

# WILD HERD WHISPERING

How the enigmatic Exmoor ponies reveal what is in their hearts and minds

Dawn Westcott

*Wild Herd Whispering* is about the incredible Exmoor ponies as they reveal their true natures through the world of herd energy and dynamics.

Starting with the dramatic winter arrival from the moor of a tiny five week old wild-born foal who faces the bleakest future, it is the big herd at Holt Ball Farm that decides how she will survive and thrive. The book follows the adventures of the ponies, revealing characters and behaviours that take you on a heart-rending, thought-provoking and enriching journey of equine enlightenment. This is an opportunity to catch up with adorable orphan Monsieur Chapeau and his friends and majestic stallion Bear, as their lives evolve and entwine with the wild herds of Exmoor. It follows the endearing, exciting and at times perilous experiences of the ponies – including unwelcome night time adventures, the quest to find foals lost in the wilderness and an entire moorland herd in jeopardy. With an expanding herd and challenges to face, author Dawn Westcott looks to the ponies themselves for help and inspiration: they in turn respond in a way that offers magical insights into what is going on in their hearts and minds.

This book is an invaluable reference for people interested in better understanding and winning the trust and friendship of ponies. It also highlights the challenges of safeguarding the endangered Exmoor ponies of Exmoor National Park.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



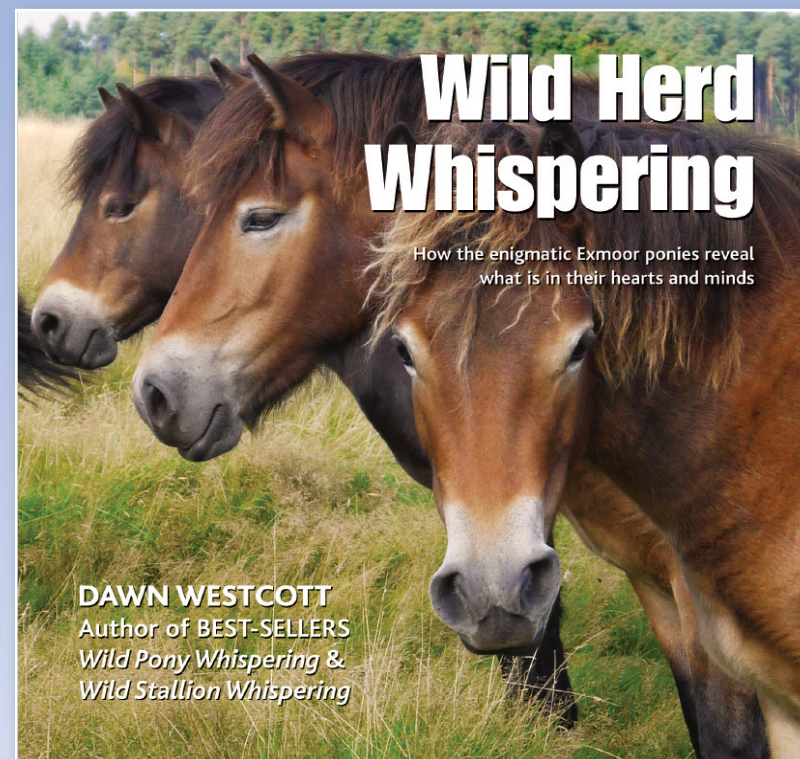
**Dawn Westcott** and her husband Nick own Holtball Herd 11 Exmoor ponies, which is one of three herds originally founded by Nick's great grandfather, A G Westcott and his two brothers early in the 20th century. The 'Porlock Westcotts' have been living and farming in the Exmoor parishes for over 500 years. In 2013, Nick and Dawn established the Moorland Exmoor Foal Project to help moorbred Exmoor foals find good opportunities. In early 2014, they co-founded the Moorland Exmoor Pony Breeders Group (MEPBG) with fellow farmers and land owners, to further improve management, opportunities and promotion of the ponies and safeguard their genetics. With an expanding herd and commitments, the foal project has now become 'The Exmoor Pony Project'. Dawn is also a Reiki Master and portrait artist and prior to moving to Exmoor worked in glossy magazine publishing in London.

Dawn has written two equestrian best-sellers – *Wild Pony Whispering* is the real-life story of orphaned, starving wild-born foal Monsieur Chapeau and *Wild Stallion Whispering* is the real-life story of stallion Bear and his amazing journey from unwanted moorbred foal to twice world champion in horse agility. Dawn's books enable people to connect with the iconic – and endangered – Exmoor pony breed and gain fascinating insights into the nature of horses. More information at [www.WildPonyWhispering.co.uk](http://www.WildPonyWhispering.co.uk).

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Members of the big herd convey their feelings to D'Artagnan (who is squaring up on the right here).



Above left: Being accepted to relax with the herd is a privilege.

Above right: Matriarch until the last, Maisie centre here, flanked by Lady Molly and Penelope Pitstop – always central to activities.

Left: Bear's father Great Gatsby running with the Countisbury Herd 423 mares.

Right: The little late-born foal with her dam and herd.

Below: Dawn connecting with the herd.



Example of a double page spread



## Chapter Six Wonderful Walks

What happens when you let go? Building rapport with the ponies on liberty and adventure walks

Esomor ponies love going out for walks so, when it can be arranged, we take two or three ponies out around the National Trust Holnicote Estate farm fields, the lanes and in the woods and moorland of the adjacent Dunkery Commons. It's magical when this can be done at liberty – undisciplined their lead ropes and letting them come along at their own pace. Of course, on the lanes, it's essential to lead ponies safely on a lead rope, but once on our own farm land, or in the woodland and moorland areas where free-living ponies, cattle, sheep and red deer roam, it's sometimes possible to turn them loose. Monty is great fun to take out. He's been lightly backed to saddle and also competed successfully in horse agility as a youngster. He recoll on the walls is excellent and he sets a great example to the younger ponies coming out to learn the ropes. Monsieur Chapeau also enormously enjoys the walks and if I appear with a head collar, he, Monty and Imperial Topaz are usually the first to come forwards – hoping it's their turn to go out. Closely followed by Lady Stumpkin Purlington and Lady Molly. When walking through the farm fields, we'll often pause for a while and let the ponies explore and graze. In the forest, although the tracks and woodland areas are part of a large moorland area, the ponies stay connected with us. If they get distracted exploring or grazing, they'll soon test or canter.



Opposite Monsieur Chapeau and Imperial Topaz love their liberty walks.

Below left: Monsieur Chapeau and Topaz lead a liberty walk with Kate and Ollie.

Below right: Sue and Jane relaxing with the ponies on a walk.