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NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2011

MARKING FEES

As most of you will know, the marking fees have had to be increased. This is following a cut in the Verderers' funding of 25% over the next 4 years. We are looking at our expenditure as well and are making savings wherever we can.

The fees from 1st January 2011 are therefore:-

Ponies, cattle and donkeys on the Forest	£22.00
Ponies and donkeys on the Commons	£11.00
Cattle on the Commons	£2.75
Sheep on the Forest	£7.00
Sheep on the Commons	£3.50
Pigs on the Forest	£4.00
Pigs on the Commons	£2.00

Payment is due by 1st April for continuously depastured stock, or otherwise before the animal is turned out.

Please remember that you can send your marking fees to your Agister (addresses below) rather than waiting for him to call. Cheques can also be posted to the office at the above address. Please of course do not send cash.

Mr J R Gerrelli, Broadley Farm, Wootton, New Milton BH25 5SL

Mr R Maton, Foresters Cottage, Furzey Lodge, Beaulieu, Brockenhurst SO42 7WB

Mr A Naphine, Bartley Cottage West, Brockishill Road, Bartley, Southampton SO40 2LN

Mr P Rix, 2 Anderwood End Cottage, Burley Lodge, Burley, Ringwood BH24 4HS

Mr M Lovell, Kings Copse Farm, Kings Copse Road, Blackfield, Southampton SO45 1XF

CONDITION OF STOCK AND THE WINTER WELFARE TOUR

The autumn/early winter welfare tour took place on Tuesday 7th December and was attended by local and national animal welfare organisations such as the RSPCA, The British Horse Society, World Horse Welfare, The Horse Trust and The Blue Cross, as well as veterinary officers from the government's Animal Health Agency. Despite the cold weather, a reasonable number of animals were inspected in both the north and the south of the Forest.

Everyone on the tour expressed their satisfaction with the condition of the animals they saw. The Blue Cross said the condition of the ponies is good and they have no concerns. The British Horse Society added that all stock look steadfast going into winter. The World Horse Welfare representative said the ponies look exceptionally well and the RSPCA and Animal Health Agency representatives were in agreement with all of the above comments and commended our Agister team on their excellent work in managing the stock.

MANAGING PIGS ON THE FOREST (from Anthony Pasmore's New Forest Notes)

After a slow start, the number of pigs turned out to eat the acorns in the autumn rose to around 450. Regrettably, the Agisters experienced a lot of difficulty with pigs entering private land (usually through failure of the landowner to erect proper fencing) and generally touring about the Forest causing upsets. Part of these difficulties seems to arise from a decline in pig husbandry in recent times. Many years ago, but certainly until after the last war, the older commoners practised what was called "nesting" of their pigs. Instead of (as today) opening up a livestock trailer and tipping out a gang of troublesome raw recruits to Forest life, the foundations of pannage exercise were carefully laid. Most commoners in those days had only a handful of sows. An owner would choose a comfortable base for his sow in some bush, equipped with plentiful dry bedding and provided with a good feed. The pig and her litter would sleep there and return next evening looking for the next feed. In this way the bush became home and wandering was rare. The process is delightfully described and illustrated by Heywood Sumner in his "Local Papers" in relation to a supposed mediaeval pig pound which he found on the Open Forest.

The placenames "Pig Bush" near Beaulieu and "Pigsty Bushes" near Godshill may be echoes of this nesting process. I also remember reading somewhere about the barbaric sport of pig sticking in India, in which an essential preliminary was to locate the victim "pig's bush" before commencing the chase. Attachment to such a base would thus seem to have been partly inherited from wild ancestors.

Perhaps there is scope for a return to some of the old ways in what is in any case a very ancient method of exploiting the mast harvest but we are not suggesting for one moment that pig sticking should be introduced!!

STALLION SCHEME

The inspection date for colts and stallions is Saturday, 9th April at the Beaulieu Road Sale Yard.

The stallion inspections will follow a similar format to previous years. Stallions will be inspected by a panel of five judges. Stallion owners will be informed whether their stallion has been selected as soon as possible after the inspection date but as careful consideration will be given to bloodlines as well as overall scores it is expected it will take approximately 2 weeks before a final list is available. We are of course mindful of the closing date for the May sale.

A maximum of 40 stallions will be selected but the final total may well be lower if insufficient suitable stallions are presented (27 went out in 2010). There will be no appeals.

NEW FOREST PONY BLOODLINE DIVERSITY PROJECT

Everyone is aware of the concerns at the loss of bloodlines in the pony herd on the Forest. This has come about because of the success of the stallion scheme whereby far fewer stallions are turned out than in the past. The result is that virtually all the younger (under 10 years) mares on the Forest are related to a relatively limited number of stallions, some of whom are themselves related.

