

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

Petitioner written submission, 27 August 2025

Note

Notably absent from the SPICe briefing and the Scottish Government's response to this petition is the archaeological evidence and genetic DNA studies by specialists to date, identifying the unique nature of the few surviving isolated Primitive Goat Herds – landrace groups that have been naturalised since their arrival around 4000 BC during the Neolithic spread of agriculture.

Furthermore, the dismissive use of 'feral' and 'invasive' to describe a unique and endangered species seems intended to deliberately mischaracterise and diminish the importance of the herds, and the suggestion of conservation and preservation as an option.

Although separated by national boundaries, it should be understood that the Langholm Primitive Goat Herd belong to the Cheviot Goat Herd Group, occupying the same geological complex, and have been identified based on phenotypic evidence with the ancient landrace group, by the [British Primitive Goat Research Group](#), who visited and viewed the herd on Langholm Moor on 10 April 2025.

To date the Langholm herd have been absent from preservation societies records.

Details of DNA studies can be found in the links below, which include the Cheviot Goat.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/02/170228222822.htm>

<https://oldirishgoat.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/presentation.pdf> (page 13 and 22)

Recent Culling by Oxygen Conservation

The Langholm Primitive Goat Herd roam what were once common lands, now jointly owned by Newcastleton Community Trust, The Langholm Alliance and Oxygen Conservation.

A culling programme by Oxygen Conservation began in March 2025 without consultation with Newcastleton nor Langholm communities, causing an outcry.

Almost 4000 local signatures were gathered immediately in protest, calling for a halt on the culling.

This petition is one of Scotland's highest signed, with over 12500 signatures – the population of Langholm and Newcastleton combined is around 2500.

The situation has been raised in both the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments by David Mundell MP, John Lamont MP, Oliver Mundell MSP, and Rachael Hamilton MSP. The plight of the herd has also been raised in national and local press, and national and local television and radio.

Aims of the Petition

As well as protected status, the petition aims to raise awareness and recognition of the Primitive Goat Herd of Langholm Moor, and to ensure its fragile survival as a heritage asset.

The hope is that the Scottish Government will take an enlightened view to the conservation and recognition of the herd, and to establish the highest standard of conservation practice for the future.

Also to consider a by-law to protect the herd.

History of the British Primitive Goat

This is well discussed and documented by The British Primitive Goat Research Group, as is its [identification](#).

The British Primitive Goat is a landrace group, who are generally believed to have their origins during the Neolithic – they were brought here around 4000 BC when the land mass was still joined to the continent.

The majority of the wild herds which evolved from these origins have historically been culled out of existence as part of land management. Only a few isolated herds now survive, of which the Langholm is one.

A key point today in conservation programmes, **is to safeguard the gene pool of the few remaining isolated British Primitive Herds.**

Goats from the Cheviot Herd for instance, have been reintroduced to a fledgling conservation programme in Galloway to preserve their unique DNA.

Archaeology

[Evidence of goats](#) in Scotland have been found dating from around 700 BC, including bones from Scottish Brochs.

Goats are now being used to keep [archaeological sites](#) clear.

Conservation outside of Scotland

England. The Cheviot Herd.

The Cheviot Herd have now been added to [DEFRA's Native Breeds at risk list](#).

Wales. The Llandudno Goat Herd.

Although not a primitive goat herd, [guidelines](#) (page 9) agreed between Conservationists and Government in Conwy have established that a target population of 120–130 (page 9) is required to ensure the future of the Llandudno Goat Herd who occupy the Great Orme in North Wales

Ireland. The Old Irish Goat.

Research by geneticists at Trinity College Dublin has identified a unique DNA identity in Primitive Goat species including the Cheviot herd.

In Ireland goats are now used [to clear fire breaks in forestry](#).

Ecology

The Langholm–Newcastleton Hills herd is a long-established biological factor of these moorlands and part of the natural balance of its ecology.

The Moor has the highest level of conservation protection in Scotland (Natura 2000 site, Special Protection Area) because of the significant breeding numbers of Hen Harriers, one of the rarest breeding birds of prey in the UK. In 2008 Scotland's nature conservation authorities considered the site to be 'unfavourable-recovering' because of the decline in Hen Harrier numbers and the lack of appropriate management. The maintenance of an open landscape suitable as harrier breeding habitat is assisted by the grazing and browsing habits of the wild goat herd. This conservation protection is because of the nesting Hen Harriers – the balance of this perfect habitat being partly maintained by the presence, and grazing, of the Wild Goat Herd.

Culture and Folklore

The wild goats are a heritage asset embedded in the local culture, landscape, and storytelling.

Everyone has a story to tell, or an experience of a wild goat.

Visitors and photographers will pointedly seek out to see the herd – and have done now for generations.

The perception of a 'native' species

One difficulty in protecting the British Primitive Goat is the perception of what is a 'native' species

The protected red squirrel for instance is considered native, although it arrived from Southern Europe with the retreating ice, only shortly before the arrival of the goat.

The capercaillie is considered native, although it was extinct in Scotland by the 18th century, reintroduced in the 19th century from foreign stock, is this still a 'native' species?

The same question could be applied to any modern 'native' species reintroduced from a foreign habitat, be it a beaver or a lynx.