

Grazing Preferences of Native Ponies

Extracts from nibblers online discussion group

does anyone have any info on some research funded by Defra that has demonstrated the benefits of using native ponies for nature conservation grazing? Saturday's Telegraph featured an article based on a paper given by David Anthony Murray at the Geographical Union Congress in Glasgow sometime recently.

Bill,

Oddly enough I found a piece of paper with David's contact details, with a cryptic note of the telephone conversation I had with him about a month ago, on my desk this morning. The cryptic note says 'Welsh Mountain Section A ponies p33 Welsh Assembly'; in case you can't make any more sense of that than I now can I will send David's contact details to you directly. There was also a piece in a recent Independent on the possibility of traditional pony breeds replacing sheep in the uplands; I haven't yet read it so don't know the details but it has been carefully cut out ready for later consumption. I suspect this was engendered by David's paper. If nothing else it seems David could teach us something about raising public awareness!

Richard

Hi Bill

Something similar also appeared in the Times and the Guardian. this is what appeared in the Times

August 21, 2004

Wild ponies' grazing helps save rare plants By Gillian Harris

BRITAIN'S hardy native ponies could play a vital role in saving rare upland plants, research suggests.

The indigenous breeds, which include the endangered Fell and Welsh Mountain Ponies, graze on the moorland and grasslands which cover the highest slopes in Cumbria, Northumberland and the Pennines.

A study by David Anthony Murray, an environmental scientist, discovered that the ponies acted as 'conservation grazers' by feeding on poor quality grass which encourages rare flowers and plants to flourish. Unlike sheep, which graze on coarse grass, ponies eat longer, finer grass which would overwhelm plants and flowers if it were allowed to grow in abundance.

He added that without regular grazing by ponies bracken would engulf hillsides.

Mr Murray, who presented his findings to the International Geographers Congress in Glasgow yesterday, said that the native ponies are thrifty feeders whose 'grazing and foraging may encourage rare flower species by opening up grazed areas among taller vegetation'.

He added: 'We must protect native ponies if we do not want to have ecological problems in the future.'

Exmoor Ponies in Conservation
Executive Partners - Margaret and Tim Mackintosh
www.exmoorpony.org