

REARING SYSTEM AND UTILITY PATTERN OF MANIPURI PONY*

TH. RANADHIR SINGH, A. K. SAMANTA², S. C. GUPTA³, P. K. SENAPATI² AND R. SAMANTA²

**Department of Animal Production and Management,
West Bengal University of Animal and Fishery Sciences,
K.B. Sarani, Kolkata-700037, West Bengal, India**

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ABSTRACT

A study was carried out in Manipuri Pony, distributed in 3 valley districts of Manipur state. During the survey, 215 pony owners and farmers in 3 districts were interviewed about the various utility of the ponies and system of rearing practiced by them, using questionnaire. Regarding the utility pattern of the breed, 96.28% of the farmers were rearing Manipuri pony for Polo game and 3.72% kept these animals for both breeding and Polo. The pony farmers usually followed 3 (three) types of rearing practices. About 36.28% of pony owners' followed extensive practice of rearing, under their broader supervision. Another, 36.28 % of the pony owners are rearing pony under partially intensive system (tethering) while 27.44% rears Pony under tethering system. It can be concluded that the pony owners are not earning any income from Pony rearing. Further, most of the time Pony wonder to the street and other crowded areas. In such state of management, the true genetic potential of the breed can't be exploited. In view of this, immediate scientific intervention must be taken up for proper management of the breed in the long term perspective.

Key Words : Manipuri Pony, Extensive system, Partially intensive system, tethering system

Manipuri Pony is one of the distinct breeds of horse in India. The breed is well known for its intelligence, surefootedness and endurance amongst others and thus considered as a perfect Pony for the game of Polo. It was also utilized as one of the most suitable pack pony in the hilly terrains. However the population of this animal is decreasing at an alarming rate². As per 17th Quinquennial Livestock Census, the population of the breed recorded was only 1893¹. In view of small population size, the need of the hour is to take up holistic approach to take up a detailed

study in respect of the present status of the breed in its breeding tract and consequently to develop conservation technology for increasing its population.

The present status of Manipuri Pony with respect to its population, existing utility pattern, rearing system in the field is not yet documented under any systematically conducted survey based research studies. Information on the existing utility pattern and rearing system of a breed is important in planning sustainable management of the breed. In view of this, the present work has been taken up to generate detailed information on various aspects of utility pattern and rearing system followed by Manipuri Pony owners.

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¹Assistant Director General (Animal Production & Breeding), I.C.A.R., New Delhi

MATERIALS AND METHODS

During the survey, 36 villages were visited in 3 districts, depending on the availability of Manipuri Pony population. Two hundred fifteen pony owners and farmers were interviewed using well prepared questionnaire. The data relating to existing utility pattern and rearing systems were collected by personal interview through an interview schedule. The information given by the owners was recorded and processed so as to document the existing utility pattern and rearing system of the breed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Utility pattern of the breed

The survey revealed that 96.28% of the farmers were rearing Manipuri pony for Polo game. Around 3.72% kept these animals for both breeding and Polo. It was also observed that some of the animals are used for carrying loads as pack animal particularly in rural areas, though the same couldn't be recorded during the survey. Riding is usually done by almost all owners as a favorite passion for time pass.

It has been also revealed that as Manipuri pony has been associated with the culture and religion of Manipuri people since mythological age, they are still used during the Lai Haraoba festivals of local deities (Pagan God or Goddess), which is being held once a year in every villages. Ponies are also occasionally used in local fairs, festivals as children ride for entertainment and pleasure.

Some of the farmers, during the survey, also informed that in hill areas, away from the breeding tract, the animals are used for long distance travel from one place to another. They are also used for carrying loads as pack animals in hilly terrains and other inaccessible areas.

The survey further revealed that the pony owners has not yet introduced the use of this breed in any feasible and acceptable income generating employment activity such as passengers transportation services and also

carriage of goods in different places and areas, where such services would be feasible.

Rearing System

Regarding the system of rearing, the study revealed that pony farmers usually followed 3 (three) systems of rearing viz. extensive system of rearing, semi-intensive system and tethering.

The survey revealed that 36.28% of pony owners followed a rearing practice, which is more or less extensive system of rearing. In this, Ponies are usually freed day and night almost throughout the year in the open and grazing areas under the broader supervision of the owners, and as such they wonder in the street and usually take shelter in unused office buildings, community halls, market shed etc during nights and rains. However, during heavy monsoon rains, valuable selected stocks are caught and sheltered in a temporary or properly constructed stable owned by local polo club or by the individual owners. Such animals are however engaged during polo practice once or twice in a week and also during tournament and freed thereafter.

This type of rearing system is usually seen in urban areas of Imphal West and Imphal East district. Practice of such system might be due to the fact that in most part of urban and city areas, extensive cropping of rice and other vegetables are not done throughout the year, except in some scattered areas. Other factors influencing such practices are the availability of the green grasses in the adjoining community land, swampy areas near streams, river banks with abundant grasses, and other low lying areas e.g., Lamphelpat in Imphal West district and Porompat in Imphal East district. In addition, poor socio-economic condition of the farmers and lack of pony based economic activity didn't enable the pony owner to stall feed and maintain the animals in their home.

The study also revealed that 36.28 % of the pony owners were found to rear Pony under Partially Intensive system . In such system, pony

Rearing system of Manipuri pony

are tethered during day time and kept at stable at night throughout cropping season, starting usually from the month of June-July up to November-December of the year. After this period, the animals are let loose day and night in the open and grazing field, up to the month of May-June, under the broader supervision of the owner.

During heavy monsoon rains, the valuable stock are caught and housed in the properly constructed stable or temporary shelter owned by local polo club or by the individual owner. They are also engaged, at least, once a week for practicing and playing polo game. Thereafter, they are freed again as usual. This system is usually practiced in Thoubal district and rural areas of Imphal West and Imphal East districts. In these areas, the fields are usually free from any crops from December-January to the month of May-June, except in some scattered areas where vegetable crops are grown. Ponies are completely let loose during this period and adoption of such practices might be due to the fact that the farmer wasn't able to stall feed their animals due to their poor socio-economic condition and also due to the lack of economic return from pony rearing. The remaining 27.44 % of the pony owners tethered their animals during day time and tied during night hours. The animals in this system, managed part of their feeding requirements through grazing during

day time. In the evening hours, they are given procured green grasses to supplement their daily requirement. Such rearing system is usually seen during the cropping months among owners living in rural areas of Imphal West, Imphal East and most of the pony owners of Thoubal Districts. Prevalence of such rearing system might be due to intensive practices of cropping paddy, vegetables in the area almost throughout the year and it is usually practised where proper resources of fodder, feeds, labor are available throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the main utility of Manipuri pony in the breeding tract is for Polo Game only. The study also showed that 36.28% of the owners maintained their animals in extensive system, indicating that there is no scientific provision of housing, feeding, breeding and health care of the animals. In view of this, immediate scientific intervention may be taken up for proper management of the breed in the long term perspective. Introduction of 'Pony Cart' in valley and 'Pack saddle' in hill areas would encourage some of the pony owners by creating employment to them. This venture at the same time would also help in developing a pollution free local environment. Such efforts in utilizing them in the above services would directly support the conservation of the breed in the long term perspective.

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