

Heritage Sheep Breed FIBER PROFILE



Soay (British)

Thousands of years ago, Soay sheep were established in the Saint Kilda archipelago, located in the Atlantic Ocean about 40 miles (64km) west of Scotland's Outer Hebrides. They have lived there in a predominantly feral state, meaning they are domesticated sheep that can survive without much, if any, human intervention. That tells you quite a bit about the hardiness of these small sheep.

Within North America there are two lineages of Soay, one of which is eligible for the Conservation Priority List. Sheep derived from the first importation, in 1974, do not qualify; known as American Soay, their genetics incorporated other breeds. In 1990, sheep came in that were registered with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. Animals whose ancestors all have RBST registration constitute the British Soay population.

British Soay sheep come in two basic color variants, dark phase (most common, and ranging from mid-brown to near-black) and light phase (tan to light brown). They also have two primary fleece types, woolly and hairy, as well as intermediate configurations. The wool sheds naturally. The photos below show several possible lock forms, and some yarn. The undercoat tends to be short and very soft. Remarkably, undercoat fibers can be as fine as 9 or



10 microns; a common demarcation for cashmere is less than or equal to 18 microns.

Fleece weight	¾–2 pounds (300–1000g).
Staple length	1½–4 inches (4–10 cm).
Fiber diameters	9–48+ microns.
Lock characteristics	Soft undercoat and hairy outercoat.
Natural colors	Brown; also tan, near-black, a few white.



lock and yarn photos reproduced to the same scale
photos © Deborah Robson