



British Sheep & Wool

A guide to British sheep breeds and their unique wool

**WELCOME TO
OUR BRITISH SHEEP
& WOOL BOOK**

This book offers an accurate exploration of British sheep at the turn of the 21st century and portrays the wide range of breeds for the appreciation of sheep expert and novice alike.

ISBN No 978-3-16-148410-0

Published by The British Wool Marketing Board
Tel: 01274 688666 www.britishwool.org.uk

Copyright © 2010 British Wool Marketing Board

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission of the copyright holder.

The publisher and contributors make no representation, express or implied, with regard to the accuracy of the information contained in this book and cannot accept any responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that it may contain.



FOREWORD

The sheep population of Britain is constantly evolving, thanks to both changing farming patterns and developments within the many breeds of sheep kept here. In the third edition of this very popular book, the Wool Board has tried to portray an accurate picture of the types of sheep kept at the beginning of the 21st century. Considerable assistance has been given by many breed societies in the production of this publication, for which the Wool Board is very grateful. Nevertheless, because considerable variations can be found within the breeds, both between breeders and also as a result of geographical location, this book presents necessarily the Wool Board’s analysis.



Frank Langrish | Chairman BWMB | 2010

CONTENTS		CROSS SECTION	75
FOREWORD	3	LUSTRE SECTION	87
HISTORY OF BRITISH WOOL	4	HILL SECTION	107
BRITISH WOOL MARKETING BOARD	6	MOUNTAIN SECTION	133
LOCATION	8	NATURALLY COLOURED SECTION	147
BREEDS AND WOOL TYPES	10	GLOSSARY	174
WOOL TYPES INDEX	11	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	176
FINE SECTION	13	USEFUL CONTACTS	177
MEDIUM SECTION	47	INDEX	178



HISTORY OF BRITISH WOOL

Sheep have grazed in Britain, providing wool - one of our greatest natural resources - for thousands of years.

Sheep have grazed in Britain, providing wool - one of our greatest natural resources - for thousands of years and, although in the last 50 years both sheep farming and the wool textile industry in the UK have shrunk considerably, their strong roots remain.

Fossilised remains suggest that wild sheep evolved between 10 and 20 million years ago in the mountains of Central Asia. Coloured black, brown or grey to provide camouflage, they would have had a hairy outer coat and a softer, woolly undercoat, all of which would have moulted in the spring.

It is not clear how these early wild sheep migrated to Asia, Europe and North Africa or when they were domesticated. Nevertheless, it is known that primitive people tamed wild sheep for food and clothing and went on to learn to spin and weave.

It is likely that some selection of breeding stock took place to produce whiter wool rather than dark hairy fibres. This theory is supported by the legend of the Golden Fleece and also in Biblical references.

Gradually sheep moved into Egypt, North Africa and Europe. The Romans became skilled sheep breeders and their influence spread. One who lived in Spain during the 1st century AD is credited with developing the foundation stock of the Merino.

In Britain, spinning and weaving are thought to have developed around 1900BC. The native sheep at that time were descended from a small, long-legged breed, similar to a Soay, developed from the wild sheep of Northern Europe.

The Britons had already established a wool industry when the Romans invaded in 55 BC, bringing with them sheep that were larger and had finer, white wool. The time was ripe for further industrial development.

By the 3rd century hard wearing British Wool cloth, said to be 'spun so fine that it is in a manner comparable to the spider's web', was a major export, much of it to Italy.

The Romans left their imported sheep to breed with native British flocks and when, later, the Vikings arrived they brought their own breeds of black-faced, horned sheep, which became ancestors of today's Blackface, Swaledale and Herdwick.



Left: Re-packing the bales. **Right:** 'Tops' of clean and fleecy wool going from the Combing sheds into the Drawing sheds. Images courtesy of Bradford Industrial Museum

And so, from these three groups of primitive breeds began to evolve the many diverse breeds and crosses which make the British Wool clip so unique.

Cloth making was widespread by the 12th century and considerable revenue was made from exports of both wool and cloth. The largest flocks generally belonged to the land-owning abbeys and monasteries, whose flock masters were probably able to exchange ideas on sheep farming and sheep breeding when they visited the houses of their Orders in Europe.

It is likely that the Ryeland, still found today although not numerous, represents the type of fine short-woolled sheep kept in Britain during the Middle Ages, while the modern Romney is probably similar to medieval long-woolled breeds.

Wool quality was the main criteria used in any breeding programmes until the 18th century. It was only after the Industrial Revolution, when British agriculture had to produce more food to meet the demands of the growing industrial communities, that breeding for meat took precedence.

The work of Robert Bakewell, who farmed at Dishley, Leicester, to develop pedigree livestock breeding, was to prove very influential in Britain and overseas.



Parliamentary copyright image is reproduced with the permission of Parliament. Photography by Terry Moore.

Concentrating primarily on meat production, his aim was to produce early maturing animals which would give more profit through a quicker turnover. By making careful stock selection from the old Leicester Longwool, he developed what was first known as the Dishley and, later, the New Leicester.

Many breeds, including the Border Leicester, Lincoln, Wensleydale, Devon Longwool and Dartmoor, evolved from Dishley stock.

Using the same principles of selection, Robert Ellman, who lived in Sussex, developed a local short-woolled heath sheep, which became the Southdown. As well as producing very satisfactory meat, the Southdown became a popular crossing sire of the time.

Since those days the process of improving and refining British sheep breeds, to meet the consumer's changing tastes and preferences for the table, has continued and wool has become a by-product, although breeding for both need not conflict.

The 20th century witnessed the introduction and rise in popularity of a number of lean, short-woolled European breeds such as the Texel and Charollais, used as crossing stock to produce high quality lamb carcasses. The Mule has become the most popular commercial ewe, and this wool accounts for 25% of the total clip.

Nevertheless, the rich diversity of British sheep breeds remains unsurpassed and the unique characteristics of British Wool are valued world-wide, a situation that, however the sheep population evolves in the future, is unlikely to change.

The Woolsack is the seat of the Lord Speaker in the House of Lords Chamber. It is a large, wool-stuffed cushion or seat covered with red cloth.

The Woolsack was introduced by King Edward III and stuffed with English wool as a reminder of England's traditional source of wealth - the wool trade - and as a sign of prosperity.

Prehistoric	Primitive man clothes himself in woolly skins of wild sheep.
6000 BC	Sheep domesticated in Europe.
4000 BC	Sheep (similar to Soay) introduced to UK by Neolithic settlers.
1900 BC	Wool is spun and woven into cloth in Britain in the Bronze Age.
55 BC	Romans invade bringing hornless, white-face sheep (similar to Romney and Ryeland).
700 AD	Export of woollen fabrics to continent.
865	Danes invade bringing horned black-face sheep (similar to Blackface, Swaledale and Herdwick).
1066	Industry expands with Norman invasion.
1100	Wool becomes the backbone and driving force of the economy and the largest flocks of sheep belong to abbeys and monasteries.
1331	Edward III encourages Flemish master weavers to settle.
1349	Black Death decimates population leading to increase of sheep flocks and not enough people to cultivate arable land.
1500	England is largely a nation of sheep farmers and cloth manufacturers.
1750	Industrial Revolution causes upheaval with new inventions to speed up the processes of spinning and weaving.
1760	Robert Bakewell introduces selective breeding - his improved New Leicesters survive today as the Leicester Longwool.
1770	Output of worsted from the West Riding of Yorkshire equals that of East Anglia. Manufacturing conurbation begins to take shape - Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield, Wakefield.
1812	Luddite riots - equipment destroyed by organised bands of workers who fear they will lose jobs. East Anglia, where opposition is most bitter, never recovers - Yorkshire thrives where machinery is more readily accepted.
1847	Lancashire & Yorkshire railway stretches across the country from Liverpool to Goole providing outlets for exportation all over the world. Yorkshire thrives with local supplies of soft water, coal, sandstone and sheep.
1939	Wool Control established so industry can provide clothing for the forces.
1950	The BWMB is set up to collect, grade, sell and promote wool.
1960	With increased use of synthetic fibres, wool production is much less and the price of wool drops.
1992	The governmental Guaranteed Price System ends following the collapse of wool prices - producers now receive the actual market price.
2010	There are still around 50,000 registered sheep producers. With the support from all sectors of industry, the British Wool Marketing Board is the only Agricultural Statutory Body left.



THE ROLE OF THE WOOL BOARD

From field to... finished product... the Board is actively involved with farming and textile manufacturing.

The British Wool Marketing Board or as it is more often referred – the Wool Board – is an organisation in its 60th year as this third edition of the British Sheep and Wool reference book is published. Set up by government to regulate the marketing of an important national product, it has evolved today into a unique farmer run organisation that is based on co-operative principles to ensure that all farmers, large or small, wherever they are located, can sell their wool through the Board. Even today, despite the reduction in sheep farming, the Board still has nearly 50,000 registered producers. The Board sits between the farming and textile industries and is deeply involved with both.

The prime intention of its role is to provide an organised structure that manages the supply and demand of British Wool from the international

textile industry and, in doing so, return the best price for the British Wool clip to the producer. This is a function for which it is widely praised across the world, as most countries have no system in place and achieve far less for their comparative wool than in the UK.

British Wool is sold at auction to merchants, representing the international textile industry. As the UK clip is more varied than any other country, it is necessary to grade it, and in doing so ensure that the merchants and manufacturers can understand which breeds and types of wool will meet their product requirements.

Wool from all over the country is collected from farm or delivered by farmers to an extensive network of depots and collection centres.



It is then graded at the Board's depots by graders that have trained for five years to ensure that the 60 pure British breeds, and many cross and half breeds, are categorized properly in preparation for auction.

Wool sales are held fortnightly in Bradford and the auction – once open-cry – is now fully computerized, offering a fully transparent picture of the sale as it progresses. An average sale will currently offer about

1.5 million kilos of British Wool, and all wool is sold greasy (pre washing/ scouring).

In addition to the grading, all British Wool is now scientifically core tested at an independent laboratory to give merchants, and their customers, access to far more detailed fibre data.



There are more than 60 Hill, Mountain and Lowland sheep breeds.

