

## **Pony Action Group Meeting**

**Friday 12 June 2015**

### **Minutes**

#### **Present**

Rob Steemson (RS) (Chair)	Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA)
Tom Stratton (TS)	Dartmoor Moorland Pony Scheme/Duchy of Cornwall (DoC)
Andy Guy (AG)	Natural England (NE)
Richard Andrews (RA)	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)
Judy Fawcett (JF)	Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust (DPHT)
Dru Butterfield (DB)	Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust
Clare Stanton (CS)	Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust
Marion Saunders (MS)	Dartmoor Livestock Protection Society (DLPS)
Sue Hutchings (SH)	Independent
Helen Radmore (HR)	Independent

#### **Apologies**

Alona Stratton, Elizabeth Newbolt-Young, Sue Martin, Karla McKechnie

#### **Minutes of the last meeting & matters arising**

All matters will be picked up under the agenda

#### **Update on Project to develop a pony database**

- There is no timeframe for completion of the database.
- It would be helpful to link pony type to herd prefix.
- When Commons stock has been recorded, newtake herds can be added if information supplied.

#### **Update from Dartmoor Commoners Council**

- Research into pony control of molinia is being carried out by Aberystwyth University, DaCC are looking to see if any trials can be carried out on Dartmoor.

#### **Update from Dartmoor Pony Society**

None

#### **Update from Natural England**

- Countryside Stewardship has been launched, the window for 'Expressions of Interest' in the scheme is now open for agreements starting 1st January 2016. The EoI 'window' will be open until the end of June. We will then work with potential applicants to determine which will go forward to application and then agreement. Applicants must have an agreed and completed application form with NE for processing by the end of

September in order for an agreement to start on 1st January 2016. If that deadline is missed then the next opportunity to start an agreement will be the 1st January 2017. Each calendar year there will be one EoI and application opportunity and only one agreement start date. All information on stewardship is on website,

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-stewardship>

- Responses to recent petition and associated publicity are taking officer time from duties. Commoners have to be willing to graze ponies, and not all commons have a history of pony grazing. Farmers want to produce a product that has a market, while remaining within grazing levels. MA asked if ponies could be counted over and above cattle and sheep numbers.
- The use of feed blocks to aid learing to areas in HLS without traditional pony grazing is possible, but it is best to check with NE project officer first. Managing grazing by swaling is more effective.
- Application of lime is a different issue.

As a result of discussion, commoners present at the meeting said they were pleased that NBAR supplement is not returning, as they feel that all ponies should be treated equally.

#### **Update from Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust**

- 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated recently, when the new building was dedicated to Elizabeth Newbolt Young by Peter Harper, representing DNPA.
- Bellever – busiest time for educational access walks, which are delivered to over 1200 people per year. We have a very active team of 10-12 volunteers who conduct the conservation work on Bellever. They work hard to maintain the environment and continually improve the visibility of the Bronze Age archaeology on the site.
- We are aiming to enhance our centre at Parke and to increase visitor information and education. We are also investigating ways to increase visitor numbers both at Parke and at Bellever.
- The PIP programme continues to grow with new schools coming on board.
- We have many enquiries for riding ponies, and for ponies as conservation grazers with HLS agreements.
- Grants of £50 towards colt castrations, £250 for stallion vasectomies, free handling service and free grazing on Bellever and other sites in SW.
- We have regular meetings with various interested bodies to maintain links with those who have concerns over the long term future and management of the ponies on the moor.
- We have agreed to support a research project with Dartmoor Zoo and Plymouth University to establish the effects of pony grazing on the environment of Dartmoor. Bellever will be used as a new take example and we will negotiate with NE to find an appropriate area on the open moor.

### **Update from Dartmoor Pony Moorland Scheme**

- Scheme currently has 17 breeding mares in one newtake, and another non breeding newtake for mares and geldings.

### **Update from Dartmoor Hill Pony Association**

- 44 colts were cut on total of 4 days.
- Selling is good, with continuing enquiries for foals.
- Display team have been successful.
- There will be a handy pony sale on 29 August in addition to the traditional October sale, and the Association are very grateful for the support of Rendells.
- One stallion has been castrated, and is taking time to heal.
- MA declined to give number of ponies sold for human consumption, but confirmed that there is a growing market.
- Limited repeat market for conservation grazing due to pony lifespan.
- Option to rear foals to 4 years old and costs of doing this could be explored, there is a shortage of experienced riders for youngsters, as children are better suited to older, quieter ponies.
- DPHT will discuss with Trustees the proposal to hold an open day / sale to promote other pony types.

### **Update from Dartmoor Livestock Protection Society**

- Around 1500 calls were received in 2014, this year heading to be equally busy.
- A number of thin ponies were removed from Roborough Down, as well as other areas.
- DLPS are hoping to trial fluorescent paint at drift time, they do not advocate the use of collars.
- Road traffic accidents remain biggest problem, with vehicle speed being major factor. The existing visors are becoming unreliable and ideally need replacing.
- 2 deformed foals were born and are being monitored. 6 others were still born.
- Clapper bridges remain a hazard when hooves are trapped between slabs.
- A member of the public was distressed by the quick and humane despatch of an injured pony on Plasterdown.
- A young foal was found wandering a few days after Ten Tors, and it is possible that it became separated from its mother due to disturbance from the event.
- Reported dog attacks are higher this year. Out of control dogs can attack ponies as well as other livestock, and DLPS support the campaign for DNA registration of all dogs.

### **Update from Dartmoor National Park Authority**

- RS is meeting Devon Highways officers; speed visors will be included on the agenda.
- Civil enforcement officers and dog wardens have powers to issue fixed penalty notices to people feeding ponies. Signage in key areas would help. CS suggested that the group could consider contributing funding to tackle problem.
- The project work around ponies and drift ways is on-going under the MTMTE scheme.

- RS confirmed that Joss Hibbs is not working for DNPA, but as a result of her attendance at a DNPA management plan meeting had offered to look at pony keeping and grazing issues. DNPA are waiting for a report, and were not aware of petition in advance. Concern was expressed that impression given is that JH has responsibility for point 6 in pony action plan, not PAG. This should be clarified, and concerns of those present conveyed to DNPA management.

### **Discussion and agreement of updated PAG action plan**

One omission from the list of partners was noted.

The next meeting will focus on the action plan for agreement by all partners.

### **Membership of group (minutes, meetings, transparency etc)**

All were in agreement that the PAG should continue to meet regularly, and were happy for DNPA to take chair.

It was agreed that in future individual organisations updates should be sent around by email before the meeting to cut down on time spent reading them out. The meeting could then deal with any specific questions relating to the reports. This would provide more time in the meeting to discuss and agree projects and joint actions. **ACTION; All**

A request has been received from the Mare and Foal Sanctuary to join the group, however when discussed and put to a vote all were agreed that the remit of that organisation does not fall within the scope of the PAG and they should not be included. They will be able to view the minutes of meetings once they are available on line.

### **Date and venue of next meeting**

10.30 Friday 18 September, Princetown