

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 10 September 2025
13th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

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

Introduction

Petitioner Kenneth Erik Moffatt

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help ensure the survival of primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders by granting them protected status.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2151>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 25 March 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 12758 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from The Wild Goat Conservation Trust, the Scottish Government, the petitioner, and Lynda Graham, which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

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

Petitioner

Kenneth Erik Moffatt

Date Lodged

25 March 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help ensure the survival of primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders by granting them protected status.

Background information

[Feral goats found around Langholm and the lower Scottish Borders have their origins in the native species of the Iron Age](#), but are not recognised in any capacity other than general protections for wild and feral animals.

These neglected species survive in the last truly wild and free habitats of the Borders, and represent an independence of spirit reflective of our national character. Their numbers are dangerously low, and in danger of extinction due to loss of habitat, and systematic and ongoing culling.

The feral goats of the Cheviots in Northumberland, which share similarities with the native goats in Scotland, have been added to [the Rare Breeds Survival Trust watchlist](#) to support their conservation, and are also included on [DEFRA's Native breeds at risk list](#).

[The British Primitive Goat Society summarises identification of primitive goats](#), and also explains the Cheviot goat herd protection process, close relatives to the Langholm herd.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2151



The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to help ensure the survival of primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders by granting them protected status.

Background – feral goats on Langholm Moor

The petitioner raises concerns that feral goats found around Langholm and the lower Scottish Borders have their origins in the native species of the Iron Age, and they are “in danger of extinction due to loss of habitat, and systematic and ongoing culling”.

In 2023, Oxygen Conservation purchased [Blackburn and Hartsgarth](#), two upland farms in the Scottish Borders, totalling 11,366 acres, [from Buccleuch Estates](#). This land forms part of Langholm Moor – an expansive moorland lying between the Eskdale and Liddesdale valleys.

[Oxygen Conservation](#) is a company that invests in the acquisition of land to restore natural processes. It seeks to develop ‘natural capital’ projects on its landholdings e.g. with a view to marketing carbon credits from forest creation or other activities. It has acquired a number of sites in Scotland in recent years. It has been reported that Oxygen Conservation had announced plans to manage the goat population on its land using lethal methods to support its land management objectives, [and a cull had started but was paused in response to local community concerns](#) about loss of animals considered to have local historical significance.

[Feral goats were managed in this area](#) by the previous owner Buccleuch Estates. It was [reported for example in 2014 as part of a wider land management programme on Langholm Moor](#) that the feral goat population had been reduced to around 100 as part of efforts to tackle overgrazing.

Feral goats in Scotland

There are a number of feral goat populations in different parts of Scotland. NatureScot [published a blog on feral goats in Scotland in 2017 which said](#):

“Some Scottish feral goat herds have been established for a long time and may be described as naturalised. Feral goats are an invasive non-native species with the potential to cause serious damage to habitats.

Feral goat herds are held in affection by people and often have strong local cultural links. They are an example of the hardy types of livestock breeds in

Scotland before the agricultural revolution. In many places they provide opportunities for wildlife watching. Goats are incredibly widely distributed but often quite difficult to spot because of the way their coats have bred back to dark colours and their predilection for grazing on often steep and broken craggy hill ground...

...Trying to estimate how many goats are out there is a tricky art. In 1993, the RSPB estimated that there were at least 45 herds scattered throughout the Highlands and Islands and southern uplands. Estimates vary from just under 3,000 to over 4,000 feral goats in Scotland. But scientists think the overall population has remained constant since the late 1960s".

Why are feral goats managed?

There is no prohibition on shooting feral goats at any time of year. As set out above, [NatureScot considers feral goats to be an invasive non-native species](#) which it states have "the potential to cause serious damage to habitats". The above-mentioned 2017 blog set out:

"They may be a fascinating spectacle, but goats have to be managed as they can cause damage to native woodlands and scrub. The International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) lists feral goats as one of the 100 worst invasive non-native species globally. In Scotland, there is evidence feral goats are contributing to grazing pressures on at least 18 different protected nature conservation sites. The habitats most affected by goats are woodlands, willow and juniper scrub and vegetation on cliff ledges.

Feral goat populations have the potential to increase in size rapidly if they are not controlled properly. They can also cause damage to young trees in forestry plantations. Wildlife managers must actively manage herds of feral goats to control numbers".

In Scotland, [browsing, grazing or trampling by feral goats can impact on designated sites for nature conservation](#) or on other land management goals such as forest creation (potentially in combination with browsing pressure from other herbivores such as deer). Feral goats are or have been managed at other sites with the aim to reduce those pressures (although note that both under-grazing and over-grazing can cause issues in relation to some land management goals). For example [NatureScot culls feral goats at the Rum National Nature Reserve](#), and Forestry and Land Scotland [manages feral goats on the Scotland National Forest Estate](#).