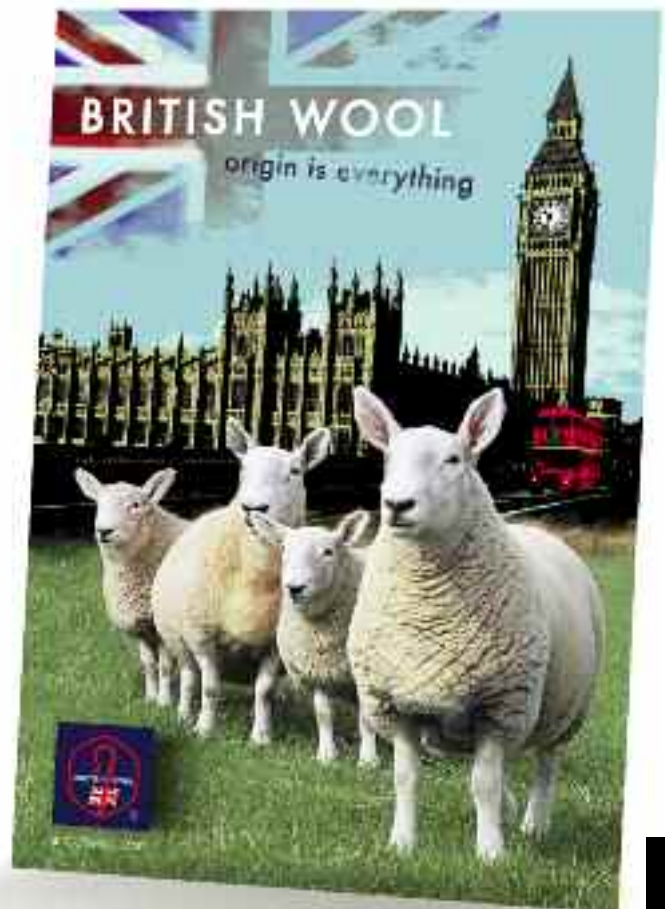


The other key role carried out by the Board is to promote British Wool and ensure that it has a valued reputation with manufacturers, retailers and consumers so that they understand the many unique properties of wool. This also helps to ensure the 'added-value' of the fibre is upheld in order to maintain prices at sale.

Marketing and promotion now has to penetrate the global textile community – particularly important now that so much manufacturing is done overseas. The significant expertise within its team is vital to the textile industry and exhibiting at trade shows to advise about wool and discuss individual requirements.

As part of its marketing and quality control, the Board has a manufacturing licensee scheme which enables registered organisations to use the Shepherd's Crook quality mark that determines the British Wool content within the finished product. In recognising the ever increasing importance to consumers of ensuring the integrity and traceability of wool products, the Board has introduced the Platinum quality mark for 100% British Wool products.

Whilst the majority of British Wool is now used to supply the international carpet industry, British Wool is used in other markets such as bedding, soft furnishings and quality garments, and on-going research and development carried out by the Board continues to explore its further potential in meeting the demand of 21st century consumers.





FROM NORTH TO SOUTH

From the remote Shetlands, across the western Highlands through the blustery Borders... over the bleak Pennines to the shadow of Snowdonia... on to the granite cliffs beyond Bodmin Moor... and all that lies in betwixt...

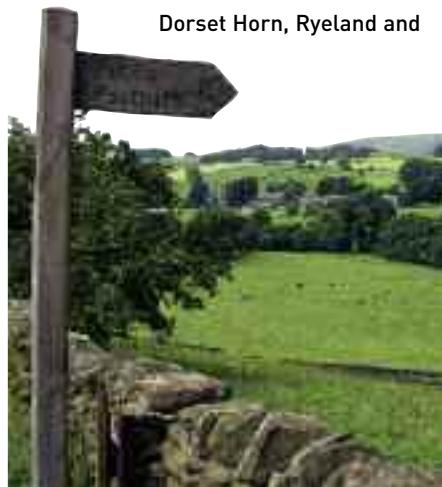
The most simplistic way to look at the British sheep flock is to consider a geographical split between breeds that hail from the mountains and fells and those that are farmed on the lowlands. All breeds have fleeces that have evolved to provide them with the protection they need to suit their location.

No other country in the world has as many pedigree sheep breeds as the UK. And as well as the pure-breeds - each developed to thrive in its own particular geographical location - there is a second-strata of "breeds" which is actually made up of cross bred sheep. These "cross breeds" include the North of England Mule, the Welsh Mule, the Welsh Halfbred and the Masham.

The Herdwick, the Blackface, the Swaledale, the Derbyshire Gritstone, and the Welsh Mountain are typical hill breeds. Their hardiness has ensured they can thrive in the toughest of conditions thanks to their dense, weather resistant fleeces of coarse wool.

Breeds like the Kerry Hill, Clun Forest and Cheviot graze the "upland" pastures of moorland and hill - a landscape that is mid-way between the mountains and the lowlands. These areas have evolved their own breeds which, although retaining a degree of hardiness, have a less harsh fleece than sheep kept solely on the hills.

The lowland areas are the natural home of short-woolled breeds such as the Dorset Horn, Ryeland and



A unique landscape for unique sheep breeds.

Devon Closewool as well as the down breeds such as the Suffolk, Hampshire Down, Southdown and Shropshire. These breeds have a softer, more dense fleece quality that reflects the geographical location in which they originated.

Also within the lowland breeds category are the Longwool sheep breeds which include Wensleydale - renowned for its high lustre fleece - as well as the Leicester Longwool and Lincoln Longwool.

The fleece of each UK sheep breed has evolved to suit the location in which it is farmed. Hill farmers need sheep that will survive in harsh climatic conditions but the price they have to pay is that their breeds do not produce as many lambs as sheep kept on the more gentle lowlands.

Farmers on the lowlands can keep larger sheep because the grazing conditions are better and the weather is kinder, and that enables ewes of lowland breeds to produce and successfully rear more lambs, nearly always twins at each lambing time.



The UK lies between the North Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean and is regarded as sitting within a temperate climatic zone, giving it four distinct seasons. But mountain ranges and ocean currents also play a big part in our weather and so there is much differentiation across this small country. The steady flow of changing weather fronts is a constant companion to British sheep and they have adjusted to it over many generations. Living on the harsh hills and mountains, their wool becomes thicker and more robust, while in the lowland areas, they are more likely to have softer wool. The wide variegation in the fleece and the suitability of certain breeds to certain areas is a phenomenon unique to British sheep breeds.



North Sea

NETHERLANDS

BELGIUM

FRANCE















English Channel



BREEDS & WOOL TYPES

British Wool is both varied and versatile, displaying a number of unique characteristics. It is bulky, resilient and exceptionally hard wearing.

With more than 60 pure breeds, as well as numerous cross and halfbreeds, the number and rich variety of sheep breeds in Britain is unrivalled. These can be categorised into seven main groups.

	Fine	Medium	Cross	Lustre	Hill	Mountain	Naturally Coloured
Typical Breeds	Suffolk	Welsh Halfbred	North of England Mule	Bluefaced Leicester	Cheviot	Welsh Mountain	Jacob
							
Micron Range	29 - 35	31 - 35	29 - 35	26 - 35+	30 - 33	35+	30 - 35+
A staple of wool							
Main end uses	Woven apparel, futons & hand knitting.	Woven apparel, hand knitting & carpets.	Knitwear & carpets.	Lustrous yarn, knitwear & woven apparel.	Woven apparel, knitwear & carpets.	Carpets.	Woven fabrics, knitwear & carpets.

WOOL TYPES INDEX



There are over 60 different breeds of sheep in Britain - more than in any country in the world.

Fine 13 - 45

Berrichon du Cher
British Rouge
Charollais
Clun Forest
Dorset Down
Dorset Horn/Poll Dorset
Hampshire Down
Ile de France
Norfolk Horn
Oxford Down
Portland
Ryeland
Shropshire
Southdown
Suffolk
Vendeen

Medium 47 - 73

Beltex
Bleu du Maine
Border Leicester
British Milkshopeep
Cambridge
Devon Closewool
Friesland
Halfbred-Scotch
Halfbred-Welsh
Llanwenog
Lleyn
Romney
Texel

Cross 75 - 85

Masham
Mule-North of England
Mule-Scotch
Mule-Welsh
Scottish Greyface

Lustre 87 - 105

Bluefaced Leicester
Cotswold
Devon & Cornwall Longwool
Greyface Dartmoor
Leicester Longwool
Lincoln Longwool
Teeswater
Wensleydale
Whiteface Dartmoor

Hill 107 - 131

Beulah Speckled Face
Brecknock Hill Cheviot
Cheviot
Derbyshire Gritstone
Exmoor Horn
Hill Radnor
Kerry Hill
Lonk
North Country Cheviot
Shetland
Welsh Hill Speckled Face
White Faced Woodland

Mountain 133 - 145

Blackface
Dalesbred
Rough Fell
South Wales Mountain
Swaledale
Welsh Mountain

Naturally Coloured 147 - 173

Badger Face Welsh Mountain
Balwen
Black Welsh Mountain
Boreray
Castlemilk Moorit
Hebridean
Herdwick
Jacob
Manx Loaghtan
North Ronaldsay
Shetland Coloured
Soay
Zwartbles



FINE

The wool from downland sheep breeds is generally densely grown, springy and has a short staple. It rarely contains 'kemp', brittle, white fibres which do not dye easily. The diameter of the wool fibre very much influences the end use of the wool and, with a micron count of between 29 and 35, the breeds in this category are used for cloth, bedding, futons and in hand knitting yarns.

15	BERRICHON DU CHER
17	BRITISH ROUGE
19	CHAROLLAIS
21	CLUN FOREST
23	DORSET DOWN
25	DORSET HORN/POLL DORSET
27	HAMPSHIRE DOWN
29	ILE DE FRANCE
31	NORFOLK HORN
33	OXFORD DOWN
35	PORTLAND
37	RYELAND
39	SHROPSHIRE
41	SOUTHDOWN
43	SUFFOLK
45	VENDEEN



BERRICHON DU CHER

Fine

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

A breed developed in France, improved by the Merino in the 1780's and by the British Dishley Leicester in the 1800's.

CHARACTERISTICS

Hornless, white faced, compact medium to large sheep whose dense, white medium-fine fleece has a good crimp.

LOCATION

Specialist flocks throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

In the Japanese bedding market for futons, also in blends for apparel yarns.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1986

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 2.5 kgs

Staple Length:
4 - 7 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 32

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



BRITISH ROUGE

Fine

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Originally kept for Camembert cheese production in the Loire Valley in France and introduced to the UK in the 1980's.

CHARACTERISTICS

Medium sized with a pink-to-red head covered with fine hair. Hornless, it has a fine, dense fleece. Valued as a versatile breeding sheep.

LOCATION

Specialist flocks throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

In down wool blends for apparel.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1986

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
4 - 7 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 32

PHOTOS

**Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female**



CHAROLLAIS

Fine

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Developed during the 19th century from local breeds from the Saone et Loire area of France and the British Dishley Leicester. Named after the town Charolles, like the cattle. First imported into UK in 1976.

