

# SUSSEX

## Summary

A placid, easy to keep breed which does well on low quality forage. The Sussex is a large, deep red animal, which although not a Minority breed is far from widespread. Nearly all herds found in southeast and central-southern England. Formerly used as a draught animal.

**Hardiness** – a hardy breed, suitable for outwintering and on hot inland sites during summer months.

- *Tolerant of heat* - considered to be especially resistant to hot, sunny conditions due to an unusually high number of sweat glands. Summer coat is fine and sleek.
- *Winter* - develops a dense, curly coat and outwinters well.

**Physical Attributes & Husbandry** – a placid, easy to handle breed.

- *Handling* - very docile and easy to handle.
- *Horns* - Sussex cattle may be horned or polled.
- *Fencing* - will respect electric fencing.
- *Flies and ticks* - not unduly bothered.
- *Mobility* - will range widely over a large site, slowly walking many miles in a day. Not particularly adept at grazing on steep slopes.
- *Size* - one of the larger UK breeds. Average weight around 650 kg.
- *Breeding* - easy calvers providing that the cow has not become over-fat. Out wintering in-calf cows on very low quality grass with supplementary feed, can be a useful practice to ensure they lose weight prior to calving. Cows will continue to produce into the mid-teens. Cows may disappear into scrub with calf for 48 hours. Bulls are very docile in a herd situation.



Simon Meek/Corporation of London

**Grazing Characteristics** - the Sussex does well on low quality forage but is not a great browser.

- *Unselective grazers* - will take a range of species and tends to graze a sward more tightly than other breeds of cattle. Compact sedges such as Glaucous, Carnation and Brown Sedge are eaten; Saw Sedge may also be eaten if no other food available, otherwise avoided. Purple Small-reed, rushes (mainly during winter), and thistles are readily taken, although in no great quantities. Purple Moor-grass, Red Fescue and Tor-grass also taken.
- *Poisonous plants* - the Sussex has been known to eat out an abundance of ragwort rosettes in an arable reversion during early summer, though this cannot be recommended as practice.
- *Browsing* - will lightly browse a range of trees and shrubs, but not sufficiently to knock the plants back. The more typical species such as hazel and birch (in spring) are taken, but unusual species such as alder have also been recorded as browse. Young and low bushes appear to be favoured.

**Interaction with the Public** – a contented breed which will generally ignore people, dogs and horse riders.

- *Curiosity* - will not usually take any notice of the public on a site.
- *Aesthetic appeal* - striking deep red colour.

**Marketability** - a commercially viable breed.

- *Fattening* - reputedly lives on fresh air and views. Will finish at 18 - 20 months off average quality forage.
- *Marketing* – local marketing schemes hope to be established in 2001.
- *Beef quality* - a small amount of Limousin blood has been introduced to much of the breed, to improve carcass quality.

## Sites where Sussex cattle are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
<b>Redgrave &amp; Lopham Fen NNR</b> Norfolk & Suffolk  Suffolk Wildlife Trust	Varied, including acid and calcareous fen, reed fen, dry and wet heath.  125 ha	Site split into compartments. Sussex cattle introduced onto the site in 1995, primarily used on the fen areas. On site May/June until autumn; often cope until late November, early December. Aiming to improve the diversity of vegetation and some specific species management for Fen Raft Spider. Cattle work well on damp and dry fen and on wet heath, but tend not to venture out into deep fen. Readily take Hard and Soft Rush throughout the season. Soft Rush in particular eaten into December. Pull up Marsh and Creeping Thistle. Eat Purple Small-reed on raised paths within the fen. Pick at Saw Sedge and nibble tall fen vegetation around paths and fence lines but a lot of it will be trampled rather than eaten.	Andrew Excell 01379 687618
<b>Mount Harry and Black Cap</b> Lewes East Sussex  National Trust	Chalk downland escarpment and ESA arable reversion.  122 ha	Around 50 animals on the site all the year round. Herd built up since the mid 1980's. Supplementary feed given only in extreme conditions. Calves weaned at 11 months and moved onto organic pasture elsewhere. Favour the neutral and semi-improved pasture on the crest, but use the steep scarp slope in poor weather. Good impact on sward but little effect on scrub.	Des Lambert 01273 890438
<b>Ouse Washes</b> Cambridgeshire  RSPB	Lowland wet neutral grassland. Much of the site is flooded.  1000 ha	Summer grazing (April – end Oct.) has been practiced here for over 300 years. Site split by drains into washes of various sizes from 6 – 100 acres. Around 2000 cattle on site, mainly Continental Crosses, Friesians and Herefords, but 200 Sussex + their calves were introduced in 1999. These have already been found to graze closer to the ground than the other breeds. None had to be pulled out of ditches in 1999, whereas staff had to pull out up to 80 animals of other breeds annually. No foot problems, despite soft, wet ground.	Jon Reeves 01354 680212
<b>Coulsdon Commons</b> North Downs, Surrey  Corporation of London	Chalk downland & smaller areas of chalk grassland.  c. 50 ha	4 main sites of varying size. Cattle owned by The Corporation since 1991. 21 head 1999 / 2000 aiming to increase up to 50 animals. Stock are moved around the sites at varying times of year. Jacob sheep also used. The cows easily become too fat as the stocking density is low. Penetrate into holly and other scrub but do not browse mature scrub significantly. They will browse lightly on hawthorn and oak re-growth after mechanical clearance – enough to maintain open spaces, and have browsed bramble well in summer.	Simon Meek 0208 660 8533 x 240
<b>Elbridge Farm</b> Canterbury, Kent	Around 40 ha of SSSI lowland river valley grassland.	Wet grasslands grazed May / June – Oct with cows, calves & followers. Sussex cattle have been on the farm since the 1940's. Have browsed alder and willow.	James Holdstock 01227 721717
<b>Other contacts:</b>		Sussex Cattle Society	Sue Kennedy 01580 880105

## References

Enact 1997 5 (3) Redgrave & Lopham Fens. Harry Barnett.