

SHETLAND

Summary

The smallest of the British native pony breeds, originating from the wet and windswept Shetland Isles. Generally placid and surefooted on steep, dangerous terrain, the Shetland pony is well suited to graze low quality keep as it maintains better health on a lower plane of nutrition.

Hardiness - known to be a very hardy pony breed.

- *Maintains condition well* - thrives on poor forage throughout the year with loss of condition being rare.
- *Tolerant of exposed conditions* - copes well on exposed cliffs and moorland. Has a double coat in winter; sleek in the summer.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry - docile and of good health when kept on unimproved vegetation.

- *Hooves* - strong & slow growing. If not fed on concentrates, little foot care is likely to be required on sites with hard, stony ground. In softer or wetter conditions regular foot trimming may be necessary.
- *Laminitis* - prone to this on improved and semi-improved grassland or where there are seasonal flushes of rich forage. Geldings particularly at risk. In some cases mares have been kept in foal to maintain a lower plane of nutrition.
- *Handling* - a non-flighty breed, generally inclined to be docile and sedate, although also renowned as a very cheeky, which is inclined to kick or bite. With regular contact and occasional inducements (e.g. a bucket of pony nuts), should become approachable and easier to handle. Forms close associations and moves as a group, which aids daily checks and penning. If kept in larger groups (15+) may be harder to approach and manipulate.
- *Summer* - has a high water requirement and a need for shade in hot weather. Occasional individuals may suffer from recurring sweet itch.
- *Containment* - generally respond well to the use of electric fencing. Some individuals may be 'escape artists' aided by their small size.
- *Insects* - not unduly bothered by flies.
- *Surefooted* - reliable on rocky outcrops and cliff tops.
- *Appearance* - small, hairy in winter and demonstrates the largest range of colours of all pony breeds including bay, black, grey and piebald.



Matthew Oates

Grazing Characteristics - a breed suited to a wide range of habitat types, including cliffs, moorlands, sand dune and wetlands.

- *Preference for fresh, accessible swards* - although will take both fine and coarser vegetation. Keen on Purple Moor-grass and Cocksfoot grass. Dislikes False-oat Grass. In winter Purple Moor-grass grazed in preference to Heather.
- *Enthusiastic browsers particularly in winter* - bark strips and eats regrowth of many deciduous species: Hazel, Blackthorn, Willow, Alder, Elm, Blackthorn and new Gorse growth. Less interested in Birch.
- *Rushes and sedges* - readily eats Soft Rush and the finer-leaved sedges.
- *'Pingo' and open water grazing* - will wade into water to chest height to graze on marginal vegetation causing little damage to bank sides.
- *Coarse herbs and flowering plants* - may take Thistles, Thistle tubers, and Hemp Agrimony. Generally does not select flowering plants; it may take some heather when pushed.
- *Dunging behaviour* - apart from stallions, tends not to use latrine areas but to dung on a more ad hoc basis; this may be site specific.
- *Seaweed* - willing to eat seaweed.

Interaction with the Public - Generally good on sites with public access but can become bullying and aggressive.

- *Friendliness* - ignores people unless encouraged by titbits; can become quite aggressive and may 'mug' passers-by.
- *Reaction to dogs* - generally unconcerned by dogs. May kick or bite dogs which get too close.
- *High public appeal* - maintains condition well and has an appealing 'woolly' appearance during winter months. Small, so not as threatening as larger breeds may be.

Sites where Shetland Ponies are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Arlington Court Devon National Trust	Semi-improved grassland.	Breeding group of variable numbers and sex. Maintained mainly for show to the public and not for habitat management. Some problems with laminitis.	Murray Sharpe 01271 850891
Coleton Cliffs Devon National Trust	Acidic coastal grassland, Bracken & scrub.	Since 1998, up to 10 Shetlands, of mixed sex & age, grazed year round. Maintain mosaic of coastal grassland & scrub well. Tend to bully people. Eat stiles, seats and fencing causing considerable damage – mostly in winter. Also eat Stinging Nettles.	Mike Ingram 01803 752776
Dodman Point Cornwall National Trust	Coastal heath & grassland.	Summer grazing (May-Oct) by 6 ponies on Dodman Point, then moved to the Knavocks (see below) for 7 months. Restorative grazing with good control of Gorse scrub and Blackthorn, but more ponies required. Leave Heather. Surefooted on rocky outcrops.	Walter Eyre 01726 844652
Hembury + 2 other sites Devon National Trust	Heath, scrub & Bracken, acid grassland, semi-improved meadow.	From 1997, 3 Shetlands used to supplement existing year-round grazing. Strong preference for open grassland. Failed to tackle areas of scrub and ranker grasses. No longer use Shetlands as not really doing their job. Became over-friendly with the public, who were feeding them food.	Lucy Morton 01626 834748
The Knavocks Cornwall National Trust	Maritime heath, extensive Gorse.	Since 1996, six ponies winter-grazed as part of scrub management and heathland restoration scheme. Fair control of Gorse considering small numbers of ponies. Docile, surefooted and generally not aggressive to people and dogs.	Bill Makin 01872 552412
Lizard Cornwall English Nature	Coastal grassland and heath.	Shetlands grazed on site for 18 years; mid-summer to February. Currently 21 animals. Breeding herd. Very successful at maintaining vegetation mosaic after initial scrub clearance.	Ray Lawman 01326 240808
Lower Predannack Cliff Cornwall National Trust	Coastal heath & maritime grass.	Mid-summer to autumn grazing of cliffs by Shetland herd since 1985. All mares or geldings with numbers peaking in 1990 to 14 ponies. Over winter on inland Cornish heath. .	Justin Whitehouse 01326 240282
Pentire Head & Port Quin Bay Cornwall National Trust	Sea cliff, maritime grass and scrub.	Winter grazing between 1994 & 97/98 with 5/6 Shetlands. Ring-barked Blackthorn; tackled areas of coarser grasses, promoting return to finer grasses. Little impact on Bluebells in maritime grassland; some damage to Thrift.	Simon Ford 01208 863046 Derek Lord 01208 863821
Thompson Common Norfolk Norfolk Wildlife Trust	Wetland: basin mire, wet grassland, fen & pingos.	Shetlands on site prior to purchase by Wildlife Trust in 1981. Since 1985, 20+ grazed with cattle. Very successful at maintaining the pingos; will wade chest high into the water to browse. Problems with a few escape artist ponies and some handling problems. Some negative responses to ponies' presence by horse riders.	Bev Nichols 01953 498339
The Shetland Centre Lanarkshire	Raised peat bog and unimproved rough grazing. 20 acres	7 ponies grazed on raised peat bog and areas dominated by Soft Rush. Do well without supplementary feed and shelter – very hardy. Biggest problem is keeping weight off, even in winter, and avoiding laminitis. Particularly useful at demolishing Soft Rush where it has become a problem. NB The Shetland centre keeps all Shetland species of domestic animal.	Linda McCaig 01238 842284
Other contacts:		Shetland Pony Stud Book Society	Elaine Ward 01738 623471

References