CHARACTERISTICS

A leading sire of top quality prime lambs. A medium to large sheep, long and muscular, which produces a light-weight fleece of short fine wool. The greyish/pink head is free from wool.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

For futons, in the Japanese bedding market, and also in blends for apparel.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1977

Handle:
Very Soft

Colour:
Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
4 - 6 cm

Micron Range:
29 - 30.5

PHOTOS

Above: male

Left: female

Opposite page: female



CLUN FOREST

Fine

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Taking its name from the market town on the Shropshire/Powys border, the Clun Forest developed from a number of now extinct local breeds.

CHARACTERISTICS

Hornless, alert, with dark brown face and legs; a forelock of white wool and a little below the knee and hock. The wool is usually dense, fine, of uniform quality and with few dark fibres.

LOCATION

Welsh Borders and in some lowland areas.

MAIN USES

Mostly for Japanese futons.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1925

Handle:
Very Soft

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2 - 2.5 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 8 cm

Micron Range:
29.5 - 31.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



DORSET DOWN

Fine

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Established in the late 1800's by crossing downland Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire ewes with pure Southdown rams, the improved sheep were introduced into downland flocks in Dorset where they thrived.

CHARACTERISTICS

The breed, although not numerous, is adaptable and easily managed. A good sire for any type of ewe and important in early maturing lamb production. Its short-fibred wool is dense, white, springy and of high quality and, because of its versatility, is often used in blends with other wools to give crispness and improved handle.

LOCATION

Mainly in the South West and elsewhere in the UK.

MAIN USES

Knitting yarns; bedding, particularly Japanese futons.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1906

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2.25 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 8 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 32

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female





DORSET HORN/POLL DORSET

Fine

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

The Dorset Horn is one of Britain's oldest breeds although the first flock book wasn't established until 1891. A little later, from Australian imported rams, the hornless Poll Dorset was created in the UK.

CHARACTERISTICS

An adaptable sheep that will breed out of season and is capable of lambing three times over two years. Its wool, in both types, is of exceptionally high quality, particularly white and densely grown.

LOCATION

Mainly in South West England. Specialist flocks occur throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Highly regarded for top class bedding products.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1891

Handle:
Crisp/Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2.25 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
33 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



HAMPSHIRE DOWN

Fine

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Established more than 150 years ago by crossing breeds from Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire.

CHARACTERISTICS

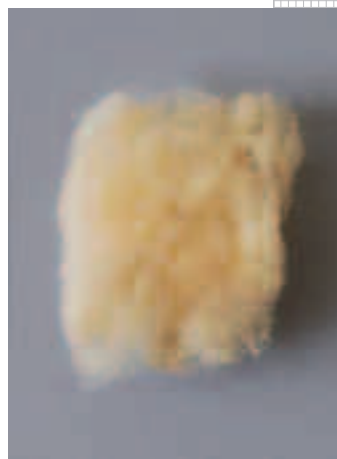
Hornless, with dark brown ears, face and legs, and a fine, densely grown white fleece. Valued for its ability to adapt well to different farming environments and as a terminal sire for crossing.

LOCATION

Specialist flocks throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Hand knitting, in cloth blends and for Japanese futons.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1889

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2.25 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 8 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



ILE DE FRANCE

Fine

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Bred in France from the English Leicester, French Rambouillet and Mauchamp Merino. The breed was introduced into Britain in the 1970's.

CHARACTERISTICS

A large, hardy, versatile sheep. Developed for quality meat production, it is well muscled and also has a heavy, white, short-fibred fleece. Without wool on its face and legs, it has a broad forehead with wool forelock, and large, often horizontal ears, pink lips and nostrils.

LOCATION

Kept in small numbers all over UK.

MAIN USES

In wool blends for apparel.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1978

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.75 - 4 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 32

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



NORFOLK HORN

Fine

Established in the UK: 13th century

ORIGINS

One of Britain's oldest breeds, developed in East Anglia from an old Saxon black-faced sheep. In the Middle Ages its wool was used locally for worsted cloth. Some were crossed with the Southdown in the 18th century to eventually produce the Suffolk.

CHARACTERISTICS

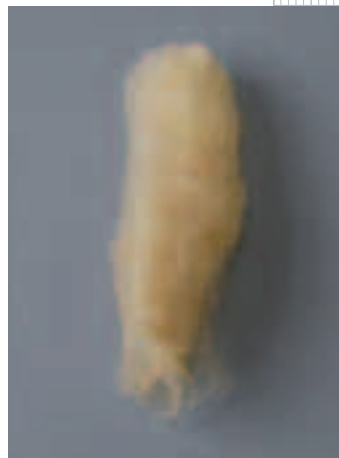
Medium-sized hardy sheep with a long body, black face and black, or dark, legs. Alert looking with strong, open spiral horns. Its short stapled, downland wool is white in the adult fleece although lambs are often darker or mottled.

LOCATION

Rare, mostly in or around East Anglia.

MAIN USES

Popular with hand spinners. Can also be blended with other similar wool types for Japanese futons and yarns for knitwear.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1994

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
1.75 - 2.25 kg

Staple Length:
7 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



OXFORD DOWN

Fine

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Dating from the 1830's and developed by crossing Cotswold rams with Hampshire Down and Southdown ewes.

CHARACTERISTICS

The largest and heaviest of British downland breeds and valued as a crossing sire. With dark face and legs, it has wool on forelock and cheeks, and a heavy, open fleece. Well known for good wool cover on new born lambs.

LOCATION

Found throughout the UK but particularly in the Midlands and Cotswolds.

MAIN USES

Bedding products, particularly Japanese futons. Also in blends with other fine wool breeds for apparel.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1889

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.5 - 3.5 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
31.5 - 33.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



PORTLAND

Fine

Established in the UK: 13th century

ORIGINS

An ancient breed, once common in Dorset, developed from tan-faced sheep in the South West and possibly influenced by both the Romans and the Saxons.

CHARACTERISTICS

Small, with tan face and legs without wool, long tail and light coloured horns, particularly spiralled in the rams. Capable of lambing out of season, lambs' wool is foxy red, turning to white or grey. The fleece is fine and short.

LOCATION

A rare breed with a stronghold in the South West.

MAIN USES

Mostly by hand spinners and in blends for apparel.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1993

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2.25 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 9 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



RYELAND

Fine

Established in the UK: 12th century

ORIGINS

Developed by the monks of Leominster, near Hereford, over 800 years ago when the wool was used in cloth.

CHARACTERISTICS

Compact, robust and adaptable, with a heavily woolled face and legs. It has a soft white fleece which is densely grown with a springy handle.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

In blends, with other fine white wools, for knitwear and fabric.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1903

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 2.75 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 8 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 32

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: male



SHROPSHIRE

Fine

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Developed during the 1800's through crossing breeds native to the West Midlands and Welsh Borders. The Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association claims to be the oldest sheep breed society in the world.

CHARACTERISTICS

An adaptable medium-sized downland sheep, with black ears, face and legs, which are woolled. White wool is found on the cheeks and forehead. Its dense, white fleece is particularly heavy.

LOCATION

Most popular in the West Midlands.

MAIN USES

Usually in blends with fine overseas wools for cloth and knitwear.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1882

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



SOUTHDOWN

Fine

Established in the UK: pre 17th century

ORIGINS

Roamed on the Sussex Downs for centuries and improved in the 1800's, particularly through the work of John Ellman of Glynde, a founder member of the Smithfield Show.

CHARACTERISTICS

A compact sheep, docile and easy to handle. Small ears, covered in wool, and 'mouse brown' face and legs, also woolled, apart from round the eyes and bridge of the nose; nostrils should form a black 'star'. Its wool is extremely dense and fine and one of the finest in the British clip.

LOCATION

Mainly in the South East but specialist flocks kept throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Mostly in blends with other fine wools for clothing.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1893

Handle:
Very Soft

Colour:
Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
4 - 6 cm

Micron Range:
29 - 30.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



SUFFOLK

Fine

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Evolved from crossing a Southdown ram with a Norfolk Horn ewe and first recognised as a pure breed in 1810.

CHARACTERISTICS

A leading, commercial, terminal breeding sire renowned for producing prime lambs. The Suffolk, a hornless breed, has a distinctive black head and legs. Its white, densely grown fleece has a short staple.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Usually in blends for knitwear and cloth, it is also used in the Japanese bedding market for futons.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1887

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.5 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



VENDEEN

Fine

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Said to have some blood-link with sheep saved from Spanish Galleons in the Armada. The breed was also influenced by Southdown rams in the 19th century, and found, for hundreds of years, in the area of Vendee, Southern Brittany.

CHARACTERISTICS

Valued for the production of high quality lean meat and easily managed. Long bodied with good conformation. Broad muzzle, large ears, pale to dark brown head and legs. Its downland wool is short-stapled.

LOCATION

In small numbers throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

In blends for cloth and knitwear.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1982

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 2.5 kg

Staple Length:
4 - 7 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 32

PHOTOS

Above: male

Middle left: male

Opposite page: female



MEDIUM

Not quite as fine as downland breeds, fleeces classified as ‘medium’ have a micron count of between 31-35 and represent some of the most versatile wools in the British clip. Mostly white wools which will dye well, with some springiness, finer qualities are suitable for apparel yarns for cloth and hand knitting. The rest is selected for harder wearing tweeds and, sometimes, carpets.

49	BELTEX
51	BLEU DU MAINE
53	BORDER LEICESTER
55	BRITISH MILKSHEEP
57	CAMBRIDGE
59	DEVON CLOSEWOOL
61	FRIESLAND
63	HALFBRED-SCOTCH
65	HALFBRED-WELSH
67	LLANWENOG
69	LLEYN
71	ROMNEY
73	TEXEL



BELTEX

Medium

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Developed in Belgium, imported to Britain in 1989.

CHARACTERISTICS

Medium sized sheep with extreme conformation that has become widely used to produce prime lambs. Tight densely grown fleece of medium length.

LOCATION

Throughout Britain.

MAIN USES

Finer qualities used in blends for knitwear and cloth, the rest goes into carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1991

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.5 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: male

Middle left: male

Opposite page: female



BLEU DU MAINE

Medium

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Western France. First introduced into the UK in 1978.

CHARACTERISTICS

A large grassland sheep noted for its prolificacy. Without wool on its head or legs, it has a slate blue face and is hornless. It has a heavy, medium-fine fleece.

LOCATION

In small numbers throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

In blends for apparel.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1978

Handle:
Medium/Soft

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.5 - 4 kg

Staple Length:
7 - 13 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 34.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



BORDER LEICESTER

Medium

Established in the UK: 18th century

ORIGINS

Bred towards the end of the 18th century from crosses between the English Leicester and the Cheviot.

