

## Pony Action Group

### **Minutes of the meeting held at Parke, Bovey Tracey, Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2012**

**Present :** Robert Steemson (Chair), Tom Stratton, Charlotte Faulkner, Tim Faulkner, Clare Stanton, Susan Martin, Andy Guy, Ally Kohler, Graham Goddard, Lynda Heriot, Ann Came, Kate Legum, Robyn Petrie-Richie, Dru Butterfield.

#### **1. Apologies:**

Ian Mercer, Mary Alford, Kerry Smith, Helen Radmore,

Robert Steemson apologised for DNPA not hosting a meeting in the Spring and for it being at Parke, not Princetown.

#### **2. Presentation from Robyn Petrie – Ritchie:**

Robyn welcomed the invite to address the Pony Action Group (PAG) with regard to her master's degree, relating to equine science. She was about to undertake independent research looking at the situation of ponies on Dartmoor and, in particular, look at trying to get a clear idea of numbers of ponies and potential management techniques. She also hoped that the project would result in a management plan for the future of ponies on Dartmoor that all members of PAG could sign up to and work to.

There were plans within the research to undertake some aerial photography of pony numbers and their respective movements on the moor. Graham Goddard was not happy with this idea, whilst others supported any initiative to help determine where we are with ponies and get clear idea of numbers. Andy Guy suggested that it would be particularly useful to have some idea of how many unmarked ponies were out on respective commons.

It was reported that there was a problem with ponies around Burrator Reservoir due to various fencing issues.

Charlotte Faulkner provided some sales and members record figures for the last three years with regard to ponies on Dartmoor stating in 2009 – total of 2108, in 2010 – total of 875, in 2011 – 1018 with this years count awaited. Of the 125 registered stallions 20 passed in 2009, 9 passed in 2010 and 3 in 2011. Young stock passed for passports were in 2009 – 302 males & 304 females, in 2010 – 103 males & 206 females, in 2011 – 139 males & 167 females.

The Dartmoor Commoners Council (DaCC) has the number of registered commoners but not, however, the number of ponies they have.

It was agreed that Robyn could stay for the rest of the meeting and would be invited again to update the PAG with further research information.

**Actions: Lynda Heriot to facilitate the co-ordination of numbers of ponies on the Commons through the Commoners Council.**

**Charlotte to put details into next newsletter.**

### **3. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising:**

Dru Butterfield corrected minute 3a, paragraph two. The average price was £275 not £255. Sue Martin reported that under 4c, the blood tested pony had since been confirmed with meningitis not louping ill.

### **4. Update on Pony Action Plan (PAP):**

Ally Kohler thought that it would be prudent to update the 2009 PAP. All attending agreed and discussion took place on quite a few points. Andy Guy mentioned that the Native Breeds at Risk supplement have been withdrawn on the commons. It would also be good to find out more about the New Forest scheme. However, the main question remains, "What is the number of ponies that would be sustainable on Dartmoor commons?" Natural England gave a figure of 4,000 at start of ESA schemes which, perhaps, was a good level. The current figure was around 2,000 which did not include unbranded ponies.

Sue Martin thought the best way forward to determine an accurate figure of how many ponies there were currently on the commons was to use the DaCC pony numbers and those supplied by Charlotte

**Action: Rob Steemson to send out updated PAP with minutes.**

### **5. Dartmoor Landscape Partnership Scheme – potential pony projects:**

Ally Kohler updated the meeting on the success of the bid so far, the way forward and specifically highlighted the extract concerning ponies on Dartmoor so that PAG members could all have an input. There is £60,000 in the bid for heritage pony related issues, which will need to be worked up over the next few months. Discussion took place about how best to do this and it was interesting to learn that HLS can match HLF in funding.

**Action: It was agreed that DNPA would send out maps for PAG members to record drift ways, pounds and suggest sites for information boards**

### **6. Update from around the table**

Dartmoor Pony Society (DPS) – nothing to report

Natural England (NE) – updated meeting with staff changes

Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust (DPHT) – Bellever area is going well with 26 ponies on site. There have been 89 educational visits so far this year with capacity for 100 within the year, along with practical conservation work. The general broader approach education programme is continuing and they are increasing their stock on site and the hours of opening at the visitor centre (both manned and unmanned). It is a tough year for selling ponies.

Dartmoor Pony Moorland Scheme (DPMS) – one newtake now for breeding and another for young stock. The areas still left in scheme were being brought in to the wider public domain with planned promotion and articles about the schemes success being provided to national media. New on site information boards are being planned and all revised information being distributed locally to the Dartmoor Guides system. DPHT could link in route through Bellever newtake to give wider information and help provide joint marketing and visitor provision.

Dartmoor Hill Pony Association (DHPA) – 20 mares in contraception project thanks to funding from horse welfare. Have an aim to reduce foal crop and are working closely with an enclosed common to remove all the colts however, this is proving difficult. Across the moor 39 colts have been cut with more due in autumn - hoping to reach target of 100.

DaCC & DNPA thanked for assistance in supporting the stallion inspections, which has helped improve the standard of ponies bred on the moor.

47 ponies have gone out on loan to conservation grazing projects and there has been a report of a pony on the moor with laminitis.

DHPA have a photographic record of all stallions on the moor since 1999, the website has been updated and Charlotte is attending an International Wild Equine Conference in Vienna and will report back accordingly.

DNPA – lead agency coordinating the Dartmoor Landscape Partnership Scheme and plan to appoint Project Manager soon to move project forward into the next phase. Support from members of PAG would be appreciated on the pony element.

There is still some money in the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) for an appropriate joint bid (to be debated under AOB).

DNPA continue to deal with the genuine concerns from the public about ponies and expect more interest after the sales. From the DNPA perspective, Robert Steemson is the lead officer relating to ponies.

## **7. AOB**

Pony sales are on 5<sup>th</sup> October at Tavistock and 11<sup>th</sup> October at Chagford.

The future role of the group, its priorities, along with potentially drawing some money from the SDF, was discussed.

It was felt that the group should continue meeting and it was useful that the overarching action plan was updated today, agreed by all present.

Linked in with Robyn's presentation at the start, it was felt that because there was no overall coordinated information on pony numbers on Dartmoor, this should be a priority. Creating an accurate database of all stallions was the first priority followed by mares, and then annually their offspring. It was agreed that the DaCC were the lead partner to accomplish this and that a bid led by them for funding from the SDF, with support from members of the PAG, would be the most favourable route to take.

**Action: To establish an updated and agreed system to record and maintain accurate numbers of ponies on the commons of Dartmoor and submit an SDF application, if appropriate. DaCC to take lead.**