather rarely; eat Bluebell leaves in spring. Maintain condition well.	Andy Butler 01983 852685
Lullington Heath NNR East Sussex English Nature	Chalk downland, chalk heath and scrub.	Year round grazing since 1976. The two remaining New Forests are now grazed with other stock. Maintain condition well. Tackle Blackthorn and Tor-grass. Previously used ACP sedation; now handle more frequently and use a crush and patience. Clear acorns when grazing is short to avoid poisoning.	Tim Beech 01273 476595 Dave Maylem 01233 812525
Redgrave and Lopham Fen Suffolk Suffolk Wildlife Trust	Tall fen, reedbeds, surface water, and willow and birch scrub.	Grazed with New Forests for nearly two years (c1996). Unsuccessful. Failed to tackle tall fen vegetation, avoided areas with surface water. Unpredictable group, some individuals inclined to be unstable and quite dangerous. Did not maintain condition well and required supplementary feeding. Replaced by Koniks.	Mike Harding Consultant, formerly Suffolk Wildlife Trust 01473 723848
Roydon Woods Hampshire Hampshire Wildlife Trust	Deciduous woodland, wood pasture, and unimproved and improved grassland.	Since 1990, grazed by 5 to 6 animals for six months of the year with cattle. Catholic feeding tastes; good impact on Purple Moor-grass; take Tufted Hair-grass & Cockfoot; winter browse knapweed heads, gorse. Disturb and aerate dead material and eat and strip holly. Relatively tame, some head-collar trained.	Mike and Charlotte Boxall 01590 622708
Sydlings Copse Oxfordshire Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)	Valley side fen, reeds, willow carr, and heath.	Two young mares, winter-grazed since 1997/98. Restorative grazing; fairly successful; prefer the drier grassy areas but making in-roads into the fen and increasing area of shorter fen; eat Common Reed; take some willow regrowth. Loss of condition in late winter but no health problems. Temperamental, difficult to box, nery of dogs. One mare is aggressive.	Alistair MacPherson 01865 775476
Oakley Hill Oxfordshire BBOWT	Chalk grassland.	Mares as above. Late spring/early summer; good impact on Tor-grass; in-roads into tall herb vegetation and Bramble scrub; eat Rosebay Willowherb; high water requirement a limiting factor on this dry site.	Alistair MacPherson 01865 775476
Wildmoor Heath Berkshire Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxon Wildlife Trust	Mosaic of wet and dry heath & valley mire.	Six young mares grazed with cattle (since 1999). Take Purple Moor grass; ignore orchids and Meadow Thistle (which cattle were selecting). By mid winter, loss of some condition and were eating a little heather. Mostly docile and inquisitive. Becoming increasingly easy to handle although some difficult to box.	Richard Elston 0118 9303773 Simon Lee 01823 283211

References

- Gill E L, (1988) *Factors affecting the body condition of New Forest ponies* PhD thesis, University of Southampton.
 Gill E L, (1991) *Further studies of factors affecting body condition free-ranging ponies* University of Southampton. RSPCA funded.
 POLLOCK J I (1980) *Behavioural ecology and body condition change in New Forest ponies*. RSPCA Scientific

Bullswater Common and others Surrey Heath Countryside Management Project	Heathland and chalk downland.	Several small sites grazed since 1992. Successful. Eat Purple Moor-grass, Gorse and rank grasses. Condition problems at first (young and lack of lay back land); now maintain condition well but not pushed too hard. Take heather when pushed. Some contained by stock fencing; others by electric. Headcollar trained.	Rob McGibbon 01483 579713
Other contacts:		New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society	Miss D Macnair 01425 402272

Publications no. 6

PRATT R M, PUTMAN R J, EKINS J R, & EDWARDS P J (1986) *Use of habitat by free-ranging cattle and ponies in the New Forest, southern England* Journal of Applied Ecology 23: 539 – 557.

PUTMAN R J et al (1981) *Food and feeding behaviour of cattle and ponies in the New Forest: a study of the inter-relationships between the large herbivores of the Forest and their vegetational environment* Report HF 3/03/127 to the NCC, Huntingdon.

TYLER S J (1972) *The behaviour and social organisation of the New Forest ponies* Animal Behaviour Monographs 5: 87-196.