CHARACTERISTICS

A large hornless sheep, valued as a crossing sire on smaller hill and upland breeds to produce quality halfbreds. It has prominent erect ears and a Roman nose. Its demi-lustrous wool is medium-fine, long-stapled with a curl at the tip, but does not cover the head or legs below the knee or hock.

LOCATION

Found throughout the UK but most popular in Northern England, Scottish lowlands and the Borders.

MAIN USES

Mostly in blends for knitting yarns, where natural elasticity is important.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1896

Handle:
Medium/Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
3 - 5 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
32.5 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



BRITISH MILKSHEEP

Medium

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Developed by Lawrence Alderson in the 1960's and '70's, as both a high performance breeding sire and high-yielding dairy ewe.

CHARACTERISTICS

The most prolific British breed, usually producing triplets, this robust sheep has no horns and is of medium size. Its white face and legs are without wool and its demi-lustrous fleece is white and heavy.

LOCATION

Found in specialist flocks throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Mostly in blends for knitting yarns.



Breed Society

Established:

1970's

Handle:

Medium/Soft

Colour:

White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:

2.75 - 4 kg

Staple Length:

8 - 14 cm

Micron Range:

32 - 34.5

PHOTOS

Above: female

Middle left: female

Opposite page: female



CAMBRIDGE

Medium

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Founded in 1964 by farmers and academics at Cambridge University.

CHARACTERISTICS

Valued for its prolificacy and for breeding a superior crossbred ewe. It is hornless, without wool on its brown face and legs. Its fine, downland fleece is white.

LOCATION

Most popular in the Welsh Borders.

MAIN USES

In blend for apparel and hand knitting yarns.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1979

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 33.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female





DEVON CLOSEWOOL

Medium

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Bred, more than 100 years ago, for local conditions on Exmoor by crossing a Devon Longwool with an Exmoor Horn.

CHARACTERISTICS

A very hardy, white-faced sheep without horns. Its head and legs are well covered with wool and its dense short-stapled fleece, which gives good protection against bad weather, may contain kemp, a brittle white fibre which is very difficult to dye.

LOCATION

Mainly in South West England.

MAIN USES

Mostly in carpet blends.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1923

Handle:
Crisp/Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2.5 - 3.5 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
34 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



FRIESLAND

Medium

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Imported from Holland, and first recorded in Britain in 1953.

CHARACTERISTICS

A popular dairy ewe, it is often used to improve prolificacy. A large-framed sheep, with good length, a narrow head without horns and a long, bald tail. Its white fleece has a medium-fine staple.

LOCATION

Kept in specialist flocks in the UK.

MAIN USES

In blends for knitwear and cloth.



Breed Society

Established:

1980

Handle:

Medium/Soft

Colour:

White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:

2.75 - 3.5 kg

Staple Length:

10 - 15 cm

Micron Range:

33 - 34.5

PHOTOS

Above: male

Middle left: female

Opposite page: female



HALFBRED - SCOTCH

Medium

Established in the UK: 18th century

ORIGINS

The Scotch Halfbred is produced from crossing a Border Leicester ram and a Cheviot ewe, usually North Country.

CHARACTERISTICS

Large sheep; without horns but with erect ears and a clean, white face.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Sometimes in carpets, but mostly in knitwear and tweed-style cloths.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1983

Handle:
Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
3 - 4 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
32.5 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



HALFBRED - WELSH

Medium

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

The Welsh Halfbred is produced by crossing a Border Leicester ram with a native Welsh breed ewe.

CHARACTERISTICS

Hornless, without wool on its face or legs, which can vary in colour from white to light tan. Bred primarily for lamb production, the white fleece can contain some coarser fibres, known as kemp.

LOCATION

Throughout Britain, but particularly in Wales.

MAIN USES

Sometimes used for knitwear and cloth, but more often in carpet blends.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1955

Handle:
Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.5 - 3.5 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 14 cm

Micron Range:
32.5 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



LLANWENOG

Medium

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Developed in West Wales in the late 19th century from a Shropshire crossed with a local, now extinct, black-faced breed.

CHARACTERISTICS

Black-faced, and without horns, it has a distinctive tuft of wool on its forehead and fairly short, thin ears. It has a white, soft, downland fleece. An easily managed sheep, it can survive on both upland pastures and richer lowland.

LOCATION

Predominantly Mid Wales but specialist flocks throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Many in yarn blends for hand knitting, knitwear and tweed-style fabrics.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1957

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 2.5 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
31.5 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



LLEYN

Medium

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Native to the Lleyn Peninsular, a headland on the North West coast of Wales, where it is said to have been imported by a wealthy landlord during the 19th century to improve local Welsh sheep.

CHARACTERISTICS

The Lleyn has become extremely popular as a commercial breeding ewe, renowned for its easy management. Medium-sized, hornless, with white face and head and without wool on the ears or legs below the hock; black nose and sometimes a black spot on the ear. White wool of a good length.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Carpet, although finer qualities can be used in yarns for knitwear and cloth.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1971

Handle:
Soft/Crisp

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2.5 - 3.5 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



ROMNEY

Medium

Established in the UK: 13th century



ORIGINS

Takes its name from the Romney Marsh area of South East England, where this breed has been kept since the 13th century.

CHARACTERISTICS

A hardy large-framed lowland sheep, well adapted to tight grazing and harsh conditions. Well known for its ability to thrive off grass and well suited to 'easy care' systems. It has a broad white face and a woolly 'top knot', with a heavy white fleece which contains some lustre.

LOCATION

Mostly in South East England.

MAIN USES

Versatile because of its characteristics and used, depending on its fineness, in knitwear, blankets and carpets.

**Breed Society
Established:**
1895

Handle:
Soft/Sheen

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
3 - 5 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 17 cm

Micron Range:
31.5 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female





TEXEL

Medium

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Said to have existed since Roman times and originated on the island of Texel, off the north-west coast of Holland. Introduced to the UK, in 1970, to improve carcase conformation.

CHARACTERISTICS

A leading crossing sire producing a large percentage of the UK's prime lambs. Muscular, with square hindquarters and a short neck, without wool on its head or legs, a black nose and dense, medium length white wool. Blue Texel sheep express the recessive "blue" gene which gives them distinctive badger-like face markings and fleece colour ranging from steely blue to brown and grey.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Finer qualities used in blends for knitwear and cloth, the rest goes into carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1974

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:
2.75 - 3.5 kg

Staple Length:
7 - 14 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 34.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



CROSS

As a result of current farming practice, the wool from the first cross between pure breeds, such as the North of England, Scotch and Welsh Mule, now represents approximately 25% of the clip, and is mostly used in carpets. Influenced by the sire, usually the Bluefaced Leicester, the wool can be fairly fine, with a micron count of 29-35. The staple contains some crimp.

- 77 MASHAM
- 79 MULE-NORTH OF ENGLAND
- 81 MULE-SCOTCH
- 83 MULE-WELSH
- 85 SCOTTISH GREYFACE



MASHAM

Cross

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Produced by crossing a Teeswater or Wensleydale ram with a Northern hill ewe such as the Swaledale or Dalesbred.

CHARACTERISTICS

A hardy sheep, without horns, its face and legs are black and white. It has a long lustrous fleece.

LOCATION

The hills of Northern England.

MAIN USES

Mostly in blends, either with other lustrous wools for particular effects, or in carpet yarn blends.



Breed Society

Established:

1986

Handle:

Soft/Demi-Lustre

Colour:

White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:

3 - 4.5 kg

Staple Length:

12 - 25 cm

Micron Range:

33.5 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: female

Middle left: female

Opposite page: female



MULE - NORTH OF ENGLAND

Cross

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Developed on the Northern fells and moors by crossing a Bluefaced Leicester ram with a Swaledale ewe.

CHARACTERISTICS

The UK's most popular commercial breeding ewe renowned for its mothering ability, prolificacy and milkiness. This easily managed ewe is hardy and adaptable. It is a hornless sheep, with a mottled face without wool. It has a demi-lustrous fleece with a curled appearance.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1980

Handle:
Medium/Soft

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.75 - 3.75 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 20 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 32.5

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



MULE - SCOTCH

Cross

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

The progeny of the Blackface ewe and a Bluefaced Leicester ram. Probably first bred more than 80 years ago, but only recognised as a breed over the last thirty years.

CHARACTERISTICS

A prolific and popular commercial breeding ewe well known for its mothering ability. The Scotch Mule is a hardy and adaptable sheep. This hornless breed has a mottled face, without wool, and a demi-lustrous fleece.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Generally in carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1986

Handle:
Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.75 - 4 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 22 cm

Micron Range:
30.5 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



MULE - WELSH

Cross

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Sired by the Bluefaced Leicester ram on a hardy Welsh hill ewe, such as a Welsh Mountain or a Beulah Speckled Face. The Welsh Mule was developed as a prolific hardy ewe for prime lamb production.

CHARACTERISTICS

Hornless, with a mottled face and legs without wool. The fleece is well grown, medium-fine and demi-lustrous.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Mainly in carpet blends.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1978

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2.5 - 3.5 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 18 cm

Micron Range:
29 - 32

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



SCOTTISH GREYFACE

Cross

Established in the UK: Unknown

ORIGINS

Developed by crossing a Border Leicester ram with a Scottish Blackface ewe.

CHARACTERISTICS

A popular hardy ewe, with good mothering instinct widely used to breed quality prime lambs. It has a grey speckled face and white wool with a good length.

LOCATION

Predominantly Scotland and Northern England.

MAIN USES

Generally in carpets.



Breed Society

Established:

N/A

Handle:

Medium

Colour:

White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:

2.75 - 3.75 kg

Staple Length:

12 - 24 cm

Micron Range:

31 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: female

Middle left: female

Opposite page: female





LUSTRE

These wools have a sheen which dye effectively. They are long-stapled, usually curly or crimped, and have a soft, almost 'soapy' handle. The variation in the thickness of the fibre is considerable with the Bluefaced Leicester the finest in the British clip, approximately 26 micron, while the Devon and Cornwall Longwool is coarser. Finer types are used in fine suitings, knitwear and hand knitting yarn, coarser wool is generally used in upholstery and carpet blends.

89	BLUEFACED LEICESTER
91	COTSWOLD
93	DEVON & CORNWALL LONGWOOL
95	GREYFACE DARTMOOR
97	LEICESTER LONGWOOL
99	LINCOLN LONGWOOL
101	TEESWATER
103	WENSLEYDALE
105	WHITEFACE DARTMOOR



BLUEFACED LEICESTER

Lustre

Established in the UK: 18th century

ORIGINS

Evolved during the last century in the Tyne & Wear Valleys and the hills of east Cumbria for the specific purpose of breeding high quality cross-bred ewes from hardy hill breeds. Sometimes referred to as the 'Hexham Leicester'.

