

Pony Action Group (PAG) Meeting Minutes

28 November 2014

High Moorland Office, Princetown

Present:

Rob Steemson (RS) (Chair)	Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA)
Tom Stratton (TS)	Duchy of Cornwall (DoC)
Andy Guy (AG)	Natural England (NE)
John Waldon (JW)	Dartmoor Commoners Council (DaCC)
Mary Alford (MA)	Dartmoor Commoners Council and DHPA
Anne Came (AC)	Dartmoor Hill Pony Association (DHPA)
Graham Goddard (GG)	Dartmoor Hill Pony Association
Judy Fawcett (JF)	Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust (DPHT)
Dru Butterfield (DB)	Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust
Clare Stanton (CS)	Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust
Elizabeth Newbolt-Young (ENY)	Dartmoor Pony Society (DPS)
Sue Martin (SM)	Dartmoor Pony Society
Karla McKechnie (KM)	Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer
Marion Saunders (MS)	Dartmoor Livestock Protection Society (DLPS)
Sue Hutchings (SH)	Independent
Kerry Smith (KS)	Independent
Helen Radmore (HR)	Independent

Apologies: Charlotte Faulkner, Naomi Brookes, John Jordan

Last Minutes – matters arising

- Rob Steemson gave an update on the Moor Than Meets the Eye Project. A full project team have now been appointed and will be working at Princetown from January 2015. There will be funding in the Ponies Pounds and Driftways element for East Shallowford pound, Poundsgate pound, Bel Tor driftway, Venton driftway and Postbridge driftway.
- Representations to retain hot branding were successful. Pony keepers will follow the Defra code of practice.
Action: Mary Alford will send copy of CoP to RS for circulation with minutes.
- A correction to the minutes was requested to clarify that DPHT had been approached by a third party to gauge interest in supply to high end meat market, and were not actively seeking a market.
- Pony passports - Draft guidance is still being written, but white markings to be included in description. The number of passport issuing authorities is being reduced.

Update on project to develop pony database

- DaCC are progressing with financing a database, which will include owners, number of ponies and breed types for all ponies on Dartmoor Commons.
- The data will be held by DaCC who work closely with the DHPA.
- It would be helpful to include information for ponies in new takes in the future to build up a thorough picture to provide evidence and statistics in the future.

Update from Commoners Council

- The DaCC, together with Exmoor and New Forest were successful in making the case for retaining hot branding.
 - Over 400 unmarked ponies have been removed from Commons following an amnesty. Final few hotspots to be cleared.
 - Welfare issues are down, animal quality improved. There are only 4 enforcements currently in progress.
 - Stallion accreditation continues, however the list needs updating.
 - Work on the database will continue over the winter.
 - It was suggested that Teignhead new take should have fencing against the Common improved to prevent ponies being pushed off the ranges.
 - Commons regulations require a visible owner mark, tagging is illegal under Defra regulations, but brand not always clear. General agreement that notching is visible and quick means of identification, clarification is needed on legality.
- Action:** DB to seek agreement to support notching from Trustees of DPHT.

Update from Dartmoor Pony Society

- Organising an international conference in August 2015. The conference will be based around Widecombe and Postbridge, and give a taste of Dartmoor and pony related activities.

Update from Natural England

- The last Higher Level Stewardship agreements are on offer until 14 December, no scheme has been put in place for 2015. A new scheme will be announced in spring 2015, with a new countryside stewardship scheme to start in 2016. This will be set up by Defra, and run by NE, and may include an element for genetic conservation.

Update from Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust

- Judy Fawcett is new Chairman.
 - Trust are expanding educational base, working with schools through Ponies Inspiring People, and holding free access walks at Bellever.
 - The building at Parke has been extended.
 - Ponies (mainly mares) have been sent to Scotland and Norfolk, although sufficient breeding mares to maintain the gene pool are retained by DPHT and pony keepers.
 - DPHT receive calls from members of public wanting to re-home "rescue" foals for free, although pony keepers in their scheme are finding a market.
 - Trustees want to support ponies on the moor, and are prepared to help fund project to record ponies on the moor.
- Action:** DPHT invited Anne Came to visit DPHT centre for discussions.

