

= Exmoor pony =

The Exmoor pony is a horse breed native to the British Isles , where some still roam as semi @-@ feral livestock on Exmoor , a large area of moorland in Devon and Somerset in southwest England . The Exmoor has been given " endangered " status by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust , and " threatened " status by The Livestock Conservancy . It is one of the British Isles ' mountain and moorland pony breeds , having conformation similar to that of other cold @-@ weather @-@ adapted pony breeds . The Exmoor pony is hardy and used for a variety of equestrian activities . In its free @-@ roaming state , the breed 's presence on Exmoor contributes to the conservation and management of several natural pasture habitats .

Equines have been present in Britain since 700 @,@ 000 BC , and fossil remains have been found in the area of Exmoor dating back to about 50 @,@ 000 BC . Some claim that the breed has been purebred since the ice age ; others claim this is unsupported by modern DNA research . There is however a close morphological resemblance to the primitive wild horse . Archeological investigations have shown that horses were used for transport in the southwest of England as early as 400 BC , and Roman carvings show ponies phenotypically similar to the Exmoor pony .

The Domesday Book records ponies on Exmoor in 1086 , and descendants of ponies removed from the moor in 1818 form the foundation bloodstock of today 's Exmoor breed , although a breed society was not formed until 1921 . The breed nearly became extinct after the Second World War , owing to soldiers using them for target practice and thieves killing them for their meat . After the war a small group of breeders worked to save the Exmoor , and during the 1950s ponies began to be exported to North America . The first stud book was published in 1963 , and in 1981 publicity resulted in increased interest in the breed . As of 2010 there were an estimated 800 Exmoor ponies worldwide .

= = Characteristics = =

Exmoor ponies are usually a variant of dark bay , called " brown " , with pangaré ( " mealy " ) markings around the eyes , muzzle , flanks , and underbelly . Pangaré markings occur in other equines as well as horses , and are considered to be a primitive trait . Entry in the breed registry requires that the animal have no white markings . They usually stand 11 @.@ 1 to 12 @.@ 3 hands ( 45 to 51 inches , 114 to 130 cm ) , with the recommended height limit for mares being 12 @.@ 2 hands ( 50 inches , 127 cm ) and that for stallions and geldings 12 @.@ 3 hands ( 51 inches , 130 cm ) .However exmoors may be taller than this limit with some reaching 13.2hh

With a stocky , powerful build , the Exmoor pony is strong for its height , and noted for its hardiness and endurance . The chest is deep and the back broad , the croup level . The legs are short , with good bone and hard hooves . Although many sources state that the Exmoor has a distinctly different jaw structure from other horse breeds , which includes the beginnings of development of a seventh molar , this is a misunderstanding based on an incorrect translation of a German study . The study , when properly translated , refers to a feature , found in multiple horse breeds and perhaps all animals with sizable lower jaws , that appears to be an extra branch of blood supply in the area . While an extra tooth may have eventually developed from this extra blood supply , its frequency among the general horse population makes its appearance in the Exmoor pony unremarkable .

The head is somewhat large in proportion to the body , with small ears , and has a unique feature called a " toad eye " caused by extra fleshiness of the eyelids , which helps to deflect water and provide extra insulation . As with most cold @-@ weather pony breeds , the Exmoor grows a winter coat consisting of a highly insulating woolly underlayer and a topcoat of longer , oily hairs that prevent the undercoat from becoming waterlogged by diverting water down the sides of the animal to fall from just a few drip areas . The mane and tail are thick and long , and the dock of the tail is of a type common in cold @-@ weather ponies , having coarse hairs , called a " frost cap , " " snow chute , " or " ice tail " that deflects rainwater away from the groin and underbelly areas to fall from the long hairs on the back of the hind legs .

= = History = =

= = = Prehistoric origin theories = = =

Exmoor fanciers claim the breed is directly descended from an isolated population of wild ancestors bred pure since the Ice Age , and thus more than 10 @,@ 000 years old . Modern DNA research to date has not supported that traditionally held view of the origin of the Exmoor pony however , as existing studies indicate they share their maternally inherited mitochondrial DNA with various other horse breeds from across the world , and their paternally inherited Y @-@ chromosome is identical to that of most other domesticated horses .

However , horses have been present in Britain for hundreds of thousands of years . Two species of wild horse were identified from remains at Pakefield , East Anglia , dating back to 700 @,@ 000 BC , and spear damage on a horse shoulder bone discovered at Eartham Pit , Boxgrove , dated 500 @,@ 000 BC , showed that early humans were hunting horses in the area at that time . Horse remains from about 50 @,@ 000 BC have been recovered from Kent 's Cavern in nearby Torquay , remains dating from around 7 @,@ 000 BC have been found in Gough 's Cave in Cheddar Gorge , less than 50 miles ( 80 km ) from Exmoor , subfossil horse tracks have been found in the Bristol Channel / Severn Estuary area , and pre @-@ domesticated horse bones have been found in Severn @-@ Cotswold chamber tombs dating to 3500 BC .

