

SHETLAND

Summary

Rare, and classified by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust as critically endangered, the Shetland nonetheless has great potential for expanding use in nature conservation grazing situations. A good all-round grazing and browsing animal, it is ideally suited for restoration and management of unimproved, neglected sites. Hardy and easy to handle, the Shetland is well worth further consideration.

Hardiness – a hardy breed, adapted to harsh conditions and poor grazing.

- *Hardy* – originating from Scandinavia, this breed has evolved on the Shetland Islands under harsh weather conditions and periods of starvation.
- *Supplementary feed* – may be necessary, depending on factors such as severity of weather and quality and quantity of vegetation.
- *Adapted to poor grazing* – a long-lived breed, which maintains best health on poor grazing.
- *Wintering* – able to winter out; if housed, adapts by growing a finer coat.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – an easily handled and fairly small breed.

- *Handling* – generally easy. May be easily halter trained and quickly learns to come to a bucket. Some individuals can dislike restraint, but this trait is mostly bred out.
- *Fencing* – easily contained; three strands of barbed wire will generally suffice; however, need to take into account the very small size of calves. Respectful of electric fencing.
- *Insects* – no particular problem.
- *Breeding* – very easy calving; able to produce large continental cross-bred calves with little difficulty. Good fertility, but low numbers due to popularity of crossing with other breeds to produce highly commercial cross breeds. Generally continues producing calves until 15 years of age, some into 20's.
- *Size* – large variation; average weight 350-500 kg.
- *Appearance* – commonly black and white, but may also be red and white. Previously much more variation in colour to include dun and mottle grey. A horned breed.
- *Background* – of Scandinavian origin, reputedly brought to the Shetland Islands by the Vikings, the breed evolved has since evolved under harsh conditions.



Tony and Cath Bennett

Grazing Characteristics - demonstrates good grazing and browsing capabilities.

- *Grazing ability* – takes a wide variety of grasses including Purple Moor-grass, rushes and coarse herbs throughout the year. Eats thistle tops.
- *Seaweed* – willing to eat seaweed.
- *Browsing ability* – wide variety of shrubs taken year round, including Birch and Scots Pine. Young Heather also eaten.

Interaction with the Public – a small non-aggressive breed, with high public appeal.

- *Public perception* – high aesthetic appeal due to critical numbers status. Small in size, thus less intimidating than other, larger breeds.
- *Reaction to people* – very content; ignores walkers and avoids horses. Bulls happy in a herd situation.
- *Reaction to dogs* – defends very young calves against dog attack.

Marketability – a breed with good commercial potential.

- *Meat* – good flavour. Eligible for Rare Breeds Survival Trust meat marketing scheme, with carcasses fetching substantial premium.
- *Finishing ability* – Fast growth rates on good grazing; 15/18 months possible with good feeding. Under 30 months on grass.
- *Breeding* – good potential for expansion into wider use as suckler cows, requiring medium/low inputs.

Sites where Shetland cattle are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Stedham Common West Sussex Sussex Wildlife Trust	Dry and wet heathland and invading Birch, Pine and Bracken. 33 ha	Site ungrazed for many years. Lots of Purple Moor-grass and Heather, but with invading Birch and Pine. Some areas of Bracken; spraying programme in operation. Grazing started in June 2000 with 8 Shetlands, reducing numbers in Autumn; 3 out-wintered. Very keen on Purple Moor-grass. Browse Birch seasonally and Scots Pine. Also readily take soft leggy gorse.	Bill Jenman 01273 492630 Mary Holloway 01730 895006
Deadwater Meadows Hampshire Deadwater Valley Trust	Acid grassland, bog and wood pasture.	Small site. Grazing since January 2000 with 3 Shetland cattle. 1 case of acorn poisoning in wet autumn of 2000, when grass was short and poor.	Mike Wearing 01420 479070 Mary Holloway 01730 895006
Fannyside Mill RSPB	Wetland.	A raised bog in Scottish Lowlands. Cattle used to improve habitat for Bean Geese. Also grazing loch-side habitat with 12 animals, 11 months of the year. Testing to see how they do on boggy ground.	Linda McCaig 01238 842284 & RSPB
River Test	Fen/water meadows.	Unimproved water meadow. 3 cows and 1 bull. Graze everything except rush, which sheep take.	Peter Hardman 01794 388087
West Moss-side Stirling	Lowland raised mire.	Cattle outwintered on SSSI/NNR. Scottish Natural Heritage are pleased with the contribution the cattle have made to the conservation interest of the site. Cattle are easy to handle, good natured and self sufficient, using only homegrown hay. Organic status.	Steve and Kate Sankey 01786 850428
Other contacts:		Shetland Cattle Support Group	Mary Holloway 01730 895006
		Rare Breeds Survival Trust	024 7669 6551

References

SHETLAND CATTLE HERD BOOK SOCIETY *Shetland Cattle – Conservers of Biodiversity*