



# hebridean sheep society

## Hebridean Sheep Breed Description

A description of the range of features found amongst the animals which comprise the breed.

### **General Description**

The Hebridean sheep is one of the primitive breeds comprising the Northern Short-Tailed group of sheep from north-western Europe. These sheep are relatively small and fine boned, with black 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 score greater than 3.

### **Head**

The head is of a delicate appearance in ewes and the face is slightly dished; in rams the head is triangular with a lift at the forehead but not 'Roman-nosed'. The ears are small and carried horizontally, or almost horizontally. The forehead sometimes carries some wool. The face is otherwise covered in glossy black hair. The nose and tongue are black. The eyes are generally pale amber to brown.

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 spiraling backwards and outwards; more than 1 ¼ 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 side wards or forwards. Multi-horned ewes may have rather more delicate 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 but does not reach the hocks. Some animals have tails which are well covered in wool, whereas others have the tip covered in coarse hair. Tail docking is not required and sheep with docked tails are not eligible for registration.

### **Wool**

Adults have a dense weather-proof black fleece and, in full wool, there is a fine woolly undercoat with a longer fibred topcoat that has some curl and lustre. Lambs are born truly black but fleece tips may become quite brown before the first shearing due to sun bleaching. 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, but this must disappear within a few weeks. In full wool, 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. In addition, its parents must be registered Hebridean Sheep.

[www.hebrideansheep.org.uk](http://www.hebrideansheep.org.uk)  
Charity No. 1158095

