

The Kerry Bog Pony



www.kerrybogpony.ie





Photo: Pascal Lando

THE KERRY BOG PONY

The Kerry Bog Pony is a small mountain and moorland type pony. The breed originated in Kerry but it is now found all over Ireland. The numbers however are very low and the breed is still critically endangered.

It has a fine intelligent head with large kind eyes. It has a strong and well set on neck with a rounded shoulder and compact body. The pony is clean legged with very little feather to its heels. It has good bone, with short cannon bones, short pasterns and upright hooves. The Kerry Bog Pony is extremely hardy, resistant to many equine diseases with great powers of endurance. Its temperament and versatility make it an excellent children's pony and it can be used by adults for carriage driving and as a pack animal.

Though an ancient breed it was only officially recognised by the Department of Agriculture and the European Union in 2004.



▲ Photo: Liz Sugar



▲ Photo: Gay Keogh





▲ Photo: Joseph Keogh



▲ Photo: Bob Langrish

BREED STANDARD

SIZE: This is a small pony evolved as such because of its use as a draught animal in the bogs of Kerry over the centuries. Thus, the height of the Kerry Bog pony is 102 cms - 117 cms for Stallions and Geldings and 102 cms - 112cms for Mares.

COLOUR: Any strong whole colour is to be found, but colour is generally brown or brownish black and bay. Some chestnut, grey and dun colours are also to be found.

COAT: The coat of the Kerry Bog Pony is long and dense and easily capable of withstanding harsh winter conditions without shelter.

HEAD: The head is pleasant, plain and of average size and rather dish-faced. Ears are small and pointed. Nostrils allow large air intake relative to body size. The jaw is strong and well formed with excellent dentition to facilitate grazing on heath, gorse and heather.

BODY: Neck is strong and medium length. The shoulder is rounded and muscular. The body is strong and compact. The chest is deep with well-sprung ribs and good girth. Loins are powerful and the hindquarters are long and well-formed. The tail is full, abundant and well set and well carried.

LEGS: Forelegs are strong and muscular with a strong forearm. Hind legs are muscular and powerful. The cannon bone is short with flat hard bone of good size. Pasterns are short and the hooves upright and wide open and well formed of hard horn requiring very little trimming.

ACTION: The KBP is a powerful pony with good bone and great weight and strength relative to its size. This together with its excellent conformation gives the pony a lovely straight and level action with good balance. This intelligent pony is sure footed and well capable of thinking for itself in the soft underfoot conditions of Kerry bogs.

TEMPERAMENT AND CHARACTER: This pony, while kind, sensible and confident and well mannered also possesses great courage and endurance. Viciousness or nervousness has been bred out of the KBP at a much earlier stage. Soundness is also a feature of the KBP; hereditary unsoundness is extremely rare and because of the pony's innate strength and toughness it scarcely ever develops any unsoundness. The animal's constitution is also first class, being possessed of large heart and lung room which in turn enables it to thrive well in spite of harsh weather or other difficulties. The excellent temperament of the pony allows it to be easily trained to harness or saddle and it can be easily worked as a children's riding pony.

[Original signed by Timothy G. Clifford, MVB, MRCVS]



▲ Photo: Don McMonagle



▲ Photo: Bord Fáilte



▲ Photo: Mary McGrath

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Up to the 1960s these ponies had been used for taking milk to the creameries, bringing turf in from the bog and harvesting seaweed. Increased mechanisation and changes in farming practice meant that the ponies were no longer needed in their traditional role.

In the early 1990s John Mulvihill from Glenbeigh, Co Kerry became aware that these ponies had disappeared from view and were almost extinct. His searches found that in 1992 only 20 mares and 6 stallions were known to exist.

Dr John Flynn of Weatherbys DNA Laboratory at the Irish Equine centre heard John Mulvihill talking about the plight of the ponies on the radio. He became interested and offered to DNA type the surviving ponies to see if they were indeed a distinct breed. As a result of genomic studies using nuclear and mitochondrial genetic markers the Kerry Bog Pony breed is now characterised at genetic level.

The most likely origin of the founding population is the north western region of Europe. Weatherbys continue to DNA type every registered pony thus building up an invaluable database of genetic information.



▲ Photo: Joseph Keogh

THE KERRY BOG PONY CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

From uncertain beginnings the Kerry Bog Pony has been formally recognised as a breed by the EU and the Irish Department of Agriculture. It is our third Native Breed alongside the Irish Draught and the Connemara Pony.

In 2005 the Kerry Bog Pony Co-Operative Society was founded "to be the responsible authority in all matters concerning conservation, promotion and welfare of the Kerry Bog Pony."

