



Manx Loaghtans thrive on native island

The Downholland flock of Rare Breeds Survival Trust-registered Loaghtans has been providing knitting wool for the best part of 40 years.

It is sold both locally on the Isle of Man and sent to other customers by mail.

The flock was established by Barbara Platt in the 1970s when there weren't many Loaghtans around.

She managed to get started with a few of the four-horned sheep she found on the island along with some that came from Whipsnade Zoo.

Children are attracted by the breed, particularly the rams which are striking.

Loaghtans are part of the Northern Short Tailed group of sheep which were kept in Northern England into Post Medieval times and in Scotland until the 18th Century.

Occasional skulls of multi-horned sheep have been found on archaeological sites dating from Roman times.

The term Loaghtan describes the bracken brown colour of the wool.

In Barbara Platt's early days the wool was sold to Sheelagh Holmes who established Island Heritage, a small business that made woollen garments and knitteds to sell at agricultural shows and other local events.

George and Cilla Platt inherited the flock

over 20 years ago and now manage it from their holding at Ballacarnane on the western side of the island not far from the Irish Sea.

The fleece is processed by the Natural Fibre Company and some of the finished yarn goes to Curlew Weavers in Wales where it is turned into throws.

As the Platts are also beekeepers, they sell their wool products along with honey and hive products.

Meat from the flock is mostly sold through the Loaghtans Co-operative on the island which is run by the Manx Loaghtans Sheep Breed Society on the Kerrowkeil Road at Greneby.

As the Manx Loaghtan is not a mainstream commercial breed, the meat is relatively rare. It is sought out for its flavour at farmers' markets and a limited number of restaurants who take a pride in using specialist ingredients.

The skins used to be tanned, but this came to an end because of the problems of sending them wet to the mainland.

For more information contact:
George & Cilla Platt
9 The Quay,
Port St Mary,
Isle of Man IM9 5EA
Telephone: 01624 835 014