In order to attempt to address this problem, the Verderers are proposing a scheme which will be funded by the Verderers Grazing Scheme which it is hoped will result in some new, more diverse bloodlines.

To do this, the plan is to cover 10 Forest mares with 5 'stud' stallions. By 'stud stallions' we mean stallions which have not run the Forest at least for the past 10 years and are not closely related to those that have run out during that period. A lot of work is going on to identify which bloodlines we actually don't want and we are very grateful to the New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society for their help in this respect. An Analysis of the Breed has been undertaken and a report received which makes very interesting reading.

The scheme will commence this spring, and we invite commoners with potentially suitable mares to put them forward NOW for consideration for inclusion in the scheme. We are looking for good quality, hardy mares, which are not related to the stallions who have run out in recent years. The likelihood is that the mares will be over 11 years old. To be eligible for selection a mare will have been a regular breeder as obviously we hope that as many as possible will get in foal. If they are halter broken all the better but it is not essential. They do, however, need to be quiet enough to be transported to the stallion and accept being kept in enclosed grazing.

The Verderers are looking to source good, secure grazing in which the mares will be kept, free of charge to the owners, until the foals are born. Following foaling, the foals will be inspected and those considered worthy of running on as potential stallions or brood mares will be kept in the grazing with their dams, again at the Scheme's expense. If, for any reason, grazing cannot be found, mare owners will be paid to keep their mare and foal, at home. Clearly in view of the investment in stallion fees it is undesirable to turn the mares back out onto the Forest in case they are lost in an RTA or to acorn poisoning or some other unavoidable circumstance. Mares with foals which do not make the grade will be returned to their owners.

Anyone interested in putting a mare forward is invited to provide details of the mare to the Verderers Office as soon as possible.

This can be by telephone, email (suewestwood@verderers.org.uk) or by letter.

Although this is undoubtedly an expensive way of diversifying the bloodlines, it is hoped that a number of nice colts and fillies with different bloodlines will be the result, which hopefully their owners will decide to run on the Forest in future years.

ANIMAL ACCIDENTS

As you may have heard and read in the press, 2010 had the lowest number of road casualties since we started keeping records back in 1959. It is to be hoped that a further reduction this year can be achieved. Sadly, we have not got off to a great start as 7 animals were killed in January.

There have been concerns about the promotion of reflective collars with some commoners thinking that insurance companies may start to try to claim their insured are not responsible for hitting an animal that is not wearing a collar. Please be assured that we will always strongly oppose any suggestion that drivers are not at fault in the vast majority of accidents.

Another concern is that many of the road signs warning of animals on roads have been removed. Their removal was agreed only after consultation and very careful consideration. It was decided that signage in the Forest should be rationalised – in other words 'tidied up'. Many of the old signs which were in a very poor state of condition were removed as were the very old and shabby 'Do Not Feed the Ponies Signs'. The latter referred to an old byelaw that no-one seemed sure who was responsible for enforcing. All entrances to the Forest where there is a cattle grid on a public highway, should however, have a running pony sign. It is a nationally accepted sign indicating that there are likely to be ponies on the roads. With the exception of the B3054, where a trial is taking place, the large yellow and black signs warning of animals on the roads day and night have also been left in place. In September last year, new signs were erected on the B3054. These signs will have messages that are changed from time to time and we are keeping a close eye on the accident numbers to see what effect they are having.

DRIFTS

The autumn drifts were once more successful although because of the hard ground and the associated heightened risk of injury to both the riders on the drifts and their horses, priority was given to catching mares with foals rather than trying to catch every pony in the area. In addition, due to the short length of time that the stallions ran out, there were far fewer foals on the Forest than in past years and as such, drifts were not held in all areas. We are very grateful to commoners who come along to the drifts to help and we would ask those who don't to do their best to make an effort to be there, especially where you know you have animals running in the area.

PONY PASSPORTS & THE CENTRAL DATABASE SERVICE

Some of you may be aware that DEFRA has announced that it wishes to improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of the central horse database. Basically, it is looking to discontinue Government funding for NED (the National Equine Database) making it self funding. The proposal is to have one passport issuing organisation (PIO), rather than the present 80. This of course will have serious consequences for the current PIO's which have invested heavily in order to be able to produce passports. We would like to reassure commoners that the Verderers' Pony Identity List will not be effected by this change if it is implemented and the Verderers' Office will continue to accept applications for ponies to be included on the 'Verderers' List'.