The Kerry Bog Pony Co-operative Society Ltd holds the official studbook for the breed and the register is maintained by Horse Sport Ireland. Today there are over 300 registered ponies with 10 distinct stallion lines.

The Society organises Annual Inspections for Classification and upgrading within the Stud Book. Two inspectors and a Veterinary Surgeon examine each pony for conformation and movement.

THERE ARE 4 CLASSES IN THE STUDBOOK.

CLASS 1 conforms exactly to the Breed Standard as regards height etc.

CLASS 2 is for ponies that are either too big or too small but which otherwise conform to the Breed Standard.

CLASS 3 is for ponies that fail inspection on grounds of unsoundness, colour, temperament etc.

CLASS 4 is for uninspected ponies.

Inspections are always very well attended. Kerry Bog Pony breeders, like all horse breeders, enjoy the opportunity to see the young stock coming in. Naturally most of the ponies are in Kerry and on the Inspection Day there is a great gathering of owners, breeders, buyers and sellers.



▲ Photo: Joseph Keogh



▲ Photo: Yasmin Fortune



▲ Photo: Joseph Keogh



▲ Photo: Pascal Lando



▲ Photo: Yasmin Fortune

PRESERVATION & PROMOTION

The aim of the Kerry Bog Pony Society is to preserve the pony in its place of origin. Kerry is a county of wetlands, mountains and coastlines. The Kerry Bog Pony has adapted to these ecological conditions and is closely linked to its area of origin.

The Society continues to search for a meaningful role for the ponies in today's world. The mares are nearly all used for breeding in order to increase herd numbers. In recognition of their rare breed status the Kerry Bog Pony is eligible for grant aid under the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The geldings are very versatile. The ponies are ideal in First Ridden and Leading Rein classes. They can jump extremely well and are very clever and surefooted. Some of the ponies compete in harness and they are strong and fearless when brought on carefully. Singles and pairs are now competing nationally in events organised by Carriage Driving Ireland.

In a more unusual role they are also benefitting the ecological balance of the countryside. Birdwatch Ireland, the national organisation for the protection of birds, has purchased several geldings to graze their reserves. Unlike cattle and sheep the ponies are selective grazers and leave tufts of grass and ungrazed areas which are ideal for nesting birds.

The data derived from Weatherbys' analyses shows that the Kerry Bog Pony herd is of international significance. Because of the small number of surviving ponies it is the responsibility of the Kerry Bog Pony Co-operative Society to encourage breeders to develop a genetically diverse national herd of ponies by using outcross breeding as identified by detailed pedigree analysis of their mares.

It is the intention of the Society to ensure that the ponies' future develops in the context of its origins – it is an intrinsic part of the history, landscape and society of Kerry. On an ongoing basis the Society organises events for the breeders including seminars on health and welfare and handling of the ponies.



▲ Photo: Mary McGrath



▲ Photo: Joseph Keogh



▲ Photo: Mary McGrath



▲ Photo: Liz Sugar

ANNUAL SHOW & SALE

This takes place in the autumn each year. It is an opportunity for breeders to showcase their ponies. Numbers continue to grow and the quality of the entries to improve. The Show is the ideal opportunity to see a number of ponies together.

The National Sale affords the opportunity to buy a pony, often directly from its breeder. The Show and Sale take place in the heart of South Kerry surrounded by mountains and bogland.

Increasingly shows around the country are holding classes for Kerry Bog ponies. These are a great way to see ponies in your own area.

MEMBERSHIP

Despite the good start that has been made by the Kerry Bog Pony Co operative Society and its members, this extraordinary pony is still very much in danger of extinction. It is vital that the preservation and promotion of the breed continues so that people become actively involved in saving one of the rarest pony breeds in the world. The future of the pony lies in increasing herd numbers through careful breeding and development of markets.

The Kerry Bog Pony Co Operative Society would encourage people **to become informed, to get involved and to consider becoming a Kerry Bog Pony owner.**

Membership of the Society offers a number of benefits every year including reduced registration fees, free stallion book and genetic advice for breeders as well as regular newsletters to keep members informed and up to date with all Kerry Bog pony matters.

For further information including Membership application forms and fees please visit our website www.kerrybogpony.ie or email us at: info@kerrybogpony.ie



▲ Photo: Bob Langrish

The Kerry Bog Pony



For information and membership details
please visit our website:

www.kerrybogpony.ie

Or contact us by email:

info@kerrybogpony.ie

www.kerrybogpony.ie