CHARACTERISTICS

The most influential sire of mule females when crossed with hill breeds such as the Swaledale or Blackface. One of the UK's tallest breeds with a broad muzzle and distinctive Roman nose. It produces soft, demi-lustrous wool which is one of the finest in Britain.

LOCATION

North East England is the stronghold, but now all over the UK.

MAIN USES

Yarns for knitwear, hand knitting and in blends for fine cloth.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1963

Handle:
Lustrous and Silky

Colour:
Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:
1 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
26 - 26.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



COTSWOLD

Lustre

Established in the UK: 13th century

ORIGINS

A descendent of a sheep found on the Cotswolds in Roman times; greatly prized for wool during the Middle Ages, when it was exported and the 'wool churches' were built as evidence of regional affluence.

CHARACTERISTICS

Large longwool sheep, without wool on its white face but with a definite forelock. Dark skin on the nose; without horns. It has a heavy fleece of lustrous, white wool.

LOCATION

Now rare but predominantly in the Cotswolds.

MAIN USES

In carpet blends, soft furnishings requiring a lustrous sheen, and in craft knitwear.



Breed Society

Established:

1891

Handle:

Smooth and Lustrous

Colour:

Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:

4 - 7 kg

Staple Length:

15 - 25 cm

Micron Range:

35 - 38

PHOTOS

Above: female

Middle left: female

Opposite page: female



DEVON & CORNWALL LONGWOOL

Lustre

Established in the UK: 18th century

ORIGINS

A grassland sheep, developed from two older West Country breeds, the South Devon and the Devon Longwool.

CHARACTERISTICS

White faced with black nostrils, hornless. Head and legs covered with wool. Produces a heavy fleece, with open lustrous curls.

LOCATION

Mainly in the South West.

MAIN USES

Used in blends mostly for carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1977

Handle:
Medium/Demi-Lustre

Colour:
Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:
6 - 9 kg

Staple Length:
20 - 25 cm

Micron Range:
40 - 42

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



GREYFACE DARTMOOR

Lustre

Established in the UK: 17th century

ORIGINS

Developed from a breed that grazed on Dartmoor in the 17th and 18th centuries.

CHARACTERISTICS

A hardy longwool breed, able to survive extreme weather conditions. Without horns, the face is spotted or mottled, fringed with wool. Its fleece is long, curly, heavy and lustrous.

LOCATION

Rare, mostly in South West England.

MAIN USES

In carpet blends.



Breed Society

Established:

1909

Handle:

Medium/Demi-Lustre

Colour:

Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:

5.5 - 8 kg

Staple Length:

15 - 20 cm

Micron Range:

40 - 42

PHOTOS

Above: male

Middle left: male

Opposite page: female



LEICESTER LONGWOOL

Lustre

Established in the UK: 18th century

ORIGINS

Developed by Bakewell in the 18th century and an important influence on British longwool breeds.

CHARACTERISTICS

A large sheep, hornless, with wool on the crown; white face and legs. The ears are blue, fairly long, with occasional black spots, and the nostrils are dark. It is a good carcase sheep and grows a heavy even fleece, which is curly and lustrous.

LOCATION

Rare, but still most popular in the East Midlands.

MAIN USES

Mostly used by hand spinners.



Breed Society

Established:

1893

Handle:

Smooth and Lustrous

Colour:

Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:

5 - 7 kg

Staple Length:

20 - 25 cm

Micron Range:

35 - 38

PHOTOS

Above: male

Middle left: male

Opposite page: female



LINCOLN LONGWOOL

Lustre

Established in the UK: 13th century

ORIGINS

Originated in the Middle Ages and further developed in Lincolnshire from the 1700's, first as a wool sheep and later improved as a dual-purpose breed.

CHARACTERISTICS

The largest British breed, producing the heaviest, longest and most lustrous fleece of any breed worldwide. Docile, hornless, with dark ears, its white face has a broad forelock of wool and its legs are white and woolly.

LOCATION

A rare breed that still has commercial flocks in eastern counties such as Yorkshire & Humberside, and is also popular with smallholders.

MAIN USES

Mostly in carpet blends.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1891

Handle:
Lustrous

Colour:
Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:
5 - 8 kg

Staple Length:
15 - 30 cm

Micron Range:
35 - 38

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



TEESWATER

Lustre

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Teesdale, County Durham, probably in the 19th century. Developed as a ram for crossing with local hill breeds – Dalesbred, Swaledale, Rough Fell and Scottish Blackface.

CHARACTERISTICS

Renowned as the sire of the Masham ewe when crossed with hill breeds, it is recognised for its longevity and prolific breeding ability. It is a large, hornless breed with grey/white face, dark brown markings around the eyes and nose, and a woolly forelock. Its long, curly white lustrous fleece, has a soft handle.

LOCATION

North East.

MAIN USES

In blends with other lustre longwools, mostly for hand knitting yarns.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1949

Handle:
Silky and Lustrous

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
3 - 6 kg

Staple Length:
15 - 30 cm

Micron Range:
32.5 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



WENSLEYDALE

Lustre

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Wensleydale, North Yorkshire in the 19th century, to provide rams for crossing onto local hill breeds. The breed can be traced to an outstanding ram, 'Bluecap', born in 1839, a large animal with dark skin and excellent wool.

CHARACTERISTICS

Large, hardy longwool sheep with distinctive blue head and ears. Still valued as a crossing sire and also for its long, lustrous and curly wool that is among the most sought after in the British clip.

LOCATION

Pedigree flocks throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Hand knitting yarn and some upholstery yarns.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1890

Handle:
Silky and Lustrous

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
3.5 - 7 kg

Staple Length:
15 - 30 cm

Micron Range:
32.5 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



WHITEFACE DARTMOOR

Lustre

Established in the UK: 17th century

ORIGINS

Descended from the native sheep on Dartmoor in the 17th and 18th centuries.

CHARACTERISTICS

Hardy and able to survive bleak, exposed conditions. With a broad white head and a black nose. Rams are horned; ewes are without horns or wool on their face. Fleece is long, heavy and lustrous.

LOCATION

Rare, mostly South West England.

MAIN USES

Mostly in carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1950

Handle:
Medium/Lustre

Colour:
Creamy/White

Fleece Weight:
5.5 - 7 kg

Staple Length:
15 - 20 cm

Micron Range:
38 - 42

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



HILL

Wool from native hill breeds varies from fine, fairly soft handling fleeces which are used in yarns for knitting yarns and fabric, to a coarser, crisp fibre which has some resilience and 'body'. It is usually within the 30-33 micron range.

Kemp, brittle white fibre, that will not easily dye, occurs in some of the coarser wools. If not excessive, this can be used for effect in tweeds and carpets.

- 109 BEULAH SPECKLED FACE
- 111 BRECKNOCK HILL CHEVIOT
- 113 CHEVIOT
- 115 DERBYSHIRE GRITSTONE
- 117 EXMOOR HORN
- 119 HILL RADNOR
- 121 KERRY HILL
- 123 LONK
- 125 NORTH COUNTRY CHEVIOT
- 127 SHETLAND
- 129 WELSH HILL SPECKLED FACE
- 131 WHITE FACED WOODLAND



BEULAH SPECKLED FACE

Hill

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Bred for over a hundred years without introducing new female stock. Occurs on the hills of central and west Wales. Improved by the breed society - the Eppynt Hill and Beulah Speckled Face Sheep Society.

CHARACTERISTICS

Bigger than a true mountain sheep and without horns. Speckled face and legs, free from wool. Ewes and most rams are hornless, with a long head and erect ears pointing forwards. The ewes are well known for their mothering and milking qualities, and are frequently crossed with downland rams to produce early maturing, prime lambs.

LOCATION

Mid Wales.

MAIN USES

Finer quality used in cloth and knitting yarns. Coarser quality used in carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1958

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
1.75 - 2.5 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 14 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



BRECKNOCK HILL CHEVIOT

Hill

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Descended from the early border Cheviot, and established 400 years ago in the Brecon Beacons, but only recognised in the mid 19th century when they were further developed.

CHARACTERISTICS

Rams are sometimes horned. Has a ruff of wool behind erect ears; no wool on its white face or on the legs below the knee or hock. A hardy, adaptable hill sheep, kept pure or crossed with native Welsh hill breeds. Its white, springy wool can sometimes contain kemp.

LOCATION

Mid Wales, around the Brecon Beacons.

MAIN USES

In blends for carpets and sometimes for tweed cloth and knitwear.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1970

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
30.5 - 33

PHOTOS

**Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: male**



CHEVIOT

Hill

Established in the UK: 14th century

ORIGINS

It is said that there have been small, hardy white sheep running in the Cheviot Hills in the Scottish Borders since records began.

CHARACTERISTICS

An alert, active, white-faced hill sheep, with a distinctive 'ruff' behind the ears and crisp, white lustrous wool, which is very versatile. The rams can have horns.

LOCATION

Cheviot Hills, Southern Scotland, Northern England and South Wales.

MAIN USES

Carpets, tweed cloth, knitwear, blankets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1890

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
30.5 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



DERBYSHIRE GRITSTONE

Hill

Established in the UK: 18th Century

ORIGINS

One of the oldest British hill breeds. First known as the Dale of Goyt sheep, from the area on the edge of the Derbyshire Peak District where it originated around 1770.

CHARACTERISTICS

A hardy hill sheep, which thrives on difficult land and has a good mothering ability, the Gritstone crosses well with other hill breeds, particularly Welsh. Larger than many other hill and mountain breeds, it is hornless with black markings, but has no wool on its face or legs. Its resilient, well grown fleece is one of the finest grown by black faced hill sheep.

LOCATION

Peak District and Pennines.

MAIN USES

Mostly carpets but finer fleeces can be used for hosiery and knitwear.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1906

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



EXMOOR HORN

Hill

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Bred to survive the winters on Exmoor, it was developed in the 19th century, although directly descended from an early horned sheep found in the area hundreds of years earlier.

CHARACTERISTICS

Horned with a white face and a white fleece of medium length wool with a softer handle than usually found in hill breeds. A good, economical grass sheep and an excellent crossing ewe.

LOCATION

South West England.

MAIN USES

Originally used in the early West Country wool industry for speciality cloths, because of its ability to felt and give a good finish. Now often used in carpet blends.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1906

Handle:
Medium/Crisp

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
33+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



HILL RADNOR

Hill

Established in the UK: Unknown

ORIGINS

The hills around Radnor, Hereford, Monmouthshire and Brecon.

