



Who owns the ponies?



All the ponies, donkeys, cows and pigs that you will see roaming in the New Forest belong to local people called 'commoners' who have the right to graze their animals on the open Forest throughout the year (or part of the year in the case of pigs).

The New Forest is really one big farm, and these are 'farm animals'. Their owners are responsible for them: they recognise them when they see them on the Forest and know each one by name. They usually know just where they are (although some of them are good at hiding – especially when you want them). It is their grazing and browsing that maintains the New Forest's

rare species and the landscape that we all enjoy.

Commoning is an ancient tradition in the New Forest, dating back before the Norman Conquest in 1066. It has survived because William the Conqueror made the Forest his private hunting reserve and imposed strict laws on the people who lived here. In return they were given the right to graze their animals on the 'common' that we now call the New Forest. The commoning community is an important part of the New Forest, with a proud history and vibrant present: anyone you meet in the New Forest may be a commoner.

The ponies, cattle, donkeys and pigs turned out by the commoners have the right to be there, and to cross the roads because of the ancient laws. Commoners' rights are protected by the Verderers Court, which is based in Lyndhurst and meets each month to hear about the concerns of commoners – and anyone who lives in the Forest. If you would like to find out more about the commoners, the Verderers, or their employees, the agisters, you can find out on the Verderers' website: <http://www.verderers.org.uk/>.

Look from a safe distance!

- Most ponies and donkeys are not used to being handled and are happier left alone. They can react very suddenly if they feel threatened.
- Ponies and donkeys live naturally in the New Forest. There is plenty of food for them.
- If they are attracted to car parks and roadsides by the offer of food they are at greater risk of being hit on the road.
- Every year a few people are hurt by ponies or donkeys that have learned to expect food, or are protecting their foals. Children are especially vulnerable.
- Feeding ponies or donkeys in the New Forest is against the local bylaws and you could be fined.

PLEASE DO NOT TRY TO FEED OR PET OUR ANIMALS



The Shared Forest Project is working to increase public awareness and understanding of depastured animals and commoning in the New Forest
Email: shared.forest@btinternet.com

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