= = = Modern DNA studies and archaeology = = =

No genetic studies to date have correlated these prehistoric remains to any modern breed . What has been studied are Y @-@ chromosomes ( Y @-@ DNA ) and mitochondrial DNA ( mtDNA ) obtained from Exmoor ponies . The Y @-@ chromosome is passed on through the male line , and worldwide shows very little genetic variation in horses , except for a second Y @-@ chromosome haplotype found in China , suggesting that a very limited number of stallions contributed to the original genome of the domestic horse . The Exmoor pony shares this general Y @-@ chromosome haplotype . In contrast , mitochondrial DNA is passed on through the female line , and shows far more variation than Y @-@ DNA , indicating that a large number of wild mares from several regions have contributed to modern domestic breeds . Some mtDNA @-@ haplotypes have been found in DNA samples obtained from wild horses in prehistoric deposits , while other mtDNA @-@ haplotypes have only been found in domesticated horses , from both living individuals and archeological finds . The Exmoor pony has a high frequency of pre @-@ domestication mtDNA @-@ haplotypes , but these are also found in different breeds all around the world . Currently , for the British Isles , there are only three DNA archeological samples available , all from Ireland . Although wild horses were abundant after the last ice age , the lack of sufficient pre @-@ domestication DNA samples makes it impossible to determine the contribution of the wild horses of the British Islands to modern breeds , including the Exmoor pony . A 1995 study of morphological characteristics , the outward appearance of organisms , indicated that the Exmoor , Pottock , and Tarpan have an extremely close resemblance ; these breeds were consistently grouped together in the results from several analyses , with the Exmoor showing the closest relationship to the Tarpan of all the breeds studied , at 0 @.@ 27 ; the next @-@ closest breeds to the Tarpan were the Pottock and Merens , both with a genetic distance from the Tarpan of 0 @.@ 47 . The distance between the Exmoor and Pottock was 0 @.@ 37 , and between the Exmoor and Merens was 0 @.@ 40 ; a significantly wider gap than the distance between the Exmoor and Tarpan .

The first indication of domesticated horses in England comes from archaeological investigations showing that the ancient Britons were using wheeled horse @-@ drawn transport extensively in southwest England as early as 400 BC . Recent research has indicated that there was significant Roman involvement in mining on Exmoor . Metals including iron , tin , and copper were transported to Hengistbury Head in neighbouring Dorset for export , and Roman carvings , showing British and Roman chariots pulled by ponies phenotypically similar to the Exmoor , have been found in

Somerset .

= = Recorded history and modern times = = =

The Domesday Book mentions ponies in Exmoor in 1086 . Mentions of the ponies are rare between then and 1818 , when the Royal Exmoor Forest was sold to a private buyer . Sir Thomas Acland , the Exmoor Royal Forest 's last warden , took 30 ponies from the area to Winsford Hill , where he owned land . This herd became known as the Anchor herd , and a small number of descendants of this original herd still remain at Winsford Hill . At the same time as Acland 's removal , the rest of the ponies were sold , but some stayed with breeders in the area , and their families still preserve the descendants of those animals . From the 1820s to 1860s Exmoors were used to produce crossbreeds , which although successful were not as hardy as their ancestors . In 1893 , the ponies were described in Sidney 's Book of the Horse as around 12 hands ( 48 inches , 122 cm ) high , usually bay in color , and with conformation similar to what it is today . In the late 1800s , the National Pony Society began to register Exmoors and Exmoor crossbreeds . In 1921 , the Exmoor Pony Society was formed , and published its first stud book in 1963 .

The Second World War led to a sharp decrease in the breed population as the moor became a training ground . The breed nearly became extinct , with only 50 ponies surviving the war . This was partially due to soldiers using some ponies for target practice and others being stolen and eaten by people in the cities . After the war , a small group of breeders continued to preserve the population , and publicity in 1981 resulted in increased interest in the breed . The first Exmoors in North America were imported to Canada in the 1950s , and several small herds are still maintained there . In the 1990s , small herds of Exmoor ponies were established in various areas of England . These herds are used to maintain vegetation on nature reserves , many being managed by organisations such as the National Trust , Natural England , and County Wildlife Trusts .

Every purebred registered Exmoor is branded with a four @-@ point star on the near ( left ) shoulder until the 2000s which attracted criticism . However it is now limited to semi feral ponies as the breeders ' choice . In 2000 , the Moorland Mousie Trust , a British organisation , was established to assist in the preservation of the Exmoor pony . There is little market for Exmoor colts , so the organisation works to raise funds for the gelding and training of these horses .

Currently , The Livestock Conservancy considers the population of the Exmoor to be at " threatened " levels , meaning that the estimated global population of the breed is less than 5 @,@ 000 and there are less than 1 @,@ 000 registrations annually in the US . The UK Rare Breeds Survival Trust considers the breed to be " endangered " , meaning that population numbers are estimated to be less than 500 in Great Britain . The Equus Survival Trust considers the breed to be " critical " , meaning that there are between 100 and 300 active adult breeding mares . As of 2010 , there were estimated to be around 800 Exmoor ponies worldwide .

= = Uses = =

In the past , Exmoors were used as pit ponies . Ponies not kept in semi @-@ feral conditions are used for a variety of activities including showing , long @-@ distance riding , driving , and agility . Exmoor ponies won both divisions at the International Horse Agility Championships in 2011 , and took a third title at the 2012 Championships . The breed 's hardiness makes it suitable for conservation grazing , and it contributes to the management of many heathland , chalk grassland and other natural pasture habitats , as well as to the conservation of Exmoor itself .

A herd of 14 Exmoors from Exmoor National park were moved to the former military base of Milovice ( Nymburk District ) , Czech Republic , in an effort to save biodiversity , in January 2015 .