CHARACTERISTICS

A hardy, heavy sheep with a docile nature and a strong maternal instinct. Grey nose, tan face and legs, without wool on its face or legs. Only the ram is horned. Its dense and springy white fleece can sometimes contain kemp.

LOCATION

Mid Wales.

MAIN USES

Still used in traditional Welsh woollen fabrics, but is also valued for carpet production.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1949

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 14 cm

Micron Range:
31.5 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



KERRY HILL

Hill

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Records date from 1809 in Powys, Wales and the first Flock Book was published in 1899. The breed takes its name from the village of Kerry, near Newtown.

CHARACTERISTICS

A sturdy, adaptable sheep with distinctive head markings – a black nose and well defined black and white patches on the head and legs. Hornless with black ears, set high. Short woolled with a dense fleece of generally white wool, although sometimes coloured fibres can occur as well as kemp.

LOCATION

Mostly in the Welsh Borders and Central England.

MAIN USES

Hard wearing and soft, useful in upholstery and furnishing fabrics.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1899

Handle:
Medium/Soft

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
31.5 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



LONK

Hill

Established in the UK: 12th century

ORIGINS

Found for centuries on the Pennines. One Lancashire flock can be traced back to 1740. The first Flock Book is dated 1905.

CHARACTERISTICS

One of the largest native British hill breeds, which can survive on poor grazing and in bleak conditions. A good, prolific ewe. Both sexes are horned, with black and white face and legs without wool. Its fleece is bulky and hard wearing.

LOCATION

The Pennines.

MAIN USES

Carpets.



Image © Peter Furness



Image © Peter Furness

**Breed Society
Established:**
1905

Handle:
Medium/Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: male





NORTH COUNTRY CHEVIOT

Hill

Established in the UK: 18th century

ORIGINS

Evolved from an animal first taken to Caithness in the 18th century, there are now three types within the breed, the Hill or Lairg, the Caithness and the Border.

CHARACTERISTICS

A long, rugged, white sheep, with a broad back and a ruff of wool behind its erect ears. Increasingly popular in Scotland and beyond, it is both thrifty and hardy and particularly suited to grassy hills and upland. Its crisp, lustrous wool is one of the most versatile in the British clip.

LOCATION

Cheviot Hills.

MAIN USES

Finer fleeces are used in yarns for knitwear and tweed style cloth; coarser qualities are used in blends for blankets and carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1945

Handle:
Very Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



SHETLAND

Hill

Established in the UK: 8th century

ORIGINS

Native to the Shetland Islands since the 8th century where it was developed to produce very fine white wool. It is thought to have Scandinavian origins.

CHARACTERISTICS

One of Britain's smallest breeds of sheep, fine-boned and with a short fluke shaped tail. It is valued as a hill ewe. Rams usually have rounded horns. Mostly white-faced and white-woolled, but also in other natural shades, moorit (tan/brown), shaela (dark grey), fawn, grey and black. The wool is very fine and soft.

LOCATION

Mostly on the Shetland Islands, but also in other parts of the UK.

MAIN USES

Used pure by the Shetland Islanders for unique and exclusive garments and accessories, including traditional Fair Isle knitwear and fine shawls; also used in blends to improve the handle and appearance of yarns for clothing.



**Breed Society
Established
(Shetland):
1927**

**Breed Society
Established (UK):
1985**

**Handle:
Very Soft and Silky**

**Colour:
White**

**Fleece Weight:
1 - 1.5 kg**

**Staple Length:
5 - 10 cm**

**Micron Range:
30 - 31**

PHOTOS

Above: male

Middle left: male

Opposite page: male



WELSH HILL SPECKLED FACE

Hill

Established in the UK: 20th century



ORIGINS

In the hills of Mid Wales, likely the result of crossing Kerry Hill sheep with Welsh Mountain.

CHARACTERISTICS

Thrives in harsh weather on upland land but can adapt to lower farming conditions. Larger than the traditional Welsh Mountain, with a tighter, finer fleece. Black markings on nose, eyes, ears, knees and feet. Rams are sometimes horned.

LOCATION

North and Mid Wales.

MAIN USES

Carpets.

**Breed Society
Established:**
1969

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
White/Creamy

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
7 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 33



PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



WHITE FACED WOODLAND

Hill

Established in the UK: 17th century

ORIGINS

The Pennines. Previously called Penistone, after the Yorkshire town where they were traded in the 17th century. The latter name is taken from an area between Derwent and Glossop in the Peak District. Probably related to the Swaledale and Lonk.

CHARACTERISTICS

A hardy, robust sheep which can adapt to both its native hills and lower land. Large framed with a lean carcase and good mothering ability, white, broad face with pink nose, white legs, free from wool. Rams have heavily spiralled horns. The white fleece is strongly grown.

LOCATION

Not numerous, mostly on the Pennines and in the Peak District.

MAIN USES

Carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1986

Handle:
Medium/Soft

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 33

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



MOUNTAIN

Sheep that are native to the harsh environment and weather of the fells and mountains necessarily produce a bulky fleece of coarser quality, which protects the animals. Measuring 35 micron and above, this type of wool is particularly resilient, contains brittle white kemp and is very hard wearing. It is used mostly in carpet manufacturing, with some of the lower qualities used in blends for insulation.

135	BLACKFACE
137	DALESBRED
139	ROUGH FELL
141	SOUTH WALES MOUNTAIN
143	SWALEDALE
145	WELSH MOUNTAIN



BLACKFACE

Mountain

Established in the UK: 12th century

ORIGINS

Said to go back to the 12th century when monks used their wool for clothing and exporting to Europe.

CHARACTERISTICS

A horned, black-faced sheep with black and white markings on both legs and feet, and a coarse, bulky fleece.

LOCATION

Primarily Scottish Highlands and hills of North East England but occurs throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

Mostly carpets, although some grades can be used in blends for Scottish and Irish tweed cloth and, to a lesser extent, in mattress production.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1901

Handle:
Medium/Harsh

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
15 - 30 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: male



DALESBRED

Mountain

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Developed from the Swaledale and Blackface.

CHARACTERISTICS

Hill sheep, able to survive bleak conditions. Black face, distinct white mark above and on each side of nostrils, with nose becoming grey. Legs black and white. Round low-set horns. No wool on face or legs, the fleece is tough, well grown and springy, curly on the outside with a dense undercoat. Ewes are often crossed with a Teeswater to produce a Masham.

LOCATION

The Pennines across Lancashire and Yorkshire.

MAIN USES

Carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1929

Handle:
Medium/Harsh

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2.75 kg

Staple Length:
13 - 20 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



ROUGH FELL

Mountain

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Bred from a black-faced sheep, found in Northern England in the Middle Ages, and other local breeds now extinct. First mentioned as meriting a class at Sedbergh Show in 1848.

CHARACTERISTICS

A large, docile sheep which is easy to handle and very hardy. It has strong curly horns, a black head with a white patch, and some black markings on the legs. It produces a fleece of long, coarse and resilient wool.

LOCATION

Mostly on the fells of Cumbria and the Northern Pennines.

MAIN USES

Carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1926

Handle:
Harsh/Medium

Colour:
White

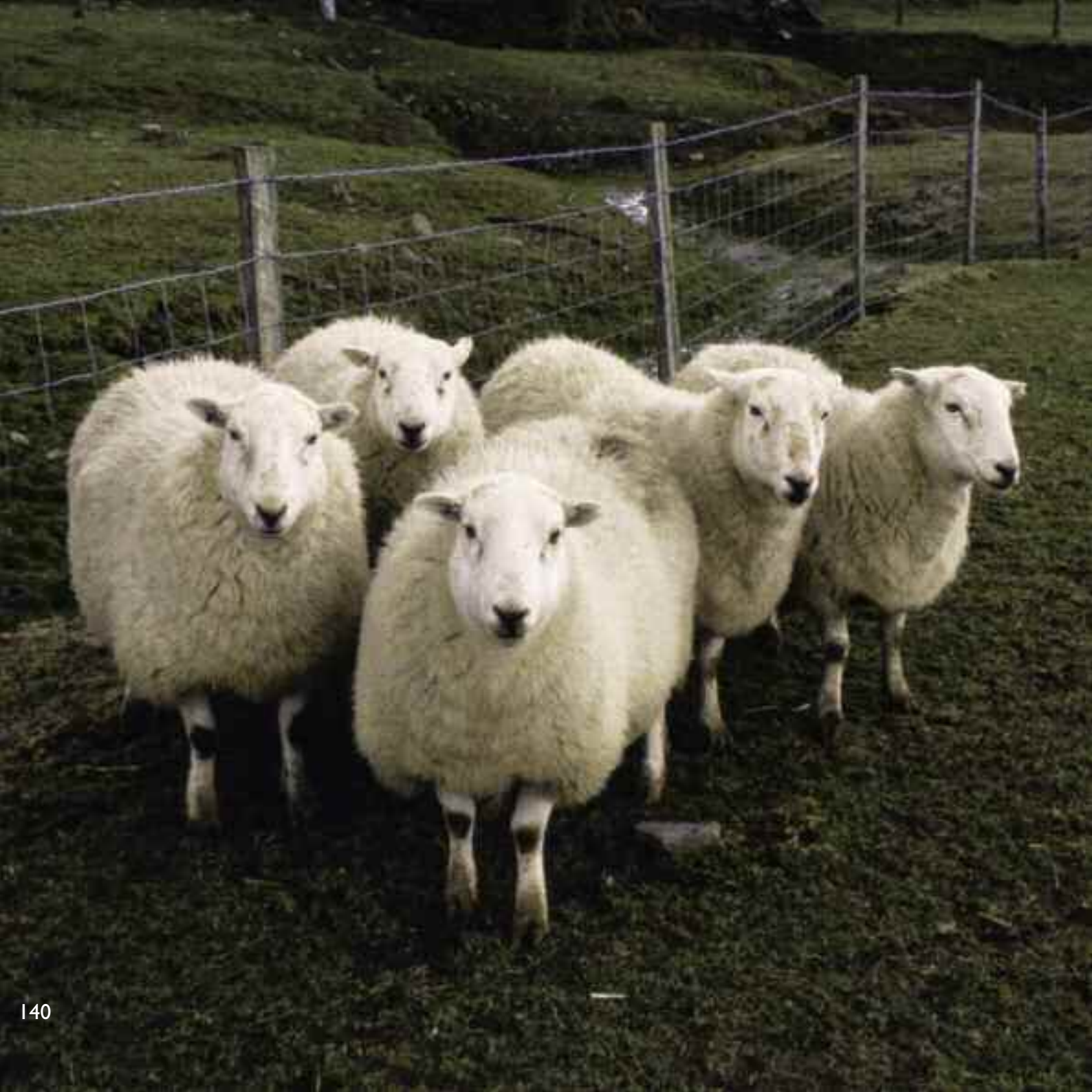
Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
15 - 30 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



SOUTH WALES MOUNTAIN

Mountain

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Native to the hills of Glamorgan, Gwent and south Powys.

