

# SOUTH DEVON

## Summary

The South Devon is the largest native beef breed within the UK. Its quiet, placid nature and capacity for consuming large amounts of forage are worthy attributes for consideration in conservation grazing schemes. Although primarily a beef breed, the South Devon produces very high quality milk, almost equal to that of the Channel Island breeds.

**Hardiness** - a fairly hardy breed.

- *Hardiness* - fairly hardy, with a thick, curly winter coat. Happy to outwinter in the milder climates of southern England, but possibly not further north in the country, depending upon upbringing.
- *Shelter* - likes to shelter on the leeward side of scrub.
- *Adaptability* - happy on a range of terrains and soil conditions, although its size and weight may make it unsuitable for very thin soils or on soft sites.

**Physical Attributes & Husbandry** - probably the most docile breed of cattle in the UK and thus a good breed for first time cattle keepers.

- *Size* - largest native beef breed, similar in height to a Simmental. Average weight of a cow 650 kg. Large rumen an attribute for conservation grazing purposes.
- *Breeding* - good maternal instincts. A cow may produce calves into her mid-teens. Historically South Devons had a reputation for difficult calving, but this is less likely to be a problem today. Avoid cows putting on too much weight prior to calving. Seem happier to calve outside, although in scrubby areas it may then be difficult to find calves. Bulls usually even tempered in a herd, but as with all livestock must be treated with caution.
- *Handling* - very quiet and contented, but has a slight stubborn trait. Thus if it is happy where it is, the South Devon will take some moving.
- *Fencing* - respects electric fencing, both strand and flexi-net.
- *Flies and ticks* - thick hide means that the breed is not unduly bothered.
- *General health* - good. On rushy sites watch out for New Forest Disease.
- *Appearance* - yellow red in colour.
- *Status* - the breed is not minority status, and outnumbers the North Devon (also known as Rubies or Devon) by 4:1.



John Williamson

**Grazing Characteristics** - a good general purpose conservation grazing animal, with potential for wider use.

- *Grazing ability* - see individual site details overleaf for more details. The breed is generally a grazer rather than a browser. In general, grazes fairly unselectively. Will eat Nettles, Thistles and Dock if cut and wilted first. Generally avoid Rushes, except some young shoots and if very hungry. May have a preference for orchids.
- *Browsing* - minimal browsing, but they seem to love pushing through Gorse, Broom, Birch and other scrub in search of tasty morsels under the canopy. They also enjoy using it as a rubbing and scratching post. Their size gives them a good ability to do mechanical damage. See table overleaf for site-specific details. Unlikely to touch Heather.

**Interaction with the Public** - an excellent choice for sites with public access.

- *Temperament in breeding situations* - a very docile breed. This aspect of their temperament generally over-rides their maternal instincts, so unlike some other breeds they are not usually aggressive when they have young calves at foot.
- *Curiosity* - unlikely to approach people.

**Marketability** - a commercially viable breed.

- *Finishing* - will need to finish on good quality pasture or with additional feed, to be within the 30 months.

## Sites where South Devon cattle are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
<b>Castle Acre Common SSSI</b> Norfolk	Wet grassland.	Grazing reinstated 1999 after gap of 30 years. July - October in 1999, but to be brought forward to a June start in 2000 to achieve better grass control. Grazed down to edge of the river and into Rush and Sedge beds. Some flower spikes of Orchids preferentially taken, although overall, Orchid colonies expanding.	John Williamson 01760 337234
<b>East Winch Common SSSI</b> Norfolk  Norfolk Wildlife Trust	Dry heath and scrub.	At East Winch grazing reinstated in 1998. Hebridean sheep also used here. Site was extensively recorded in the 1920's which will provide useful comparisons. Previously recorded species are already returning. Successful grazing of Purple Moor-grass when cattle on early in season. Some orchids taken, so electric fence used to protect colonies. They also browse the scrub – the sheep take it early in the year and the cattle follow it up about July – so useful as a management tool	John Williamson 01760 337234  Bill Boyd 01603 625540
<b>Lower Failand Farm</b> Near Bristol	Wet grassland SSSI.	Wet grassland grazed with young stock (8 - 15 months of age) from May until October depending upon season. Preference for the flower spikes of Orchids. Lightly browsed Hawthorn. Farm is in Countryside Stewardship and organic conversion. Mr Amos always happy to show people around by appointment and discuss ideas.	Mike Amos 01275 372415
<b>Pencarrow Head SSSI</b> Cornwall	Varied site, with neutral grassland, maritime grassland and dense scrub. (16 ha)	Grazing re-introduced to coastal site in 1996. Some cliff side grazing. Cattle on site August - October, ponies October - April, sheep October-April. Trample on but do not eat bracken.	Andy Simmons 01726 870146
<b>Other Contacts:</b>		South Devon Herd Book Society	Mrs Lesley Lewin 01392 447494

## References