

2021 CONSERVATION PRIORITY LIST UPDATES

The status of most of the 185 endangered livestock and poultry breeds on the Conservation Priority List (CPL) remained steady during the last year. This is a testament to the ongoing efforts of breeders and breed associations around the country. Strong partnerships among breed associations, breeders, and owners are necessary for breeds to survive and grow in numbers. The Livestock Conservancy continues to facilitate and support such partnerships to ensure that our unique and irreplaceable heritage genetics are conserved for future generations. Your conservation efforts help ensure that rare breeds do not disappear.

GRADUATING!



Ayrshire cattle are graduating from the CPL in 2021. Ayrshire cattle are an excellent choice for small dairies, family farms, and mixed-breed dairy herds. The breed was imported from Scotland to the northeastern United States at least 200 years ago. Their selection for life in rugged landscapes confers the ability to efficiently convert forage to milk, making them productive dairying animals for grass-based operations. Ayrshire cows can produce 12,000 – 17,000 lbs of milk per year, with an average milk fat content of 3.9%. They generally calve with ease and the breed is hardy and long-lived. Today, more than 3,000 Ayrshire cows are registered each year in the United States, and 5,000-6,000 are born annually in the United Kingdom. Worldwide, the population of Ayrshire cattle well exceeds the 25,000 animals needed for graduation. Congratulations to our dedicated partners, the U.S. Ayrshire Breeders' Association, and to all the Ayrshire breeders who have worked hard to save this breed!

BREEDS IN NEED



Miniature donkeys moved from Recovering to Watch this year because of declining registration numbers. The Watch category means there were fewer than 2,500 registrations in the U.S. and an estimated global population of less than 10,000 donkeys. Miniature donkeys descend from a composite of small Mediterranean donkeys brought to the United States in the early 20th century. Although small donkeys continue to be used as pack and cart animals in their native region, miniature donkeys in the United States are kept primarily as pets and companion animals. They are docile, trainable, and friendly, good characteristics for fitting in with a family. Miniature donkeys are also suitable companion animals for other equines or livestock. They can be trained to pull or pack, and are strong for their size.



Navajo-Churro sheep thrive in arid environments and are especially hardy, but the enduring drought in the Southwest forced some breeders to scale back. Annual registrations fell below 200 per year, moving them from Threatened to Critical. Navajo-Churro sheep have been integral to Navajo, Hispanic, and Anglo cultures in the Southwest for more than 400 years. They are small, intelligent sheep with a strong flocking instinct, generally long lived, and excellent mothers. Navajo-Churros have a double coat of fine underwool and coarse outer hair. Low grease content and open locks make hand processing this wool easy. Their fleece is important in their desert homeland as it conserves water and is superbly suited to the textiles produced in the local region, which are famous for their unique qualities and cultural relevance.



Shire horses moved from Threatened to Critical this year, with fewer than 150 annual registrations in the United States and a total estimated global population well under 2,000 horses. Shires have a proud history as draft animals. Descended from medieval war horses, these tall strong animals were used in 18th century England to power farm implements and draw heavy loads. The Shire was essential to industrialization, moving cargo and people over both long and short distances. Even as the railway eclipsed the canal barge, Shire horses remained important for hauling freight from docks and railway stations to warehouses, and from warehouses to businesses, until the emergence of motorized transportation. Today's Shires are used in riding, jousting and archery competitions, forestry, and exhibition – especially pulling exhibitions that demonstrate their power. A handful of breweries in the United Kingdom continue to use Shire horses to draw carts that deliver ale from the brewery to the pubs. Careful conservation of these beautiful and useful horses will be essential to their future.

DOING WELL



Galloway cattle moved from Watch to Recovering this year, thanks in large measure to continuing growth of the breed in other countries. Originating in Scotland, Galloway cattle are cold adapted and sturdy. Their thick double coats shed snow, sleet, and rain, insulating these medium-sized, polled cattle. Although they do not grow rapidly, patience pays off in their well-marbled, flavorful beef. While Galloway cattle were never as popular in North America as their Belted Galloway cousins, sizeable populations in England, Germany, Denmark and other countries pushed the global population to more than 10,000.

STUDY

Breeds in the Study category require further research to learn whether their history, genetic integrity, global status, and U.S. numbers merit listing on the Conservation Priority List. This step is necessary to clearly target The Livestock Conservancy's conservation efforts toward breeds that not only require conservation, but can also benefit from our conservation efforts. After investigation, three breeds will be removed from the Study category, and one was added for further investigation. Breeds in Study will only be listed on The Livestock Conservancy's website and not on the printed Conservation Priority List.



North American yaks are long-haired bovines of Tibetan origin. They were imported to North America in the late 1800s to early 1900s to produce cold tolerant cattle hybrids for beef production in the harsh northern climates of Alaska and Canada. After more than a century of genetic separation from their cousins in the Himalayas, purebred yaks in the U.S. may merit recognition as a distinct genetic pool, and were added to our Study category this year. The breed is useful in grass-based ranching, especially where stocking levels are restricted and environmental conditions are harsh. Yaks produce lean, nutrient-rich beef, and their fur and milk are valuable to high-end fiber producers, dairy farmers, and cheesemakers. The next steps for North American yak are to confirm their genetic composition and to further investigate their purebred population status, both in America and internationally.



California Vaquero horses were added to the Study category in 2018. This small subset of the Sulphur mustang population was defined as exemplifying a classic Iberian phenotype. The Livestock Conservancy determined that the population is not large enough for a stand-alone breeding effort. California Vaquero horses will continue to be tracked within the Sulphur population of Colonial Spanish horses.



Golden Guernsey goats were imported from the United Kingdom to the United States and remain few in number here. Most Golden Guernsey flocks in the U.S. are derived from embryo transfers or from upgrades using imported semen. Fortunately, numbers of this useful dairy goat breed appear to be rising in their country of origin.



Manx Rumpy/Persian Rumpless chickens have a reduction in the number of tail vertebrae and lack a fleshy rump and tail feathers. This characteristic is controlled by a single dominant gene, and is best described in South American chickens, known in the United States as Araucana. The trait is also observed in other breeds. The Livestock Conservancy was unable to confirm any breeding populations of Manx or Persian rumpless birds that meet the criteria of a true genetic breed.

New Year – New CPL Look

We updated the format for our 2021 Conservation Priority List to highlight uniquely North American breeds, as well as Non-American importations both before and after 1900. The existing categories of Critical (C), Threatened (T), Watch (W), and Recovering (R) remain and are noted with their corresponding letter. We also removed the Study category in the print version to streamline the document. However, breeds in Study will continue to be listed online.

Ayrshire cow, Shire horse, Miniature donkeys, and rumpless chicken by Jeannette Beranger. Navajo-Churro ewe by Nikyle Begay. Galloway bull by Susan Waples. North American yak courtesy of Nicole Porter. California Vaquero mare by Deborah Jones. Golden Guernsey goat by Bob and Ross Featherstone.