



## How to make the most of Hebridean

Anyone going to the National Trust for Scotland's Visitor Centre in Glencoe will come across the products of Camus Natural Wools.

Their continued popularity can be measured by the number of repeat orders, coming either by telephone or e-mail, frequently from abroad.

The raw material comes from a Hebridean flock managed John and Beth Connolly from their croft in North Argyll.

Generally the wool is black, but the fibre tips can become brown, and older sheep's fleeces tend to become flecked with grey.

What the Connollys do is combine all their fleeces to give a consistent, dark colour, but it is possible to separate the shades and spin each individually which allows the weaving of some interesting grey, black and brown patterns.

Although the Connollys offer fleeces to local amateur spinners, they tend to accumulate wool for a decent-sized consignment, get it spun by the Natural Fibre Company, and then label and sell it through local craft and wool shops.

The process started in 1997 when John left the Royal Navy and the couple moved to North Argyll starting with seven Hebridean ewes, sourced from Oxford.

'We were completely ignorant about sheep in general, and Hebrideans in particular. We didn't know where to start looking - it was a fairly rare breed at that time,' says John.

'Hebrideans are extremely hardy, live contentedly outdoors all year and, provided they are not cross-bred with large rams, lambing is consistently pleasurable trouble-free.

'They are excellent mothers and their strong flocking instinct and individual personalities make them a real pleasure to keep'.

The wethers are around 20 months old before they're ready for slaughter, but John says the meat is well-flavoured, lean and well worth waiting for.

'Over the years, our flock has given us a great deal of fun and not a little pleasure,' he adds.

'If you have sufficient ground, keeping a small flock of Hebrideans might be a really neat idea. Apart from some winter feeding, by and large they look after themselves. They don't need baby-sitters, don't require putting in kennels and you'll never have to mow your grass again'.



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