

PE2151/A: Grant protected status to primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders

The Wild Goat Conservation Group written submission, 17 April 2025

I understand that the public petition PE2151, asking for the consideration of protected status for the ancient herd of wild goats in the Langholm-Newcastleton Hills, southern Scotland, will shortly be considered by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

As Chairman of the Wild Goat Conservation Group (the Group), I am writing with a short piece of context.

Firstly, although not associated with the petitioner, we very much support the petition's objective.

Secondly, the Group is supportive of Scotland's strong leadership in tackling climate change. What the Group is against however, is the endangering of this nationally significant herd of wild goats as an unintended consequence of broad government policy.

Below is a succinct document that sets out some context to the issue and the Group's position on the way forward.

I hope that you find it both interesting and informative. We do not underestimate the challenges this issue poses.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information or wish to visit to view the situation on the ground.

The Ancient Wild Goat Herd of Langholm – Newcastleton Hills

We believe that the ancient goats of Langholm – Newcastleton Hills have been wild in this open moorland landscape for centuries.

It is quite easy to imagine how the Reivers cattle raiding, in the dead of night, could have led to the crofters' goats becoming at large in these hills, never to be recaptured.

They are today fully naturalised, meaning that they sustain a viable population in the wild state. They are therefore wild goats and part of the natural fauna of this upland area.

Local people feel a strong emotional connection to these wild goats, generations of families enjoying seeing them. People travel from far and wide to catch a glimpse. They are a living relic of Scottish clan crofting culture.

An expert and leading authority on the history of goats in Britain considers that this herd is directly descended from the original type of 'Landrace' goat, now referred to as the British Primitive Goat, that made its way to Britain in the Stone-Age. This herd

represents a good example of the British Primitive Goat and is therefore of national importance.

There are believed to be a few hundred wild goats, forming a herd with sub-groups, that are hefted to an area of some 30,000 acres of uplands.

Up until 2023, this area was in single ownership and had previously been hill farms and kept moorland. The people involved in the management of the area had an in-depth knowledge of the moor and its wildlife, many living and working there all their lives. Management of the herd was kept in balance with the rest of the ecology of these hills.

The area has now been divided up and sold off. Hill farms no longer have their tenancies offered up; the keepers have left. Most of the knowledge involved in the direct management has gone.

In pursuit of the government's 'Net-Zero' targets and 'rewilding' ambition, the forces behind the management of this moorland have changed significantly in recent years. As wild goats have no legal protection in Scotland, this exposes the ancient herd of goats to new threats as they are perceived as being problematic to tree planting schemes. In short, without being granted protected status, these wild goats are endangered.

Such protected status will allow their numbers to be regulated through licensing so that there will always be a healthy herd of wild goats in balance with the rest of the upland wildlife.

The Wild Goat Conservation Group is therefore calling for the following 7-point plan:

- excepting legal requirement, a complete moratorium on wild goat culling on Langholm - Newcastleton Hills and surrounding areas until the wild goat population, its dynamics and genetics are better understood
- NatureScot to revoke all wild goat culling consents on the Langholm - Newcastleton Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest
- no reduction to the current range of the wild goat herd by the erection of fences
- an in-depth study of the wild goat herd, its biology, population dynamics and ecological impacts to be undertaken
- landowners, stakeholders and biological scientists to work up and agree a long-term, science-based **Herd Conservation Management Plan**
- a committee, with a balance of expertise, scientific understanding and local interest, to be formed to oversee the implementation of the Herd Conservation Management Plan
- protected status for this ancient herd of wild goats as an integral feature of the Langholm - Newcastleton Hills area.

This ancient herd of wild goats represents the spirit of our hills, they are fully naturalised and truly wild animals playing an important part in the ecology of our uplands. As such, they are owned by no one, but they surely must belong to the people of Scotland.