HOT BRANDING

You may have noticed a gentleman at several drifts, taking a particular interest in hot branding. You may also have seen him at the Beaulieu Road Sales. This was Dr Mark Kennedy of Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge who has been commissioned to undertake a review of the identification of ponies. Dr Kennedy is not an employee of the RSPCA and he assured us that he is approaching this subject with a completely open mind. He is a senior lecturer in animal welfare, equine behaviour and response to stress as well as equine reproduction.

Dr Kennedy spoke with a number of commoners, including Mr Dave Readhead and Head Agister, Jonathan Gerrelli. We await his report with interest.

COMMONING CENSUS

All commoners should have received a copy of the commoning census. It is intended to identify changing trends in the commoning population and will be used to gain a greater understanding of the issues affecting commoning and the implications for the future. This will enable the necessary steps to be taken, so far as possible, to help safeguard the future of commoning in the New Forest. It is therefore very important that as many people as possible return the form so that the Verderers can identify the issues which may concern you. The census will also inform decisions taken by the Verderers for the Verderers' Grazing Scheme (formerly known as the Verderers' Countryside Stewardship Scheme). All information provided in the census will be treated in total confidence and no information linking individuals to the responses in the questionnaires will be available to the Verderers, or staff in the Verderers' office. The form need take only a few moments to fill in and it is hoped that everyone will take the trouble to complete and return it. If you haven't returned your form already, please do so without delay. If for any reason you have not received a census form – or have mislaid one and would like a replacement – please call Jo Ivey on 01590 626707.

VERDERERS' GRAZING SCHEME

Membership. Agreements/application forms for the Verderers' Grazing Scheme for 2010/11 will be sent out shortly. Please complete and return the forms as soon as possible. If you have any queries about the Scheme, contact Colin Draper on 02380 283134.

Beaulieu Road Sale Yard Upgrade. The Verderers' Grazing Scheme is contributing over £300,000 towards the cost of providing mains water and electricity and a washdown and toilet block at the Beaulieu Road Sale Yard. Contributions are also being provided by: the owners of New Forest Hotels, Decoy Pond Farm and other properties at Beaulieu Road Station; the New Forest National Park and the Sustainable Development Fund; The New Forest Trust; the New Forest Pony and Cattle breeders Society; the New Forest Livestock Society and the Commoners' Defence Association. Work on the new main water pipeline from Twiggs Lane at Ipley, across the Forest through Decoy Pond Farm and along the lane to Beaulieu Road, has already started. It is hoped that the work will be completed this Summer.

Other Projects Supported by the Scheme. The following is a list of the rough costs on the main items of expenditure by the Scheme over the last year:

- Payments to members - £390,000
- Agisters' Payroll - £40,000
- Stallion Scheme - £20,000
- Stock Trailers - £22,000
- Replacement Land Rovers - £65,000
- Reflective Collars - £9,000
- Mobile Crush/Microchipping Forest Run ponies at Beaulieu Road - £15,000
- Grant to Land Advice Service - £10,000
- Grant to Young Commoners - £200
- Census - £15,000
- Administration - £45,000

NEW FOREST LAND ADVICE SERVICE

The New Forest Land Advice Service is available to provide advice and assistance to commoners, and other land owners/tenants in the New Forest. The 3 members of the team, which is led by Julie Stubbs, provide free independent advice on all aspects of land management. This includes: cross compliance; applications for Environmental Stewardship grants and other sources of funding; as well as general advice on land management issues and assistance with form filling, eg. Soil Review/Nitrate Vulnerable Zone/Single Payment Scheme. They also manage a 'small grants fund' and may be able to provide grants for capital works which enhance the wildlife and landscape qualities of holdings. Their visits are strictly confidential and entirely without obligation, and commoners are urged to take advantage of this free service. The team can be contacted on 01590 646696/07717 733570.

LOST STOCK

Several animals have been reported missing and the most recent are listed below:-

Chestnut Shetland pony mare – reported lost by Mr Jim Naphine on 1st December 2010. This mare usually runs around Ashurst.

Chestnut New Forest Pony mare, rising 6. Irregular blaze otherwise no white markings. Broken to ride and quiet. Missing from Aldridge Hill/Black Knowl. Owner, James Young, reported the mare missing on 22nd December 2010.

Black and white horned cow. Spots on head, over loin and on left knee. White under belly. Red Verderers' tag and yellow Ministry tag in left ear. White brand tag HK in right ear. Usual haunt Mill Lawn, Burley. Owner Ray Kitcher. Animal reported missing on 23rd January 2011.

Iron grey mare. Rising 4. Branded AJS on saddle and shoulder. Should be wearing a reflective collar. Missing from Alum Green since November. Owner Andy Shore. Mare reported missing 9th February 2011.

Please keep an eye out for these animals and if by any chance you see them, contact their owners or this office.