

# **North European short-tailed breeds of sheep: a review**

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# The short-tailed breeds native of an area from Russia to Iceland



- Spread by Norse vikings to several countries – late 8th century to mid 11th century A.D.
- Primitive type, Soay sheep resembling the wild Mouflon sheep
- Great genetic diversity
- The best know breeds of this group internationally: Finnsheep & Romanov
- Common feature – fluke shaped and tapered, short tail, normally 8-10 vertebrae compared to 16-18 vertebrae in long-tailed sheep

# Questionnaire survey

- Distribution of breeds
- Countries of origin and other countries
- Purebred populations of breeding sheep
- Economic importance of the breeds
- Incidence of crossbreeding – breeds involved
- Priority ranking of products – meat, wool skins and milk
- Endangered populations – conservation breeds – landscape management
- Information on 34 breeds presented in the following tables:

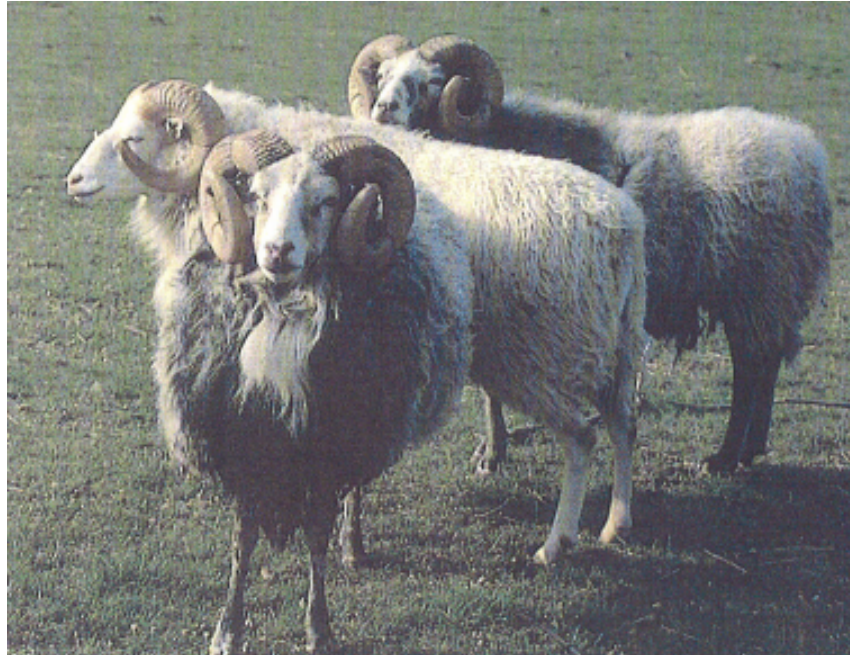
**Table 1                      The status of North European short-tailed breeds of sheep:  
distribution and purebred population size**

Name of breed	Distribution		Breeding sheep n
	Country of origin	Other countries	
Aland Island Sheep (Ålandsfår)	Finland (Aland Islands)		900
Asen Sheep (Åsenfår)	Sweden		979
Boreray Sheep	Scotland	England, Wales	276
Castlemilk Moorit Sheep	Scotland	England, Wales, Netherlands	1.042
Dala Fur Sheep (Dala pälsfår)	Sweden		200
Faeroe Sheep (Føroyskur seyður)	Faeroes	Denmark	80.000
Finnsheep (Suomenlammas, Finsk lantrasfår)	Finland	40 countries in Europe, North-America, Asia, Africa, New Zealand	16.000
German Heath Sheep (Heidschnucke)	Germany	Denmark	9.295
Gestrike Sheep (Gestrikefår)	Sweden		159
Gotland Sheep (Gotlandsfår)	Sweden	Denmark, Germany, UK, USA	14.387



Grey of Kainuu Sheep (Kainuun harmaslammas)	Finland		700
Gute Sheep (Gutefår)	Sweden	Denmark, Germany	7.000
Hebridean Sheep	Scotland	England, Wales	23.000
Helsing Sheep (Helsingefår)	Sweden		176
Iceland Sheep (Íslenska sauðkindin)	Iceland	Greenland, USA, Canada, UK, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Switzerland	500.000
Klövsjö Sheep (Klövsjöfår)	Sweden		97
Manx Loaghtan Sheep	England	Scotland, Wales, Belgium, Netherlands	3.000
North Ronaldsey Sheep	Scotland	England, Wales	900
Norwegian Pelt Sheep (Norsk pelssau)	Norway		8.000
Norwegian Speal Sheep (Moderne spælsau)	Norway	Denmark, Sweden	120.000
Old Norse Sheep (Villsau)	Norway	Denmark	20.700
Old Spael Sheep (Gammelnorsk spælsau)	Norway	Denmark	3.500
Polish Heath Sheep (Wrzosówka)	Poland	Lithuania, Belarus	4.295





