

Rare, endangered & vulnerable breeds of

Sheep

emphasizing the wool-growing kinds

SUCCINCT VERSION

2020 status

Who decides what breed is rare, and why, varies depending on where you are in the world and how the people making those evaluations interpret their task. The information here comes from the United States and the United Kingdom and gives a context and structure for understanding similar activities elsewhere on the globe. Each group that studies livestock breeds and assigns a conservation category goes by fundamental sets of population data and then adjusts for other variables.



Navajo-Churro

The Livestock Conservancy

In North America, The Livestock Conservancy (TLC) evaluates sheep breeds for conservation priority based on two primary criteria: the number of newly registered animals and the estimated global population.

Today, The Livestock Conservancy's work is more critical than ever and

- helps to:
- ◆ protect our food



by Deborah Robson

systems by keeping alternative livestock and poultry genetic resources secure;

- ◆ ensure the availability of broad genetic diversity for the continued evolution of agriculture;
- ◆ conserve valuable genetic traits such as disease resistance, survival, self-sufficiency, fertility, longevity, foraging ability, maternal instincts;
- ◆ preserve our heritage, history, and culture;
- ◆ maintain breeds of animals that are well-suited for sustainable, grass-based and organic systems; and
- ◆ give small family farms raising heritage breeds a competitive edge.

The Livestock Conservancy, established 1977, <http://livestockconservancy.org>. Known as the *American Minor Breeds Conservancy*; the *American Livestock Breeds Conservancy*; now *The Livestock Conservancy*.

Quoted text from <http://www.livestockconservancy.org/index.php/resources/internal/about-us>

Rare Breeds Survival Trust

In the United Kingdom, the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) evaluates sheep breeds for conservation priority based on one primary criterion, the number of registered



Karakul (American)

breeding ewes, adjusted by other factors reflecting the vulnerability of the overall population.

Between 1900 and 1973, the United Kingdom lost 26 of its native breeds. . . . Even though many of the UK's native breeds were no longer considered economically viable for the mass production of food, their many other important attributes such as adaptation to the local environment, the genetic diversity they represented and their close links to our livestock history and cultural heritage were recognised by a group of pioneering individuals. . . . Since the [Rare Breed Survival Trust's] formation in 1973 no other native livestock breed has become extinct in the UK.

Rare Breeds Survival Trust, established 1973), <http://www.rbst.org.uk>.

Quoted text from <https://www.rbst.org.uk/About-Us/Heritage>

continues on page 4

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Rare, endangered & vulnerable breeds of

American Tinis



	The Livestock Conservancy (United States)	Rare Breeds Survival Trust (United Kingdom)	The Sheep Trust (U.K., geographic vulnerability)
Balwen		at risk	
Barbados Blackbelly (hair)	watch		
Black Welsh Mountain	threatened		
Border Leicester		minority	
Boreray		vulnerable	
Brecknock Hill Cheviot			vulnerable
Castlemilk Moorit		at risk	
Clun Forest	threatened		
Cotswold	threatened	at risk	
Dalesbred			vulnerable
Dartmoor Greyface		minority	
Dartmoor Whiteface		minority	
Derbyshire Gritstone		at risk	
Devon Closewool		minority	vulnerable
Devon and Cornwall Longwool		at risk	
Dorset Down		minority	
Dorset Horn	threatened	minority	
Exmoor Horn			vulnerable
Florida Cracker	critical		
Gulf Coast or Gulf Coast Native	critical		
Herdwick			vulnerable
Hill Radnor		at risk	
Hog Island	critical		
Jacob, American	threatened		
Karakul, American	threatened		
Leicester Longwool	threatened	vulnerable	
Lincoln Longwool	threatened	vulnerable	
Llanwenog		minority	

SHEEP (U.S. and U.K.)

from 2020 lists

North Ronaldsay



	The Livestock Conservancy (United States)	Rare Breeds Survival Trust (United Kingdom)	The Sheep Trust (U.K., geographic vulnerability)
Lonk		minority	vulnerable
Manx Loaghtan		at risk	
Navajo-Churro	threatened		
Norfolk Horn		at risk	
North Ronaldsay		vulnerable	
Oxford	watch	minority	
Portland		at risk	
Romeldale / CVM	threatened		
Romney			vulnerable
Rough Fell			vulnerable
<i>St. Croix (hair)</i>	watch		
Santa Cruz	critical		
Shetland	recovering		vulnerable
Shropshire	watch		
Soay		at risk	
South Country Cheviot			vulnerable
Southdown	recovering		
South Welsh Mountain			vulnerable
Teeswater	critical	at risk	
Tunis, American	watch		
Welsh Hill Speckled Face			vulnerable
Welsh Mountain Pedigree		vulnerable	
Wensleydale		at risk	
Whitefaced Woodland		vulnerable	
<i>Wiltshire Horn (hair)</i>	watch		

*Updated May 15, 2020, using the most current information available (2020 TLC and 2020-'21 RBST lists). Because of the way ratings are calculated, the RBST list is the most volatile and The Sheep Trust group is least volatile, although because it is geographically based the breeds it highlights could be dramatically affected at any time by disease or weather.



The Livestock Conservancy

Primary criteria: (1) annual newly registered animals in the U.S. and (2) estimated global population.

CRITICAL: Fewer than 200 annual registrations in the United States and estimated global population less than 2,000.

THREATENED: Fewer than 1,000 annual registrations in the United States and estimated global population less than 5,000.

WATCH: Fewer than 2,500 annual registrations in the United States and estimated global population less than 10,000. Also included are breeds that present genetic or numerical concerns or have a limited geographic distribution.

RECOVERING: Breeds that were once listed in another category and have exceeded Watch category numbers but are still in need of monitoring.

STUDY: Breeds that are of genetic interest but either lack definition or lack genetic or historical documentation.

Rare Breeds Survival Trust

Primary criterion: number of registered breeding females. Secondary criteria: genetic diversity, geographical concentration, and current population trends.

CRITICAL: fewer than 300 registered breeding females

ENDANGERED: 300–500 registered breeding females

VULNERABLE: 500–900 registered breeding females

AT RISK: 900–1,500 registered breeding females

MINORITY: 1,500–3,000 registered breeding females

Success stories: *The Livestock Conservancy*—Border Leicester, Delaine Merino, Katahdin (hair), North Country Cheviot. *RBST*—Black Welsh Mountain, Hebridean, Jacob (British), Kerry Hill, Lleyn, Ryeland, Shetland, Shropshire, Southdown, South Wales Mountain, Wiltshire Horn (hair).

continued from page 1

The Sheep Trust

The Sheep Trust was established in 2001, at the time of a widespread occurrence of Foot and Mouth Disease in the United Kingdom. This emergency emphasized the need for additional analysis and protection of specific sheep populations not under the purview of the RBST: some populations were large, but were still vulnerable.

Working with Breed Societies and ~1000 individual breeders across the country, we put individual flocks

“on the map” and showed just how concentrated some breeds were in different regions. . . . Our evidence led the specialists to recommend that 12 Heritage sheep breeds were at severe risk from their geographical concentration.

This endangerment is acute when infectious diseases enter their region, whether Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001, Blue Tongue Virus in 2007, Schmallenberg virus in 2012.

The Sheep Trust, established 2001, <http://www.york.ac.uk/org/cnap/tst/home.htm>.



Border Leicester

Quoted text from <http://www.york.ac.uk/org/cnap/tst/heritagebreeds.html>

PHOTOS: *American Tunis* by Sarah LaFreniere, used courtesy of SVF Foundation, a genetic conservation resource (<http://svffoundation.org>). All others by Deborah Robson.