

= Manipuri pony =

The Manipuri pony is a breed of pony developed in India . Experts disagree on its exact origin , although they do agree that it is an ancient breed , possibly developed from either the Tibetan pony or a cross between the Mongolian Wild Horse and the Arabian . First mentioned in written chronicles in 1584 , Manipuri ponies were used as cavalry horses throughout the 17th and 18th centuries . In the late 19th and early 20th centuries , they were in demand by the British for use as polo ponies . Breed numbers have dwindled , however , mainly due to exports , and today the population is very low . In 2007 , a genetic study was conducted on the Manipuri and four other Indian equine breeds . The Manipuri was shown to be genetically close to three other Indian pony breeds , but genetically more distant from the Marwari , the sole Indian horse breed in the study . The Manipuri pony was originally bred for polo and military usage , and today is bred mainly for playing polo and racing , although it is also in demand for military transport use .

= = Breed characteristics = =

The Manipuri breed has a light head with a straight profile , set on a well @-@ formed neck , somewhat pronounced withers , a deep chest and sloping shoulders . The croup is sloping , the legs sturdy and the hooves well @-@ proportioned . The breed 's overall appearance is elegant , an inheritance from their Arabian ancestors . Manipuri ponies generally stand 11 to 13 hands (44 to 52 inches , 112 to 132 cm) high . They are often bay in color , but can also be pinto , gray and chestnut . Because of the short height of the ponies , riders use shortened mallets while playing polo . The Manipuri pony resembles , and is distantly related to , the Burmese Pony and the Indonesian Batak and Sumba ponies .

In 2007 , a study was published that examined genetic variation among five Indian equine breeds : the Manipuri , Marwari , Spiti , Bhutia , and Zanskari . Based on analysis of microsatellite DNA , the Manipuri was found to have the greatest genetic distance from the Marwari , and a much closer genetic distance to the other three breeds . The distance from the Marwari was not only genetic , but seen in physical characteristics , particularly height and environmental adaptability . The physical differences were attributed to differing ancestries : the Marwari horse is closely associated with the Arabian , while the four other breeds are thought to have descended at least in part from the Tibetan pony . None of the breeds in the study were found to be closely genetically associated with the Thoroughbred .

= = History = =

Sources disagree as to the exact origins of the Manipuri pony , although all agree that it was derived from ancient stock . One source gives the ancestors of the pony as Tibetan ponies brought into India over a thousand years ago , while another states their origins to be a cross between the Mongolian Wild Horse and the Arabian , brought to India by invading Tartar tribes , who also brought the equestrian game of polo . Manipuri ponies have been bred for centuries in the Manipur area of northeast India . The first written mention of the breed dates to a brief statement in the 1584 Manipur Royal Chronicle . By the early 1600s , the breed was mentioned frequently in Manipur literature . They were often used as cavalry horses , and were ridden by Meitei warriors . Manipuri ponies played a major part in the cavalry commanded by Garib Newaz , whose horsemen terrorized upper Burma throughout the early 1700s and in 1738 were used during his Sack of Sagaing . Between 1859 and 1916 , Manipuri ponies were extremely desired by the British for playing polo , and there were further infusions of Arabian blood in the 19th century , as British administrators and military officers sought to upgrade their polo ponies . The height of polo horses was initially restricted to 13 hands (52 inches , 132 cm) , based on the average height of the Manipuri , and although this restriction was later relaxed to 14 hands (56 inches , 142 cm) and then removed altogether , demand for Manipuris was so high that the area was drained of them . At one point during this period , the export of ponies from Manipur was banned to allow the breed time to

increase in number to a viable level . Manipuris were also used to transport British troops into Burma throughout World War II .

In 1977 , the Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association was established to promote the Manipuri pony breed and the game of polo . In recent years , breed numbers have decreased , and estimates place the breed at somewhere between 2 @, @ 300 and 1 @, @ 000 in population in the 21st century . Population numbers continue to dwindle in part due to high numbers of ponies being smuggled into Myanmar (Burma) , where the breed is in demand , after either having been purchased or stolen from their Indian owners . In 2005 , a heritage park was begun by the Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association with the goal of preventing the extinction of the breed and promoting them to tourists .

= = Uses = =

Polo was introduced into the area of Manipur state as early as the seventh century , and Manipuri ponies were one of the first breeds used in the game . The British learned of polo during the 19th century while watching it played on Manipuri ponies in India . The breed is still used for polo today in India , but other breeds are more popular in Europe and America . Manipuri ponies are often also used to play sagol kangjei , a version of polo believed to be close to what was originally played when the sport was invented . Sagol kangjei is more demanding than modern polo , as ponies are used for the entire match instead of being changed between periods . Manipuri ponies are also used for racing . During their early history , they were in demand as cavalry horses , and men that rode these ponies were thought well @-@ mounted . They continue to be in demand for military uses .