

Verderers Court: **Wednesday 16th April** 2025

Presentment x 2 **New Forest Commoners Defence Association**

Good morning Official Verderer, Verderers, and members of the Court.

 Andrew Parry-Norton CDA Chairman.

**Presentment -1; Burning.**

The CDA would like to thank Forestry England, the Deputy Surveyor and his team for a very successful burning season this year. It’s been well done and a lot has been achieved, thank you.

**Counter Presentment- 2; Tree barking.**

Following a suggestion made last month in court that pony numbers have increased on the Forest, this is incorrect, the marking fee register and the recent Commoners survey has shown the numbers have remained reasonably static albeit with a slight decline. Cattle numbers are now falling dramatically.

As most of the people in this court will know, New Forest ponies are well adapted for life in the Forest. This includes the process of storing fat reserves during the summer months in preparation for providing a source of energy over the cold winter. These fat reserves will be getting low in early spring, but with warmer temperatures the grass soon grows. Part of a job as a Commoner is to monitor this very carefully not just for ponies but all turned out livestock. However occasionally one or two ponies will become poor and our excellent Agister team will remove that pony to the Commoners holding for supplementary feeding.

 We ask the public to always report an animal to the Verderers office if they feel its not looking right; the ponies’ welfare is always our top priority, nobody including the Commoners, wants to see a pony in a poor condition.

It is accepted that a small percentage of ponies do develop a habit of barking, this is normally associated with Holly so it’s unusual in Beech trees and research has shown that its bark can be toxic to ponies.

 Barking is a learned behavior; similar to crib biting by stabled horses and it’s incorrect to suggest its due to hunger. This is not a new trend and it’s certainly not a reflection on the Verderers or Agisters management, in the past ponies have been caught and removed from the Forest who have developed this habit.

 It is regrettable that the Beech trees have been damaged in this way but as the spring growth starts to appear on the Forest the ponies will disperse; the CDA would suggest that persistent offenders are removed although provision of a mineral block might help in that particular area.

We all take our roles in protecting the Forest very seriously and an early telephone call to the Verderers or an Agister will ensure the correct information being given and will prevent a situation escalating.

Thank you.