Update from Dartmoor Pony Moorland Scheme

- Currently running 20 mares in 2 breeding new takes, undertaking task to document properly.

Update from Dartmoor Hill Pony Association

- 66% sold at only sale, more sold since, market looking for “pretty, coloured, little or cute” or larger animals.
- Ponies need to be viable, and match market demand, and also receive proper support through agri-environment schemes.
- Market is for older ridden ponies with good temperament, not for unbroken foals.
- Meat supply going well. DPHT stated that press interpretation of their comments was not accurate. The meat market should be viewed as one solution among many, and ponies should not be specifically bred for the meat trade.
- The meat market pilot is currently available to herds in DHPA and also taking part in contraception scheme trials. It will be rolled out to other DHPA herds if successful, however any pony keeper has the option to send ponies to local abattoirs for meat outside the trial scheme.
- The fall back scheme of zoo meat is still available for ponies not sold at market.
- There has been a reduction in the number of ponies, thanks to vasectomised stallions and the contraceptive trial leading to fewer foals.
- MA recorded thanks to Karla McKechnie for her support of all livestock on the moor.
- Contraceptive trials are continuing, the drugs can be administered with a dart gun. DPHT requested an update on the trial.
- **Action:** RS will ask Charlotte Faulkner for update to be circulated with meeting minutes (see below).
- The Pony Pill contraception scheme, run through Friends of the Dartmoor Hill Pony, grew in 2014 from the 2012 first pilot stage. 20 mares were carried forward from the 2013 pilot, continuing with boosters in Spring and Autumn 2014.
- 74 mares began the contraception scheme in Spring 2014. These mares came from the herds of 11 pony-keepers grazing on commons in the Forest, West and East quarters of Dartmoor. 3 pony-keepers decided to put an entire herd of mares into the programme.
- Of the mares in the contraception scheme since Spring 2013, 1 mare foaled this year (95% success rate in the second year in the programme).
- The success of the contraception protection for the new starters in the scheme will be known with confidence in 2015 as a percentage of the mares entering the scheme will have been pregnant before starting jabs (the 2013 pilot proved that it is safe for both mare and foal if a pregnant mare is injected). That said, 65 of the 74 mares did not foal (86% success rate in the first year of being in the programme).
- It would be expected, should these 94 mares be running with stallions in herds on Dartmoor’s commons, close to 100% of them would foal. All of the mares in the scheme were turned back out onto the commons with a stallion after the second injection in Spring 2014

Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority

- Concerns raised by members of the public and other sources, need a consistent approach from all pony keepers.
- There was agreement from the group that up to date information should be available in the public domain, and this will be facilitated through the DNPA website. Pony groups will also provide links and co-ordinated information on their own websites.
- **Action:** All

Update of PAG Action Plan

- The Pony Action Plan was discussed and suggestions for amendments noted.
- DNP/NE did not lead on key messages when the press picked up the meat market issue.
- NE are encouraging graziers who want to keep ponies as part of a mixed grazing regime, however some commons do not have a history of pony grazing so it is not compulsory and there is no financial support specifically for ponies. Commons Associations determine the payments to graziers within their agreement, and prioritise higher value animals. There was agreement that there should be a presumption that all three types of grazing livestock should be supported out on the common whenever possible.

Action: All to maintain pressure on Defra to include all three types of livestock grazing in agri-schemes.

Action: DNPA to update Pony Action Plan and circulate.

Action: DNPA to monitor supplies of pony leaflet and reprint when required.

Membership of Group

- It was agreed that the present membership of the group (e.g. limited to those involved with breeding and the management of ponies on Dartmoor) was fully representative and that meeting minutes would be available in the public domain on the DNPA website, once agreed by group.

Action: DNPA

Greater Dartmoor LEAF

- It is proposed that applications for funding to Dartmoor LEAF should be reviewed by the PAG. The applications will be considered by one member from each interested group before submission.

Action: RS to facilitate and inform Dartmoor Leaf of decision.

DB recorded recognition of the work done by the Commoners Council to clean up the commons.

It was agreed that amendments to the minutes would only be made at the meetings to avoid any confusion.

The next meeting will be on Friday 12 June, at Princetown.