Romanov (Romanovska Ovce)	Russia	Several countries in Europe, North America, Africa, Asia	23.000
Roslag Sheep (Roslagsfår)	Sweden		675
Russian Viena Sheep (Viena Ovce)	Russia (Karelia)		100 (estimated)
Rya Sheep (Ryafår)	Sweden	Norway	1.000
Shetland Sheep	Scotland	England, Wales, USA, Canada	13.000
Skuddy Sheep (Skudden)	Germany	Poland	3.700
Soay Sheep	Scotland	England, Wales, Germany, USA	2.000
Svårdsjö Sheep (Svårdsjöfår)	Sweden		55
Swedish Finewool Sheep (Svenskt finullfår)	Sweden	Finland	3.669
Ushant Sheep (Moutons d'Ouessant)	France (Brittany)	Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, UK	8.493
Värmland Sheep (Värmlandsfår)	Sweden		1.814
			<b>Total = 872.112</b>





**Table 2****The status of North European short-tailed breeds of sheep:  
importance, breeding practices and products**

<b>Name of breed</b>	<b>Importance compared to national sheep population</b>	<b>Incidence of crossbreeding and breeds involved</b>	<b>Priority ranking of the products meat, wool, skins and milk</b>
Aland Island Sheep (Ålandsfår)	little	low Finnsheep	wool skins meat milk
Asen Sheep (Åsenfår)	little	low	wool skins meat milk
Boreray Sheep	little	low	meat wool skins milk
Castlemilk Moorit Sheep	little	low UK lowland breeds	meat wool skins milk
Dala Fur Sheep (Dala pälsfår)	little	low	skins wool meat milk
Faeroe Sheep (Føroyskur seyður)	vital	low Scottish Blackface	meat wool skins milk



Finnsheep (Suomenlammas, Finsk lantrasfår)	great	High Texel, Oxford, Down and several other breeds in 40 countries	meat wool skins milk
German Heath Sheep (Heidschnucke)	little	low	meat wool skins milk
Gestrike Sheep (Gestrikefår)	little	low	wool meat skin milk
Gotland Sheep (Gotlandsfår)	great	low Leicester, Texel and other breeds	skins meat wool milk
Grey of Kainuu Sheep (Kainuun harmaslammas)	little	low	skins wool meat milk
Gute Sheep (Gutefår)	little	low Texel	meat wool skins milk
Hebridean Sheep	considerable	considerable Suffolk, Texel, Charollais and other terminal sire breeds	meat wool skins milk





Helsinge Sheep (Helsingefår)	little	low	wool skins meat milk
Iceland Sheep (Íslenska sauðkindin)	vital (only breed in Iceland and Greenland)	none in Iceland, low in other countries	meat wool skins milk
Klövsjö Sheep (Klövsjöfår)	little	low Gute Sheep	wool skins meat milk
Manx Loaghtan Sheep	little	low UK terminal sire and long-wool breeds	meat wool skins milk
North Ronaldsey Sheep	little	low	meat wool skins milk
Norwegian Pelt Sheep (Norsk pelssau)	little	low	skins meat wool milk
Norwegian Speal Sheep (Moderne spælsau)	great	low Iceland Sheep, Finnsheep	meat wool skins milk





Old Norse Sheep (Villsau)	little	low	meat skins wool milk
Old Spael Sheep (Gammelnorsk spælsau)	little	low	meat wool skins milk
Polish Heath Sheep (Wrzosówka)	little	low Polish and other lowland breeds	skins meat wool milk
Romanov (Romanovska Ovce)	little	high mainly several meat breeds in many countries	meat wool skins milk
Roslag Sheep (Roslagsfår)	little	low	wool meat skins milk
Russian Viena Sheep (Viena Ovce)	little	low	meat wool skins milk
Rya Sheep (Ryafår)	little	low Texel and other meat breeds	wool meat skins milk



Shetland Sheep	considerable	considerable North Country Cheviot, also Suffolk and other terminal sire breeds	meat wool skins milk
Skuddy Sheep (Skudden)	little	low	meat wool skins milk
Soay Sheep	little	low UK lowland breeds	meat wool skins milk
Svårdsjö Sheep (Svårdsjöfår)	little	low	wool skins meat milk
Swedish Finewool Sheep (Svenskt finullfår)	considerable	considerable Texel, Oxford Down and other terminal sire breeds	wool meat skins milk
Ushant Sheep (Moutons d'Ouessant)	little	low	meat wool skins milk
Värmland Sheep (Värmlandsfår)	little	low	meat wool skins milk





# In summary, the results of the survey show that:

- The total purebred population of North European short-tailed sheep is 872 thousand, mainly in Northern Europe and North America
- The population size:
  - < 1.000 = 12 breeds (endangered)
  - 1.000 – 10.000 = 13 “
  - 10.000 – 100.000 = 7 “
  - > 100.000 = 2 “





- Economic importance in countries of origin (number of breeds):

little	=	26
considerable	=	3
great	=	3
vital	=	2

- Incidence of crossbreeding:

none	=	1
low	=	28
considerable	=	3
high	=	2

- First priority of products:

meat	=	20
wool	=	9
skins	=	5
milk	=	0



# Conclusions

- Most of the purebred populations of North European short-tailed sheep have been declining, several endangered
- Should not be looked upon as relics of the past; rich in genetic diversity
- Can improve efficiency of production
- Fit well into grassland-based, low-energy input and easy-care systems



- Future role in organic farming and other sustainable systems
- High quality products – contribute also to rural communities through landscape management, conservation grazing and as a tourist attraction
- Need continued breed conservation efforts – already some endangered breeds saved
- More research may reveal a larger number of valuable traits in these breeds
- Discuss utilization, both in pure- and crossbreeding ; short- and long-term perspectives





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**Thank you !**