Land managers can also seek to reduce overgrazing pressures by herbivores (e.g. deer, goats, sheep, hares) through other methods such as fencing, or a combination of methods. RSPB Scotland has [trialled controlling goat numbers at its Inversnaid reserve via contraceptive darts](#), although it is unclear if this practice has been continued or adopted more widely as a management tool.

Some shooting estates in Scotland have also offered the option to shoot feral goats. It is unclear to what extent this is current practice. Concerns were raised about the

animal welfare implications of “trophy hunting” of feral goats in 2018, and the issue was raised in a motion [in the Scottish Parliament](#). The Scottish Government was reported at the time [as committing to review the matter](#) and consider whether any clarifications to the law may be required.

Potentially relevant protections and welfare standards

Feral goats are not a protected species in Scotland.

A key piece of legislation in this area is [the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(WCA 1981\)](#), under which various and detailed protections and restrictions apply to species set out across various schedules. Under the WCA 1981, it is an offence for example to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take any wild animal included in Schedule 5 of that Act, unless that is licenced by NatureScot. NatureScot may still licence the lethal control of protected species under the WCA for a range of purposes, such as to prevent serious damage to livestock or crops, or to prevent damage to natural habitats, and may set a ‘close season’ during which lethal control may not take place.

Under [section 22 of the WCA 1981](#), Scottish Ministers have the power to, by regulations, add any animal to Schedule 5 of the Act (but must consult NatureScot before doing so). There is a [statutory review of Schedule 5](#) undertaken every five years by the UK Joint Nature Conservation Council (JNCC), the ‘Quinquennial’ review of species which aims to inform any decisions made regarding changes to Schedule 5. However, there is a precedent for species to be added to Schedule 5 outwith this process. [Mountain hare was added to Schedule 5 from 2021](#) in response largely to concerns around the conservation impact of levels of culling (although this was [done via primary legislation](#) rather than using delegated powers).

However, it should be noted that the Scottish Government has set out that it considers feral goats to be an invasive, non-native species, and has no intentions to give feral goats any form of protected species status. In response [to a Parliamentary Question on this issue on 5 March 2025](#), Acting Minister for Climate Action, Alasdair Allan MSP said

“The Scottish Government understands that feral goat populations may need to be managed as part of a sustainable grazing management plan. Sometimes feral goat numbers need to be reduced to prevent damage to sensitive habitats or forestry interests, in much the same way deer are required to be managed. As the landowners, it is for Oxygen Conservation Limited to consider how any reduction in the feral goat population should be achieved in practice. I understand that the landowner is not calling for eradication of the feral goats but that all future herbivore management will be informed by monitoring the species.

The Scottish Government does not intend to provide feral goats with protected status. Feral goats are a non-native species and it is an offence to release any non-native species without a licence from NatureScot.”

Regarding animal welfare, there are no specific animal welfare standards or guidance for the control of feral goats. By comparison, animal welfare considerations are generally built into NatureScot's functions in relation to deer management [via the Deer \(Scotland\) Act 1996](#), and there is [Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance on deer health and welfare](#).

Alexa Morrison, Senior Researcher

17 June 2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot. Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C: Written submissions

The Wild Goat Conservation Group written submission, 17 April 2025

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

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.

Scottish Government written submission, 22 May 2025

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

I refer to your email of 25 March 2025 regarding Petition PE2151 – Grant Protected Status To Primitive Goat Species In The Scottish Borders, lodged by Kenneth Erik Moffatt, seeking the Scottish Government's views on the action called for in the petition, namely calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to grant full legal protected status to primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The Scottish Government currently has no plans to provide full legal protected status for primitive goats, or feral goats as they are more commonly known. In terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, feral goats are considered to be outwith their native range in Scotland, which means it is an offence to release goats into the wild without a licence from NatureScot. Whilst feral goats can bring benefits, they are an invasive non-native species that can cause damage to the natural environment and forestry interests.

The Scottish Government fully understands that feral goats are of local cultural and historical significance, not just in the Scottish Borders, but across Scotland providing opportunities for wildlife watching and wildlife tourism. For example, seeing feral goats is valued as a wildlife experience for many visitors to Cairnsmore of Fleet and Rum National Nature Reserves.

Feral goats can also have positive benefits for biodiversity by preventing open habitats from scrubbing over and providing food for eagles and carrion feeders. Goats have been used to control scrub on a number of nature reserves in Great Britain, including Tentsmuir in Fife.

However, feral goat populations may need to be managed as part of a sustainable grazing management plan. Sometimes feral goat numbers need to be reduced to prevent damage to sensitive habitats or forestry interests, in much the same way deer are required to be managed.

The main impacts are from feral goats browsing native vegetation, particularly trees and shrubs. Goats are able to reach cliff ledges that are inaccessible to other large herbivores.

