

# 'EASYCARE'

## Summary

The 'Easycare' is a commercially viable breed which has been developed in Anglesey by crossing Wiltshire Horn rams with Welsh Mountain ewes. Although not as hardy as the traditional hill breeds and probably less effective at taking coarse vegetation and browse material, the 'Easycare' seems well-suited to maintenance grazing on conservation sites.

**Hardiness** – a fairly hardy sheep.

- *Maintains condition on poor forage* – provided stocking rates are low and if not pushed too hard. Supplementary feed may be necessary for breeding ewes, particularly if supporting more than one lamb.
- *Tolerant to extremes of weather* – copes well with cold, wet exposed conditions.

**Physical Attributes & Husbandry** – a relatively low maintenance breed.

- *Fleece* – short, with a goat hair texture. Naturally falls off in spring, removing the need for shearing. No dagging required and unlikely to get hung-up in Brambles.
- *Fly-strike* – low risk, due to nature of the fleece. A polled breed, so head-fly unlikely.
- *Handling* – flocks well and so easy to gather, although skittish and active, so requires good dogs. A strong animal, it tends to struggle when being handled.
- *Fencing* – fairly respectful of electric fencing, as the short fleece, or 'hair' gives little protection from the shock. However, a quite long-legged athletic sheep and some individuals may habitually jump out of their enclosure.
- *Hooves* – good, requiring routine care.
- *Breeding* – usually lamb unaided outdoors. Good mothering ability. Productivity ranges from 100-175%; with fewer lambs, the ewes tend to maintain condition more successfully.
- *Size* – medium sized.



Mark Parsons

**Grazing Characteristics** - a useful maintenance grazer on conservation sites.

- *Grazing preferences* – strongly grass-based. Will eat some of the coarser species as well as finer grasses of short swards. Unlikely to make much impact on rank, older Tor-grass.
- *Browsing ability* – thought to be minimal, although will take newer scrub regrowth.
- *Rushes and sedges* – little interest in rushes; possibly nibble some sedges of short swards.

**Interaction with the Public** – suitable for grazing sites with public access, but like most sheep, vulnerable to dog attack.

- *Public perception* – generally maintains condition well, so less likely to raise welfare concern. Its self-fleecing ability may mean the sheep look tidier and cleaner to the public, as well as reducing the potential risk of fly-strike.
- *Reaction to dogs* – vulnerable to attack, although have been known to 'face-off' dogs occasionally.

**Marketability** – a commercially viable breed.

- *Meat production* – when crossed with Texel or Charolais rams, the 'Easycare' produces good-sized, fast growing lambs for slaughter, which are highly marketable.

## Sites where 'Easycare' sheep are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
<b>West Billingham Farm</b> Isle of Wight	Lowland grassland on greensand and some clay.		Mark and John Parsons 01483 721248
<b>Lower Hatch Farm</b> Devon	Steep grass hill-sides and permanent pasture.	Mixed age flock. Own version of Easycare developed from Wiltshire crossed with Charolais with some influence from lolo Owens flock (see below). More lowland type producing good lamb bred pure. Run parallel to pure Wiltshires and proving to be more prolific and with longer useful lives, especially in terms of teeth. Being phased out due to less rough grazing available and concentrating on Wiltshires.	Richard Ling 01548 559068
<b>Old Winchester Hill and Beacon Hill</b> Hampshire  English Nature	Chalk grassland, scrub.	Mixed age 'Easycare' ewes (+ Herdwick & Beulahs) grazed since 1999. The sheep combination is successfully tackling ranker grasses, including False Oat-grass and Cocksfoot, whilst also maintaining the areas of finer sward. 'Easycare' have been hardy & have maintained condition & health well on the keep, but are being phased out as they are stropy and difficult to handle, with a tendency to jump out of enclosures	Barry Proctor 01489 878536
<b>Whitbarrow</b> Cum- bria  Cumbria Wildlife Trust	Limestone grassland, crags and pavement, mixed woodland, and scrub.	A version of an 'Easycare' (Wiltshire Horn x Cheviot or Gritstone) grazed with Rough Fell ewes and others from August - end October. Site not grazed for 30 to 50 years so restoration management to promote butterfly and botanical interest. The forage is very coarse and low quality and the 'Easycares' are not so hardy and do less well on the keep than the hill breeds and is breeding out the Wiltshire Horn element. Few problems with flystrike.	Bill Grayson 01524 701280
<b>Other contacts:</b>		Developer of the 'Easycare' breed. Farms on Anglesey keeping 3000 'Easycare' sheep. Available for advice on the breed & on where to obtain them.	Mr lolo Owen 01407 840250

## References