

NORTH RONALDSAY

Summary

The North Ronaldsay has evolved over many decades under near-feral conditions on its native Orkney Island. A rare but hardy breed, it is well adapted to harsh environments, sparse grazing and difficult terrain. In locations where there is access to the seashore, the North Ronaldsay will actively seek out and consume nutritious seaweeds as a major component of its diet.

Hardiness – a hardy and thrifty breed, well adapted to harsh environments.

- *Adaptable and active* – where it has access to the seashore, the North Ronaldsay will athletically range over rocks seeking seaweed to eat. Readily grazes grasslands when available.
- *Can withstand harsh conditions* – has evolved under near-feral conditions on areas with sparse herbage, difficult terrain and exposed conditions.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – a breed with many husbandry advantages, which is well suited to either semi-feral or domesticated situations.

- *Small size* – adult ewes have an average weight of 25kg.
- *Naturally short tail* – thus less prone to fly strike and tail docking unnecessary.
- *Fleece* – naturally shed, but traditionally plucked or 'rooded'. Mainly grey, but can include a wide range (11) of colours and patterns.
- *Handling* – in semi-feral flocks, the North Ronaldsay is wary of humans and not responsive to sheepdogs; if kept in 'hobby' flocks, it can be very tame and friendly. Rams have large horns; ewes may be either horned or polled.
- *Fencing* – standard stock fencing adequate but must be well maintained. A horned breed, thus not suitable for use within electric net fencing.
- *Breeding* – as primitive sheep, the North Ronaldsay lambs easily without intervention. Singles are common on poorer land; twins on better land.
- *Hooves* – foot rot uncommon, but not unknown.
- *Copper poisoning* – very susceptible to copper. The breed should not be used on pastures treated with pig slurry or other sources of copper. May need mineral lick (e.g. Tub-Ron) to counter copper.



Richard Small

Grazing Characteristics – a breed with potential for grazing conservation sites, particularly those pastures with 'weed' problems.

- *Grazing* – actively seeks out and grazes Seaweed when available. Readily eats coarse herbs within pastures, including Creeping Thistle and Dock.
- *Browsing* – enjoy a varied diet and will browse Hawthorn, Brambles, Elderberry and most trees if given access to them. They will eat both leaves and bark.

Interaction with the Public – popular with the public, particularly if it becomes tame.

- *Reaction to people* – tolerates, but is generally wary of people. Can become very tame and friendly.
- *Appearance* – size, varied colours and markings, and horns make the North Ronaldsay attractive to the public.
- *Fleece shedding* – can make the breed appear 'moth-eaten' which may need explanation on sites with public access.

Marketability – as a rare breed there is a market for breeding stock.

- *Meat* – distinctive flavour, with lean, small joints.
- *Fleece* – if shorn or rooded (plucked) the fleece has value to handspinners. The North Ronaldsay is currently exempted from the regulations concerning sale of wool to the British Wool Marketing Board.

Sites where North Ronaldsay sheep are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
High Wood Meadow Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust	Acid grassland on locally uncommon sandy soils.	North Ronaldsay sheep introduced in 2000 to control Creeping Thistle; in first season reduced Thistle flowers by >90% but longer-term impact not yet known. Also eat nettles and new bramble growth. Able to avoid rounding up by diving into opened-up scrub. One ewe lost to copper poisoning – ‘Tub Ron’ mineral lick used. More prone to foot problems than other primitive breeds.	Cathy Wainwright 01455 202952
Gorse Hill North West Ecological Trust	Arable conversion to pasture and meadow.	Meadow winter grazed with 12 North Ronaldsay sheep; pasture summer grazed during establishment phase.	Derek Atkins 0151 531 0067
Other contacts:		North Ronaldsay Sheep Fellowship	Brian Cassie The Chimneys, Rugby Road, Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE17 4HN
		North Ronaldsay Sheep Fellowship Newsletter – ‘The Hemlin’	Edward Lambert 01785 850183
		Rare Breeds Survival Trust	024 7669 6551

References