CHARACTERISTICS

A hardy sheep, able to survive harsh weather and an excellent mother of fast-growing lambs. Larger than other Welsh Mountain sheep, with tan marking on face and legs, which are without wool; the rams have horns. With a brown collar, its thick fleece is dense and white, with red/brown and white kemp.

LOCATION

South Wales.

MAIN USES

Carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1948

Handle:
Harsh/Medium

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
1 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



SWALEDALE

Mountain

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Developed by farmers on the borders of North Yorkshire and Westmorland.

CHARACTERISTICS

A bold and hardy sheep, very suited to an exposed hill environment. Popular as a breeding ewe, and widely crossed with a Bluefaced Leicester to produce the North of England Mule. A dark upper head, with low-set horns and distinctive grey muzzle; grey, or mottled legs. Long, thick and woolly tail and rugged, resilient wool that is mostly white, although mixed with black on the top of the head.

LOCATION

The hills and moorlands of Northern England.

MAIN USES

Carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1920

Handle:
Medium/Harsh

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2.5 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 20 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



WELSH MOUNTAIN

Mountain

Established in the UK: 13th century

ORIGINS

Developed centuries ago, on the Welsh Hills.

CHARACTERISTICS

A hardy, thrifty and versatile sheep, thriving on areas with poor grazing and heavy rainfall. Good mothering ability. White or tan face, rams are usually horned; legs are without wool. The fleece is strong and bulky and may contain coarser coloured fibres - red, grey or black and kemp.

LOCATION

Welsh Hills.

MAIN USES

Originally used in the Welsh woollen industry for traditional tweeds and blankets, most is now used in carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1902

Handle:
Medium/Harsh

Colour:
White

Fleece Weight:
1.25 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: male



NATURALLY COLOURED

Some British breeds naturally produce coloured fleeces used, without dye, for their special effects. With a micron range of 30 – 35+, the thickness of the fibre can vary enormously, depending both on the breed and where it is farmed. Shetland is one of the finer, Herdwick, with considerable brittle, white kemp, is usually coarser. Finest qualities of these wools are used in cloth and hand knitting yarns. Coarser grades are used for carpets and insulation.

149	BADGER FACE WELSH MOUNTAIN
151	BALWEN
153	BLACK WELSH MOUNTAIN
155	BORERAY
157	CASTLEMILK MOORIT
159	HEBRIDEAN
161	HERDWICK
163	JACOB
165	MANX LOAGHTAN
167	NORTH RONALDSAY
169	SHETLAND COLOURED
171	SOAY
173	ZWARTBLES



BADGER FACE WELSH MOUNTAIN

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 1st century

ORIGINS

Believed to be one of the oldest British sheep breeds with origins tracing back to the 1st century, and further developed in the Middle Ages from a Welsh Mountain strain similar to the Soay. By the 17th century, books were referring to Welsh sheep of 'badger' colouring.

CHARACTERISTICS

Hardy and easily managed, the 'Torddu' (Welsh for black belly) has black stripes above the eyes and a black stripe running from the chin to the tail, with a lighter fleece – white, grey or light brown. The 'Torwen' (white belly, in Welsh) has reverse colouring with a smaller eye stripe. Rams of both types are horned.

LOCATION

Specialist flocks still occur in Mid Wales and other parts of the UK.

MAIN USES

For carpets, but also popular with hand spinners who favour the naturally coloured wool.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1976

Handle:
Medium/Harsh

Colour:
Cream or Black

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
7 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
33 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: mixed



BALWEN

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 19th century

ORIGINS

Developed by a small group of enthusiastic breeders in the Upper Tywi Valley in Dyfed, Wales.

CHARACTERISTICS

A small, compact hardy sheep with distinctive appearance. Mostly black, dark brown or dark grey, it has a broad white stripe running from the top of its head to the top of its nose, white feet and a half white tail. Easily managed, excellent mothers and tough enough to withstand most adverse weather.

LOCATION

Mid Wales.

MAIN USES

Craft use.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1985

Handle:
Soft/Harsh

Colour:
Black/Dark Grey

Fleece Weight:
1.25 - 1.75 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
33+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



BLACK WELSH MOUNTAIN

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 13th century

ORIGINS

Welsh writing from the Middle Ages refers to black fleeced mountain sheep. Later, in the mid 19th century, flock masters selected quality black lambs to produce a pure breed.

CHARACTERISTICS

A small sheep with good meat flavour and a distinctive black fleece of fine, dense wool.

LOCATION

Stronghold in Mid Wales but popular further afield in specialist flocks.

MAIN USES

A speciality wool used in its natural colour, without dye, in cloth and, sometimes, for traditional Welsh woollens.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1920

Handle:
Soft

Colour:
Black

Fleece Weight:
1.25 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 10 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female



BORERAY

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 19th Century

ORIGINS

Developed during the 19th century on the island of Boreray off the west coast of Scotland from a Blackface and the Hebridean variety of old Scottish Dunface.

CHARACTERISTICS

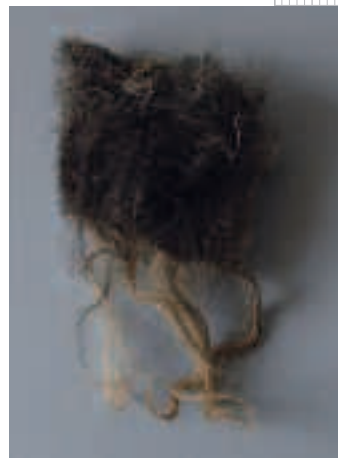
Very small, horned with ram's horns large and spiralled. Faces – without wool – are black, tan or grey, often with a dark marking on white. Wool usually cream or light tan, sometimes with darker marking.

LOCATION

Island of Boreray (Scotland).

MAIN USES

Craft.



**Breed Society
Established:**
2003 (incorporated
into Soay Society)

Handle:
Soft/Harsh

Colour:
Grey/Black

Fleece Weight:
1 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



CASTLEMILK MOORIT

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Developed in the 1900's by Sir Jock Buchanan-Jardine, on his Dumfriesshire estate at Castlemilk, by crossing Shetland Moorit ewes with Manx Loaghtan and Mouflon rams.

CHARACTERISTICS

Vigorous and self-reliant. Long-legged with a short tail. A tightly grown soft moorit (light tan) fleece of demi-lustrous wool with white patches. Ewes have two uniform, wide-spreading horns, the rams' horns spiral.

LOCATION

South West Scotland.

MAIN USES

Craft.



Breed Society Established:
1975

Handle:
Very Soft/Silky

Colour:
Brown

Fleece Weight:
1 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 31.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: mixed



HEBRIDEAN

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 9th century

ORIGINS

The Hebridean Islands off the west coast of Scotland.

CHARACTERISTICS

A small sheep, mostly black, although the fleece may become grey with age. Both male and female have two or four horns.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK, increasingly popular with smallholders' and widely used in conservation grazing schemes.

MAIN USES

Often used by hand spinners for special effects.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1975

Handle:
Soft/Harsh

Colour:
Black

Fleece Weight:
1.25 - 2.25 kg

Staple Length:
5 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



HERDWICK

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 12th century

ORIGINS

Although believed to have originated in Scandinavia, the Herdwick has developed over centuries on the Lake District fells. 'Herdwyck' means sheep pasture and is recorded in 12th century documents.

CHARACTERISTICS

Regarded as the most hardy of all British breeds and can survive on the highest ground. White head and legs; the rams are usually horned. The lambs are born with a black fleece and, as the brittle, white 'kemp' fibres increase with age, the mature fleece becomes grey.

LOCATION

Mostly in the Lake District, but increasingly popular in small flocks across the UK.

MAIN USES

The naturally coloured wool is used undyed mostly for distinctive carpets and rugs. It is added to blends for insulation material and is also sometimes used for rugged knitwear and cloth.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1916

Handle:
Harsh

Colour:
Black/Grey

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
10 - 20 cm

Micron Range:
35+

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



JACOB

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 17th century

ORIGINS

Closely related to a Middle Eastern breed of Biblical times, and introduced to Britain in the 17th century as a fashionable and attractive parkland breed.

CHARACTERISTICS

An easily managed, distinguished sheep, either two or four horned in both sexes, with a naturally coloured fleece ranging from cream and brown through to almost black.

LOCATION

Throughout the UK.

MAIN USES

It has niche market appeal as a naturally coloured wool and is used in a wide range of textiles, including carpets and clothing. It is also popular with hand spinners.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1969

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
Black and White

Fleece Weight:
1.75 - 2.75 kg

Staple Length:
8 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female



MANX LOAGHTAN

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 11th century

ORIGINS

Descended from a primitive mountain breed thought to have been on the Isle of Man for more than 1000 years.

CHARACTERISTICS

Small and hardy with good mothering ability. Naturally coloured – the word Loaghtan is Manx for 'mouse brown' – although lambs are born black and start to change colour from about two weeks old. Multi horned, usually four, but sometimes six.

LOCATION

Rare, mostly on the Isle of Man.

MAIN USES

Usually by hand spinners and weavers.



Diana B. Steriopoulos c. 2003



Image © Cotswold Farm Park

**Breed Society
Established:**
1976

Handle:
Very Soft and Silky

Colour:
Brown

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 31.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: male





NORTH RONALDSAY

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 9th century

ORIGINS

Evolved from an early short-tailed breed and developed to adapt to the terrain of the Orkneys, particularly North Ronaldsay.

CHARACTERISTICS

Small, fine-boned and short-tailed. Very hardy and prolific. Rams are horned with a fringe of coarse hair under the neck; ewes are not always horned. Wool is coarse and coloured, often grey and white, but also black and brown.

LOCATION

Still occurs on the Isle of Ronaldsay and also kept by rare breed enthusiasts.

MAIN USES

Popular with hand spinners.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1997

Handle:
Soft/Harsh

Colour:
Grey/Black

Fleece Weight:
1.5 - 2.5 kg

Staple Length:
4 - 8 cm

Micron Range:
32 - 35

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: mixed



SHETLAND COLOURED

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 8th century

ORIGINS

Developed over the centuries by Shetland Islanders alongside their knitting and weaving industries.

CHARACTERISTICS

They are a small hardy sheep producing fine, soft, naturally coloured wool in various shades; 11 main whole colours and 33 different markings, Black, Shaela, Emsket (blue/grey), Grey, White, Moorit (tan/brown), Mioget (yellow/brown), Musket (grey/brown), and Fawn. Fine-boned with a short fluked shaped tail. Rams usually have two rounded horns but can also be polled or multi horned.

