

Hebridean Sheep

Breed Description

General Description

The Hebridean sheep is one of the primitive breeds comprising the Northern Short-Tailed group of sheep from northwestern Europe. These sheep are relatively small and fine boned, with black or dark brown wool. The face and legs are largely free of wool and are covered with glossy black hair. Both sexes commonly have two or more horns; but ewes may be polled or scurred and some may carry large woolly topknots. Ewes typically weigh 35-40kg and rams proportionately larger. The legs are slender and the feet are small, with hard, black horn. The body is relatively long.

These sheep are slow maturing and are not inclined to carry excess condition; mature adults, even on good keep, rarely have a body condition score greater than 3.

Head

The head is of a delicate appearance. In ewes the face is slightly dished; in rams the facial profile is straight but not 'Roman-nosed'. The ears are small and almost horizontal. The forehead commonly carries some wool. The face is otherwise covered in glossy black hair. The nose and tongue are black. The eyes are generally hazel brown but some individuals have yellow-brown eyes.

Horns are black. In rams, the horns are fairly massive for the size of the animal. In 2-horned rams, the horns sweep upwards from the head before spiralling backwards and outwards; more than 1 1/4 spirals is rare. In 2-horned ewes, the horns are scimitar-shaped and sweep backwards and outwards from the head. In multi-horned rams, the upper horns are generally larger than the lower; the upper horns may be predominantly upright or may curve strongly sideways or forwards. Multi-horned ewes may have rather bent or weak horns, which may break. The horns of multi-horned animals may be fused together.

In polled, scurred or multi-horned animals, the upper eyelid is sometimes notched or even split.

Tail

The tail is short to medium in length, tapers gently and approaches the hocks. Some animals have tails which are well covered in wool, whereas others have the lower tail covered in coarse hair.

Wool

Adult fleeces range from black to dark brown; fleece tips may become brown through sun-bleaching. Lambs are born truly black; fleeces on many yearlings become quite brown before the first shearing. Some sheep go grey with age, particularly on the flanks and the coarse wool of the hindquarters. Lambs may be born with a white spot on the poll or elsewhere, but this generally disappears within a few weeks.

Some animals have a double-coated fleece of fine underwool overlaid by coarser fibres. Some rams may carry a mane or a ruff of coarse wool. Fleeces may range from dense and coarse to fine and soft, with the average ewe fleece weighing about 1.5 kg and ram fleeces about 3-4 kg. The staple length is 3-37 cm, with any crimp varying from slight to moderate. Fibre micron count has been measured at between 33 and 38, which equates to a Bradford count of 45-50.

Breeding and Management

Mature ewes commonly produce and raise twins, even under less than ideal conditions. Ewes are excellent mothers and lamb easily, even when crossbred with meat sires. Ewes produce relatively large quantities of milk and can rear large crossbred lambs.

These sheep have the ability to survive and adapt successfully to a wide range of management regimes.

Registration Requirements

To be eligible for registration, an animal must meet the general parameters of the breed, as set out in the Breed Description, and the Card Grading Criteria. In addition, its parents must be registered Hebridean sheep.