

Welsh Mountain Pony (Section A) Semi-Feral Hill Pony



Summary

Centuries of harsh conditions have ensured the sound constitution of the Welsh mountain ponies. The Welsh Mountain (Section A) semi-feral ponies are now in danger of extinction in their natural habitat; having formed the basis of the Welsh Pony and Cob Society Stud Book in 1901. The importance of retaining these genetic lines is imperative to the breed. Proven conservation grazers, they are vital to the landscape of upland Wales and other nutrient poor lowland areas including designated conservation areas. This native breed is also vital for our culture and historical heritage. Small (under 12hands) hardy and lightweight, Welsh Mountain (Section A) semi-feral hill ponies are thrifty feeders that can thrive on poor quality forage; they eat coarser grasses rather than flowering plants and rarely eat heather, which is a priority habitat in both upland and lowland Wales. Their grazing habits can encourage rare flower species by opening up overgrown areas. Non semi-feral ponies brought from improved grazing may take time to adjust to the inferior diet of conservation sites, unlike hill bred ponies. It follows that they will require more supervision than their upland cousins at least in the early stages.

Hardiness

A hardy and adaptable breed, which can thrive in the harshest conditions.

- **Thrifty** – able to thrive in poor conditions, mares may lose condition in late pregnancy, monitoring advisable.
- **Supplementary feed** – welfare regulations recommend supplementary feeding when needed, ponies will normally adapt to seasonal grazing.
- **Hardy** – their thicker winter coat allows them to withstand exposure to the harsh weather conditions, will predict storms and blizzards a day before and find suitable shelter. Prefers frost and snow, to continuous wet conditions.
- **Adventurous** – within recognised territory, will graze extensively, but will heft on hill, when there is pressure from other herds and stallions.

- **Adaptable** – ponies bred on their domain adapt easily to conditions, marsh ponies are a classic example of this where from birth they learn to live with tidal conditions and develop a tolerance to salt contents of the plants.
- **Surefooted** – owing to their surefootedness and intelligence they will safely explore dangerous conditions such as bogs and steep rocky terrain.

Physical Attributes and Husbandry

A lightweight hardy breed, requiring only infrequent routine husbandry.

- **Handling** – Welsh Mountain (Section A) Semi-Feral-Hill Pony are normally only handled when weaning foals, for worming and any other necessary welfare.
- **Size** – weighing approximately 250kg at maturity.
- **Background** – evolved in the Welsh hills for thousands of years making them hardy and fit. The Pony Improvement Societies made sure that the 1908 Commons Act requiring the removal of scrub stallion from commons was carried out, resulting in a marked improvement of the breed.
- **Appearance** – any colour, except piebald and skewbald.
- **Hooves** – round dense hooves.
- **Laminitis** – virtually unheard of in hill ponies, can occur on rich pastures.
- **Summer** – High tolerance from biting insects, ticks can be a problem on extensive grazing. Flies do not normally upset ponies on hills. In extreme heat you will see them move in and out of water. Sweet itch almost unheard of.
- **Containment** – Standard fencing is usually adequate, gulleys on the marshes help to contain ponies.

Grazing Characteristics

Good grazing tools that can assist in the control of bracken, gorse and scrub, preventing areas becoming choked by these plants.

- **Grazing** – Young growth of purple moor grass is readily grazed, nutritious but low in minerals. Ponies need access to areas of clean water. On extensive sites they will chose grazing according to the season. They ignore rare plants. On confined sites care must be taken that they have adequate grazing to protect rare plants.
- **Rushes sedges** – prefers young rush, but will eat mature rush when sward is covered by snow.
- **Browsing** – will take some willow or gorse to vary the diet.
- **Dislikes** – old dead herbage.
- **Wetlands** – being comparatively light weight is an advantage on wet and boggy sites.

Interaction with the public

Semi-Feral ponies are rarely handled but are suitable for public access sites, provided there is sufficient scope for them to move away from people and dogs.

- **Reaction to public** – mares with young foals move quickly away. Some ponies are inquisitive and will come close and then move away if approached. On urban sites problems can arise with public feeding ponies.
- **Reaction to dogs** – Ponies perceive a dog as a potential predator, so may move away where they are able to but will defend themselves against an attack by a dog.
- **Public perception** – accepted generally as a graceful and a beautiful breed. Visitors from across the world view and photograph the ponies in their natural environment.

For further information on the semi-feral Section A Welsh Mountain Pony contact:

The Welsh Pony and Cob Society
6 Chalybeate Street
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 1HP

Tel: 01970 617501
Fax: 01970 625401
Website: www.wpcs.uk.com

For information on 'grazing for wildlife' and for support in sourcing ponies contact:

Pori Natur a Threftadaeth (PONT)
PO Box 52
Llangadog
Carmarthenshire
SA19 9WZ

Tel/Mobile: 07791 932484
Email: pontcymru@btconnect.com

Website:
www.grazinganimalsproject.org.uk/pont_home