LOCATION

On the Shetland Islands, but also throughout the UK mainland.

MAIN USES

Used pure for unique and exclusive garments and accessories including traditional Fair Isle knitwear, fine shawls and super soft woven fabrics.



Grey



Moorit



Grey Katmoget

Photograph by Mr Len Cox,
Willowcroft Flock, Wiltshire.

**Breed Society
Established
(Shetland):
1927**

**Breed Society
Established (UK):
1985**

Handle:
Very Soft and Silky

Colour:
Black/Brown/Grey

Fleece Weight:
1 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 31.5

PHOTOS

**Above: male
Middle left: male
Opposite page: female**



SOAY

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 1st century

ORIGINS

The most primitive breed, related to a short-tailed breed originating in Northern Europe and found, from prehistoric times until the mid 19th century, on the island of St. Kilda in the Scottish Outer Hebrides.

CHARACTERISTICS

A small, lean and very hardy sheep, usually horned. Without wool on face or legs, with lighter marks over the eyes and muzzle. Rams grow a thick, hairy mane. Its naturally coloured chocolate brown or tan wool sheds naturally.

LOCATION

Isle of Soay (Scotland).

MAIN USES

Mostly craft.



Image © Cotswold Farm Park

**Breed Society
Established:**
2000

Handle:
Very Soft and Silky

Colour:
Brown

Fleece Weight:
1 - 2 kg

Staple Length:
6 - 12 cm

Micron Range:
30 - 31.5

PHOTOS

Above: male
Middle left: female
Opposite page: mixed



ZWARTBLES

Naturally Coloured

Established in the UK: 20th century

ORIGINS

Developed in the early 19th century in Friesland in the Netherlands, to graze behind a dairy herd. The name means 'black with a white blaze'.

CHARACTERISTICS

A naturally tame and gentle milking sheep. Tall and long-bodied; completely black with a white blaze from the top of the head to the nose, two white socks on the back legs and a white tip on the tail. The medium-fine wool shades through brown to black.

LOCATION

Increasingly popular and now kept all over the UK.

MAIN USES

Finer qualities used in blends for knitwear and cloth, the rest goes into carpets.



**Breed Society
Established:**
1995

Handle:
Soft/Medium

Colour:
Black/Brown

Fleece Weight:
2 - 3 kg

Staple Length:
7 - 15 cm

Micron Range:
31 - 34

PHOTOS

Above: female
Middle left: female
Opposite page: female

GLOSSARY

Name of breed

The category of wool which the sheep falls into. See page 10 for more details.

When the breed was established in the UK (to the best of our knowledge). For exact information, please contact the relevant breed society.

General information on the breed.

Origin: How/where the sheep originated from.

Characteristics: Main characteristics of the sheep and the wool.

Location: Where in the UK the breed is found. See page 9 for map.

Main Uses: What the wool is used for once it has gone through processing stages.

Close up picture of the head, usually male.

When the Breed Society was established (to the best of our knowledge). For exact information, please contact the relevant breed society.

Technical information about the wool.

Handle: Description of how the wool feels, ranging from soft to harsh.

Colour: Colour of the fleece, ranging from white to black.

Fleece Weight: Average weight of the fleece once it has been shorn.

Staple Length: Average length of the wool.

Micron Range: [Fibre Diameter]. Average micron range. Originally qualities were given by an experienced wool sorter and was an estimate of the finest count the wool could be spun. The more technical/modern measurement of fibre quality is by the determination of fibre diameter and quoted as a micron (millionth of a metre).

Example of the breed, usually a single male.

Example of the wool staple.

Explains which pictures are showing male and female sheep.

GLOSSARY

SHEEP TERMS

LAMB

A young sheep is termed a lamb until 1 January following the year of birth.

HOGG / HOGGET

From 1 January following the year of birth a lamb becomes a hogg/hogget.

SHEARLING / TWO-TOOTH / YEARLING

A female sheep that has been sheared once and has two-broad teeth.

EWE

A broad definition applied to adult females but in precise terms a ewe is a female after which it has been sheared for a second time.

GIMMER

A female sheep.

GIMMER HOGG

A female sheep in her first year and after 1 January of the year of birth.

GIMMER SHEARLING

A female sheep that has been sheared in the spring/summer following birth.

RAM / TUP

An adult male sheep that has not been castrated and is used for breeding.

WETHER

A castrated male sheep.

TERMINAL SIRE

A ram whose primary role is to sire prime lambs for slaughter.

CROSSING SIRE

A broad term used for rams used to breed females to be used for commercial breeding.

WOOL PROCESSING TERMS

SHEARING

Wool is clipped off sheep's back in one complete fleece.

GRADING

Checking by eye and touch each individual fleece and putting by hand into groups of the same type and style, ready for sale by auction.

SCOURING

Washing the wool to remove the grease and dirt.

CARDING

Turning scoured wools from staple to sliver form and disentangling the fibres.

COMBING

Straightening long fibres and placing them in parallel alignment. This takes out short fibres in the process.

SPINNING

Pulling out the fibres and adding twist to make a continuous, strong thread.

DYEING

Adding colour between any of the stages in wool processing.

WOOL TERMS

RAW WOOL

Wool from the sheep's back, still containing grease and dirt.

KEMP

Hollow, dead fibre.

MEDULATED FIBRE

Fibre partially solid and hollow.

TOPS

Long aligned wool fibres which have been combed by machines.

NOIL

Short fibre and untreated matter removed during combing.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The British Wool Marketing Board would like to thank the farmers, breed societies and organisations without whose help this book would not have been possible.

USEFUL CONTACTS

**Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs**
9 Millbank, 17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
T: 08459 335577
defra.gov.uk

**The Scottish Government
Rural Affairs and the Environment**
Pentland House, 47 Robb's Loan
Edinburgh EH13 1TY
T: 08457 741741
scotland.gov.uk

**Welsh Assembly Government
Agricultural & Rural Affairs**
Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ
T: 0300 606 3300
wales.gov.uk

**Department of Agriculture
and Rural Development**
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast BT4 3SB
T: 028 9052 4999
dardni.gov.uk

National Sheep Association
The Sheep Centre, Malvern
Worcestershire WR13 6PH
T: 01684 892661
nationalsheep.org.uk

Rare Breeds Survival Trust
Stoneleigh Park, Nr Kenilworth
Warwickshire CV8 2LG
T: 024 7669 6551
rbst.org.uk

National Farmers' Union
Agriculture House
Stoneleigh Park, Stoneleigh
Warwickshire CV8 2TZ
T: 024 7685 8500
nfuonline.com

NFU Scotland
Rural Centre, West Mains
Ingliston, Newbridge
Midlothian EH28 8LT
T: 0131 472 4000
nfus.org.uk

NFU Cymru
Agriculture House
Royal Welsh Showground
Builth Wells, Powys LD2 3TU
T: 01982 534200
nfu-cymru.org.uk

Farmers' Union of Wales
Llys Amaeth, Plas Gorgorddan
Aberystwyth, Dyfed SY23 3BT
T: 01970 820820
fuw.org.uk

Ulster Farmers' Union
475 Antrim Road, Belfast
Co Antrim BT15 3DA
T: 028 7965 0644
ufuni.org

**Northern Ireland Agricultural
Producers Association**
15 Molesworth Street, Cookstown
Co Tyrone BT80 8NX
T: 028 8676 5700
niapa.webs.com

INDEX

3	FOREWORD	59	DEVON CLOSEWOOL	167	NORTH RONALDSAY
4	HISTORY OF BRITISH WOOL	93	DEVON & CORNWALL LONGWOOL	33	OXFORD DOWN
6	BRITISH WOOL MARKETING BOARD	23	DORSET DOWN	35	PORTLAND
8	LOCATION	25	DORSET HORN / POLL DORSET	71	ROMNEY
10	BREEDS & WOOL TYPES	117	EXMOOR HORN	139	ROUGH FELL
11	WOOL TYPES INDEX	61	FRIESLAND	37	RYELAND
149	BADGER FACE WELSH MOUNTAIN	95	GREYFACE DARTMOOR	85	SCOTTISH GREYFACE
151	BALWEN	63	HALFBRED - SCOTCH	127	SHETLAND
49	BELTEX	65	HALFBRED - WELSH	169	SHETLAND COLOURED
15	BERRICHON DU CHER	27	HAMPSHIRE DOWN	39	SHROPSHIRE
109	BEULAH SPECKLED FACE	159	HEBRIDEAN	171	SOAY
135	BLACKFACE	161	HERDWICK	41	SOUTHDOWN
153	BLACK WELSH MOUNTAIN	119	HILL RADNOR	141	SOUTH WALES MOUNTAIN
51	BLEU DU MAINE	29	ILE DE FRANCE	43	SUFFOLK
89	BLUEFACED LEICESTER	163	JACOB	143	SWALEDALE
53	BORDER LEICESTER	121	KERRY HILL	101	TEESWATER
155	BORERAY	97	LEICESTER LONGWOOL	73	TEXEL
111	BRECKNOCK HILL CHEVIOT	99	LINCOLN LONGWOOL	45	VENDEEN
55	BRITISH MILKSHEEP	67	LLANWENOG	129	WELSH HILL SPECKLED FACE
17	BRITISH ROUGE	69	LLEYN	145	WELSH MOUNTAIN
57	CAMBRIDGE	123	LONK	103	WENSLEYDALE
157	CASTLEMILK MOORIT	165	MANX LOAGHTAN	105	WHITEFACE DARTMOOR
19	CHAROLLAIS	77	MASHAM	131	WHITE FACED WOODLAND
113	CHEVIOT	79	MULE - NORTH OF ENGLAND	173	ZWARTBLES
21	CLUN FOREST	81	MULE - SCOTCH	174	GLOSSARY
91	COTSWOLD	83	MULE - WELSH	176	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
137	DALESBRED	31	NORFOLK HORN	177	USEFUL CONTACTS
115	DERBYSHIRE GRITSTONE	125	NORTH COUNTRY CHEVIOT		



British Sheep & Wool

British Sheep and Wool is a concise reference guide for sheep enthusiasts and wool people - professional or otherwise.

This revised third edition reflects the subtle changes that have evolved in certain breeds since last catalogued and reflects British sheep as they are at the beginning of the 21st century. New sheep, flock and wool imagery gives the reader access to over sixty UK breeds, all photographed in their natural form and habitat.

A new format divides the sheep according to their wool type, showing clearly the heritage and diversity of British Wool and its immense suitability for textile products.



Published by the
British Wool Marketing Board

britishwool.org.uk

