



THE MOORLAND MOUSIE TRUST

PROTECTING EXMOOR PONIES

The Exmoor Pony Centre
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Registered Charity No. 1116710
Company Registration No: 05861223

Use of Exmoor Ponies in Environmental Situations: Provision for care in the grazing landscape

The Moorland Mousie Trust has identified the use of environmental grazing as an outlet for the rehoming of Exmoor ponies.

Environmental grazing can include but is not limited to 'conservation grazing' and 'rewilding'.

In all cases any potential site must comply with the strict requirements set out by the Moorland Mousie Trust if the site wishes to utilise charity owned ponies.

A process for this rehoming has been approved by the Trustee board in collaboration with various veterinary professionals and environmental organisations.

There are a variety of factors which are taken into account and each individual pony, and each individual site is different and therefore a 'blanket' approach is not appropriate. Each site must undergo a thorough inspection and discussion to ensure suitability. Sites must demonstrate thorough knowledge and resource to care for the ponies, including policies for caring for injured/ill ponies.

In all circumstances the site must provide evidence of the following:

- Daily checking of all ponies
- Identify an individual with equine knowledge and experience who will take the 'lead' in pony care and decisions.
- Access to a coral (temporary or permanent) to allow for ponies to be contained and undergo treatment/ closer inspection.
- Suitable water supply and contingency plans for alternative water supply
- Suitable vegetation – adequate food sources for the ponies
- Suitable shelter (man-made or natural)
- Emergency policies for veterinary care, disposal of deadstock, escaped ponies.
- Willingness to undergo training and liaise with the Charity in any aspects affecting ponies.
- Evaluate the impact pony grazing will have on stakeholders of the site and consult in advance to ensure good relations with the community and the ponies.
- Insurance, Risk Assessments, and appropriate management policies.

The Moorland Mousie Trust will remove any ponies deemed unsuitable or unhappy in any 'rehomed' situation. Care of injured/ill ponies may result in the return of individuals into the direct care of the Charity



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The Use of Exmoor Ponies for Environmental Grazing

Exmoor ponies are being used privately and by organisations all over the UK and Europe. Many of these 'herds' are undertaking their role on an informal basis where the owner is enjoying the benefits of owning ponies whilst also seeing improvements to their land. In other cases the ponies are sought after for formal projects which have identified that Exmoor ponies would suit their needs. These 'reasons' for requiring ponies can range from specific biodiversity and flora/fauna targets, the need to reduce 'man' hours and use mechanical devices to push back scrub, through to the economic incentives of countryside stewardship grants such as SP8 Rare Breeds at Risk Supplement. There are various organisations set up to facilitate the grazing of Exmoor ponies.

MMT is well placed within this sector with a proven record of over 20 years experience and support from the general public due to the use of 'unwanted' exmoor ponies for this role. There are some aspects of the sector that MMT needs to approach with careful consideration.

Supplying/supporting the use of breeding herds.

In a world filled with unwanted and neglected equines it is a priority of MMT to encourage only responsible breeding and that where the offspring is in demand. Many grazing herds have previously been breeding and this has led to an over saturated market of unhandled and unwanted youngstock.

Rewilding

Rewilding has rapidly gained traction and popularity over the last decade. Most notably due to the exposure given to the Knepp Estate by the book *Wilding* by Isabella Tree and the public interest in the estates approach to managing their land. Rewilding and the popularity thereof does not come without some confusion as to the practical application of these ideas but also the way in which moral and legal considerations balance with the hoped environmental outcomes. In Oostvaardersplassen rewilding was used in a very 'raw' sense and allowing nature without intervention caused huge controversy. It is important for MMT to only support projects where the ponies will receive care in line with the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and to advise projects and ensure protocols are in place for the removal of sick, injured or dead animals.

Interacting with the public

The use of grazing ponies has had unquantifiable benefits to local communities and individuals, improving both mental and physical health. The ponies are capable of encouraging improvements to social behaviours and connecting people with nature. The considerations here are to ensure the 'anticipated' benefits are balanced with the safety of the ponies and of the people who they may come in to contact with. The ponies safety and the public perception of the ponies should always be positive, this also can create both positive and negative perception of the charity which must be managed closely.