

# WILD PONY WHISPERING

The real-life story of how an orphaned Exmoor pony foal helped us to tame and understand the wild ponies of Exmoor

Dawn Westcott

This is the real-life story of Monsieur Chapeau, a wild, orphaned Exmoor pony foal found severely malnourished with pneumonia on the moors of Exmoor and how he survived and thrived beyond all expectations – bringing with him the secrets of how to create a bond of trust and friendship with the wild Exmoor ponies.

Dawn Westcott, the author, and her husband Nick, run the Moorland Exmoor Foal Project. Their struggle to get Monsieur Chapeau recognised and registered as a true Moorland Exmoor highlights the plight of the free-living ponies of Exmoor National Park that threatens their very existence. This book follows Monsieur Chapeau and other foals like him and the quest to safeguard the future of this endangered ancient native breed. Horse whispering becomes pony whispering as a wild Exmoor pony connects with man to secure his survival – with the character, wisdom and generosity of heart to inspire better understanding of the equine mind. This story will appeal to those with a love of Exmoor and its flora and fauna and also provides an invaluable practical guide for people interested in ‘connecting’ with horses through trust-based liberty handling and socialisation – from the perspective of the enigmatic Exmoor ponies.

Now Monsieur Chapeau reaches out from the moor and shows that there is more that must be done to ensure the successful preservation of the wild Exmoor ponies – and improve their welfare, wellbeing and opportunities – and the way they are handled and trained, in this superbly presented and richly illustrated book.

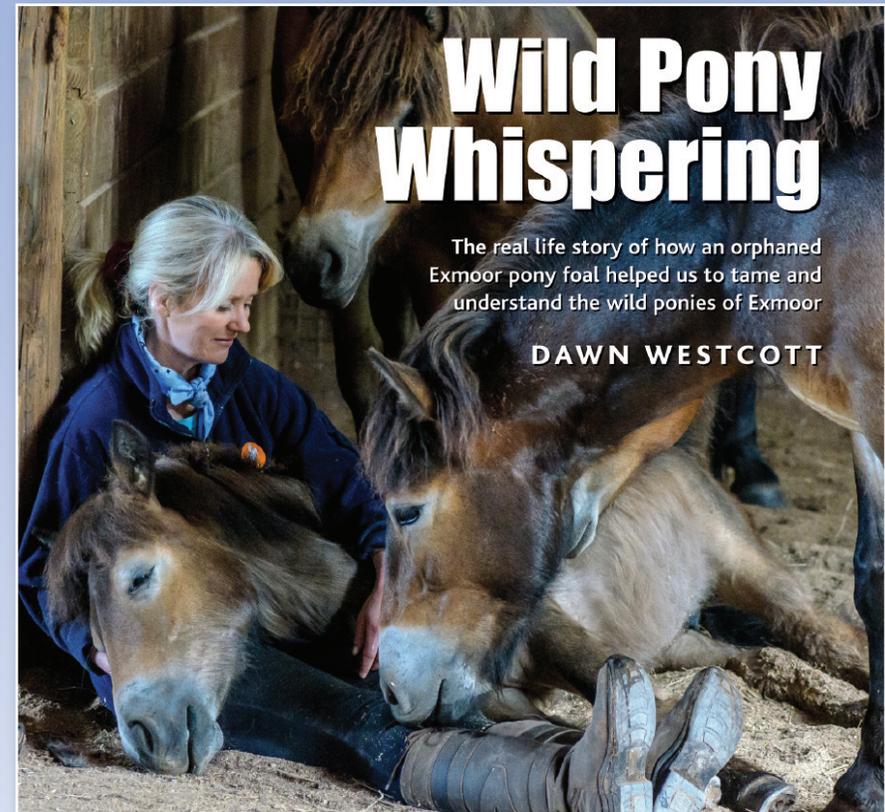
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dawn Westcott and her husband Nick are founder members of the Moorland Exmoor Pony Breeders Group (MEPBG), run the Exmoor Pony Club, Moorland Exmoor Foal Project and the Holtball Exmoor Pony Stud (Herd 11). The Westcott family has lived and farmed on Exmoor for over 500 years. Nick's great grandfather was a founding committee member of the Exmoor Pony Society in 1921, and he and his two brothers established the original Exmoor pony herds 10, 11 and 21. Nick's cousin, Malcolm Westcott, has Herd 4. After a career in glossy magazine publishing in London, Dawn (née Williams) moved to the Westcountry and in 2008 married Nick Westcott; together they re-established Herd 11. Nick and Dawn are committed to the preservation of the Exmoor ponies of Exmoor National Park and encourage the use of positive, trust-based handling and training of the ponies which endeavours to understand the language of the horse. Dawn is twice International Horse Agility world champion with stallion Hawkwell Versuvius ‘Bear’, who is ridden as well as standing at stud at Holtball. It was through working to build trust with their Exmoor ponies that Nick and Dawn realised that welfare and treatment of the free-living Exmoor ponies could be improved immeasurably.

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## Chapter 2 The Rescue of Monsieur Chapeau

In the middle of a cold, wet and harsh January, a tiny, starving late-born Exmoor pony foal was spotted by a walker in the steepcombe running down to Cloutsham Watersplash, which nestles under Dunkery Beacon – the highest point in Exmoor National Park at 1700ft.

The little colt foal had been separated from his mother and had for some time and he was all alone and in a weakened state. That day, he'd climbed up through an undergrowth of moss-covered, knarled tree roots and a slippery carpet of sodden fallen leaves onto the path which walker Tricia was navigating, and stared helplessly at her. She was moved by his plight and that evening alerted nearby moorland farmers, Nick and Dawn Westcott, who ran the Moorland Exmoor Foal Project. Early the following morning they went out to find the foal and assess the situation. Dawn Westcott tells the story of Moorland Exmoor pony, Monsieur Chapeau.



Climbing onto the path where he was spotted by a walker

Early that morning, the rain was lashing at the windscreen as we made our way up from the National Trust Tropicote estate village of Luccombe to the car park at Webber's Post to meet Tricia and her husband Peter. We unloaded the quad bike from the horse trailer and traversed the moor on the bike and on foot to try and locate the orphaned foal – while the heavy, freezing drizzle continued unabated. We eventually spotted him half way down the steepcombe where he was standing forlorn among the trees and trying to nibble at the fallen leaves, moss and other sparse vegetation. He made a pitiful sight, obviously severely malnourished and unsteady on his legs, and it was clear that he needed some immediate help. The challenge was working out how to approach him, catch him and then persuade him to come with us so we could get him to safety. The foal may have fared better in crisp, cold weather, but we'd recently been subjected to one of the wettest winters in years – and prolonged, relentless rain is trying for any free-living animal. As a result, he was drenched and shivering and couldn't even summon the energy to trot away from us.



Opposite: A plea for help, staring helplessly at the walker



Top left: Monsieur Chapeau conveyed his trust in humans who also seemed to love relaxing with humans



Right: Kindness and patience results in happy and relaxed ponies

Bottom left: Other ponies learn to be more trusting from watching the confidence given



Some examples of double-page spreads.

Opposite, top left: Establishing a trust-based connection with the herd

Top right: Monsieur Chapeau during his rehabilitation

Centre left: Lady Stumpkin Pumpkin in the Learning Zone with Dawn Westcott

Centre right: The Exmoor pony youngsters relaxing with Dawn Westcott

Bottom: Free-living Moorland Exmoor ponies in Exmoor National Park

