

The Nude Ewe Project



Nude Ewe partnership increases range

The Bedfordshire-based Nude Ewe project is a partnership between the Wildlife Trust and BedsLife, a local environmental coalition, which brings wool from local fields to local needles and beyond, explains Heather Webb.

Sheep are used in nature conservation to maintain habitats on grassland and heathland, and the partnership aims to make conservation grazing more economically viable for local graziers.

Sheep eat brambles, shrubs and other rough vegetation and without this grazing our hills and fields would become covered by scrub, she says.

So the livestock keep these areas open and in doing so they provide habitats for many plant and animal species.

But conservation grazing is not lucrative. Most of the breeds used are small, slow growing and not commercially viable.

So Nude Ewe works with local graziers, spinning their fleeces and selling the wool. The project currently includes four graziers whose flocks help maintain grassland and orchard habitats in Bedfordshire and the surrounding countryside.

The Nude Ewe is not for profit: proceeds from the wool sales are returned to the graziers to offset shearing and husbandry costs.

A single batch of Hebridean wool got the The Nude Ewe project started in 2008. Since

then it has grown and now offers several yarns. The original dark brown 'Heb' wool has sold out, but thanks to a grant from the Chilterns Conservation Board, a second batch has been spun to meet demand.

Wensleydale and Beulah Speckled-face wools are also available. The first Nude Ewe Manx Loaghtan will be launched this autumn with a limited edition, handspun Norfolk Horn wool.

Also included in The Nude Ewe product range are a series of 'knit kits' featuring designs created especially for the project by Norfolk designer Rita Taylor.

Launched on Apple Day 2008, the patterns are all named for apple varieties. Nude Ewe products are sold through a dedicated website, www.bedslife.org.uk/nude-ewe. And although many of the project's customers are local to the Bedfordshire area, they can also be found in Plymouth, Pembrokeshire, West Yorkshire and even Dumfries.



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