In Scotland, browsing and trampling by feral goats has been recorded as a negative pressure on 29 protected nature conservation sites, although, in most instances, goats contribute to the overall pressure, along with other large herbivores. The habitats most affected by goats are woodlands, montane scrub, juniper and tall herb ledges and the level of impact from goats varies according to their population density.

Browsing and bark-stripping by feral goats can also have a negative impact on forestry. Impacts on agriculture are low because goat populations tend to be found in areas that support only rough grazing.

In regard to the specific circumstances at Langholm, it is for the landowners Oxygen Conservation Limited to consider how any reduction in the feral goat population should be achieved in practice. We understand that the landowner is not calling for eradication of the feral goats but that all future herbivore management will be informed by monitoring the species, including undertaking goat population surveys and regular Herbivore Impact Assessments.

I hope this sets out the Scottish Government's position on this issue.

Wildlife Management Team

Natural Resources Division

Directorate for Environment and Forestry

The Scottish Government

The Wild Goat Conservation Trust written submission, 15 August 2025

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

The SPICe briefing has given a fair account of the largely government agency literature on the subject of “feral” goats. However, the research relies too heavily on these information sources that have a general bias towards the excessive culling of wild goats. The government has already given its response to this petition. A response that explains exactly why so many people have signed it.

Whilst we accept that wild goats were, many centuries ago “feral”, having escaped captivity or having been released into the wild, they are now fully naturalised and therefore more “wild” than “feral”. The persistent use of the term “feral” is a construct used to position the animals outwith wildlife protection legislation and outwith agricultural livestock regulations.

We also accept that wild goats are non-native. They have however, lived freely in Scotland's more remote places since at least the time of Robert the Bruce (1274-1292).

They are not “invasive”. Despite the rhetoric about rapid population and range expansion, we know of no populations that have achieved this. In contrast to Scotland’s burgeoning wild deer populations, Scotland’s wild goats have undergone a range contraction over the past 100 years. G. Kenneth Whitehead, in his book *The Wild Goats of Great Britain and Ireland* (1972), documented that largely due to culling, half of the known herds had become extinct with a little more than 70 remaining. He calculated that the entire Scottish population of wild goats was about 4000 animals, broadly similar to today’s population estimates. Put in perspective, they are as rare as pine martens. To consider that wild goats are a real threat to Scotland’s nature restoration initiatives is quite fanciful and bordering on hysteria.

In reality, wild goat herds are vulnerable and succumb to overzealous culling, reducing their numbers to a point from which they cannot recover. The SPICe briefing failed to comment on Oxygen Conservation’s claim that a population of 20 animals had increased to 138 in just two years, which they called rapid population growth. Such population growth is biologically impossible and was yet further misrepresentation of the facts by that company.

Oxygen Conservation set about a cull at the onset of the wild goat breeding season with the intention of reducing the heft number on their land by 83%. We argue that not only was the timing unethical but also that such a reduction was unsustainable for the heft. There was little wonder that local people were outraged. In the event, we believe 75 wild goats were shot, a number of them being females.

Although the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) cites “feral goats” as being in the worst 100 non-native, invasive species globally, they are not generally referring to the upper latitudes of the northern temperate zone where Scotland is located but rather are referring to arid or semi-desert regions of the globe. This is yet more misrepresented science in arguments against Scotland’s wild goats.

We should add that the SPICe briefing also failed to mention that since 2014 when the landowner felt that 100 was the correct size of the wild goat population in relation to the livestock numbers on the Langholm and Newcastleton Hills, 170 head of black Galloway cattle and 5,700 hill sheep have been removed.

We do not expect the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) to place wild goats on Schedule 5 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act; but this is not what this petition is calling for. It calls specifically for the protection of wild goats in the Scottish Borders because:

- the herd of Langholm and Newcastleton Hills is culturally and biologically significant having been identified as morphologically true to the ancient landrace type;
- the goats contribute positively to the upland ecology of the 30,000 acres where they are hefted (for example they were present on this land when 18,000 acres was designated SSSI and SPA for its high conservation value);
- are revered by the public;

- and are clearly endangered by “rewilding” ambitions.

Finally, it appears that the issue has become confused, it is important, we believe, that the discussion focuses upon the ask of the petition. We accept that it is not generally possible to legislate for a sub-population (although examples do exist e.g. Greenland white-fronted geese). However, it should be noted that bylaws are a mechanism for achieving localised legislation and wildlife protection.

We would urge the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to consider all options to satisfy the genuine concerns of so many people. Surely, in the end, the people of Scotland must have the right to a say in what natural heritage they wish their country to conserve.

Petitioner written submission, 27 August 2025

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

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.

Lynda Graham written submission, 27 August 2025

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

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.