

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

Lynda Graham written submission, 27 August 2025

I am a member of the Newcastleton/Hermitage community and have been studying the history of these wild goats and how they survive on the moors between Newcastleton and Langholm. Their existence is of great value to the people who live by these moors.

This petition was raised for the goats that are hefted to the 30,000 acres of the Langholm and Newcastleton moors. Most of the information in the SPICe briefing appears to be about multiple locations in Scotland and various goats that survive freely.

This petition specifically focusses on the historic wild goat population of the Langholm and Newcastleton Hills and calls for their protection considering the dangers the goats are now facing since the land was sold off by Buccleuch Estate.

The notes mention that in 2014 the goat numbers on these moors were reduced to around 100 to tackle overgrazing. Since that date sheep and cattle have been removed from this upland – leaving just the goats and a recently introduced small pocket of native ponies and Highland cattle at the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve. Given the paucity of larger herbivores now occupying this large upland area, there are no fears of any over grazing or ecological damage.

Rather, in recent media reports, the fire service have stated they are worried about animals taken from uplands as the vegetation grows, dies and becomes tinder for wildfires. These fears have been voiced by residents at the local Community Council meetings in the Hermitage Valley which lies below this moorland.

These goats are the origins of farming; they are living history and yet their survival is not protected. Ancient settlement sites are protected – these sites have their depth in history, and so have the goats hefted to the Langholm and Newcastleton moors!

The Scottish government submission to PE2151, states that wild goats provide “...opportunities for wildlife watching and wildlife tourism.” This positive feature certainly contributes to the local economy and has been mentioned several times at the Upper Liddesdale and Hermitage Community Council meetings, of which I am a member.

On the Langholm/Newcastleton moors, especially on the single-track road that links Newcastleton and Langholm, the site is very popular for birdwatchers. Amongst the variety of bird they look out for is the very rare hen harrier. The goats on their passage round the moorland have provided and kept a habitat that enables the Hen Harrier to breed. Not too far away, over the border, the RSPB Geltsdale Nature Reserve has recently suspiciously lost two of their hen harriers – this is grouse shooting area... grouse shooting ceased on the Langholm and Newcastleton moors some years ago. The hen harriers are safe here... as long as the goats are left to sustain their habitat.

The Langholm/Newcastleton goats have been here longer than wild rabbits (Romans introduced the rabbit, nomadic Neolithic herds-people brought the goats to Britain). The Langholm/Newcastleton goats have been naturalised for centuries and have become wild animals, rendering the term 'feral' somewhat redundant. They have adapted to withstand the rigours of the harsh conditions of the upland area where they live.

Oxygen Conservation have purchased approximately one third of the moorland – one third of the moor these goats are hefted to. If a number of goat family groups wander on to this land, they can be shot. Elsewhere on the moors if they wander on to someone else's land – they can be shot. Some landowners may have more empathy for these animals than others but I have heard during a Community Council meeting some landowners openly saying that they would not hesitate to shoot a goat if it wandered on to their land!

Oxygen Conservation went in to cull the goats during the breeding season. How many small kids were left to die without their mother? This company proposes to plant trees, yet the valley below the flanks of the moor they have purchased has vast areas where Buccleuch Estates are to plant conifers and hardwoods. Can the moorland not be left alone as an environment for wildlife?

This company is to gain government money to 'rewild' for carbon credits. Does this system really work? They then will sell on carbon credits to polluting companies at a profit. I am a taxpayer – I am appalled that I could be contributing to this, as will others be!

The goats that roam the Langholm/Newcastleton moors are a 'living history' – they should be preserved as an important part of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage and for future generations to revere and enjoy.

The Scottish government must find a way to grant them protection so that future herd management can be humane, science-based and carefully planned; thus ending the 'free for all' gun law that currently exists.