



DPHT Conservation Report

By Ellie Polley

Overview

Since taking over the conservation role in June, my focus has been on developing opportunities for Dartmoor ponies, particularly through conservation grazing, alongside pony sales, rehoming and passporting.

A key part of the role is helping to find suitable futures for Dartmoor ponies, whether through private homes or conservation grazing, while also promoting the qualities of the Dartmoor pony and the contribution they can make to conservation management.

Pony Enquiries and Sales

From April 2025 to the present, DPHT has received 45 pony-related enquiries through the admin email. Of these, 32 were from people looking to buy ponies, 7 from people looking to sell or rehome ponies, and 6 related to conservation grazing.

The buying enquiries have covered a wide range of uses, including family and children's ponies, companions, and ponies for riding, driving and showing. There has also been good interest in younger, unbroken or less-handled ponies, with several people specifically looking for a project pony to bring on themselves. This is encouraging, particularly when considering options for younger ponies coming off the moor.

To make it easier for prospective owners to see what is available, a Pony Sales List has been put together and added to the DPHT website. Keepers will be contacted every six months to check which ponies are still available, remove those that have found homes and add any new ponies to the list. This should help keep the information current and make it easier to match enquiries with suitable ponies.

Conservation Grazing

Conservation grazing has been a major focus over the past few months, with interest coming from a range of landowners and conservation organisations considering Dartmoor ponies for the management of their sites.

Two ponies have now gone to a conservation grazing site near Sidmouth, where they will form part of the ongoing management of the site.

Other conservation grazing enquiries have ranged from smaller sites looking for ponies to graze meadows and areas of rougher land to larger projects looking for groups of ponies. The range of enquiries received so far is encouraging and suggests there is scope to develop this area of DPHT's work further.

Two of the larger opportunities currently being progressed are with Chester Zoo, who are looking for approximately six ponies, and a nature reserve in Dorset looking for around four ponies. Both are still being arranged and numbers may change, but if successful they could provide conservation grazing homes for around another ten Dartmoor ponies.

Over the coming year, I would like to continue promoting Dartmoor ponies as conservation grazers and make contact with more landowners, nature reserves and conservation organisations with potentially suitable sites.

Bellever Monitoring

At Bellever, annual bird surveys have been arranged with the RSPB through to 2029. This will provide consistent monitoring and allow changes in bird populations at the site to be followed over the coming years.

Subject to available budget and resources, I would also like to introduce vegetation surveys at Bellever to assess habitat condition and monitor how the vegetation changes over time under pony grazing.

As well as providing useful information for the management of Bellever, this could strengthen the wider conservation grazing programme. Having clear evidence of the effects of grazing would give DPHT something more tangible to present when approaching landowners and conservation organisations about the use of Dartmoor ponies on other sites. It would also allow us to build a better picture of the conservation benefits of pony grazing over time.

Pony Passporting

So far, 13 ponies have been passported. Passporting is an important part of helping ponies move on from the moor, ensuring they have the correct identification and documentation needed before moving to new homes.

Further passporting is planned for the autumn following the pony drifts, when there will be an opportunity to work with keepers and passport more ponies coming off the moor. Increasing the number of passported ponies should also help with the sales and conservation grazing work, as ponies will be ready to move when suitable opportunities arise.

Looking Ahead

One of the main priorities over the coming year will be to find more conservation grazing sites for Dartmoor ponies and continue developing contacts with landowners and conservation organisations.

I would also like to increase the number of ponies being passported, particularly following the autumn drifts, so that more ponies coming off the moor are in a position to move on to suitable homes.

Finally, subject to budget and resources, I would like to explore introducing vegetation monitoring at Bellever. This would provide further information on the effects of pony grazing at the site and help strengthen the evidence available when promoting Dartmoor ponies for conservation grazing elsewhere.