

2022 CONSERVATION PRIORITY LIST UPDATES



(Top) Heritage Shorthorn - Native cattle herd, photo by Jeannette Beranger. (Below) Soay - British sheep, photo by Phil Sponenberg.

The Livestock Conservancy publishes its annual Conservation Priority List (CPL) of endangered livestock and poultry breeds each spring. We rely on data provided by breed associations, clubs, registries, and breeders to assess each breed's endangerment status and conservation needs.

Because the population sizes of breeds are ever-changing, livestock breed numbers are gathered every year using a census of breed registrations. This method is based on the recognition that purebred livestock are the ones most likely to be registered. They are also the ones most likely to contribute their genes to the next generation.

Poultry and rabbit breed numbers are counted differently since they are not registered. The Livestock Conservancy conducts a national survey of poultry breeders about every 5 years to estimate the numbers of flocks and flock sizes for each breed. Rabbit breed populations are estimated from numbers reported at rabbit shows across a 5-year period.

Many breeds on the CPL originated in the United States and Canada, or they have been in the Americas for many years. For those breeds, CPL classification is based on domestic numbers. For international breeds, American populations are one only part of a global total. For these breeds, numbers provided by organizations in other countries help to determine their CPL placement.

LIVESTOCK

The 2021-2022 breed census confirmed the ongoing commitment of

heritage breed associations and breeders to conservation of their breeds. Their hard work maintained stable population numbers for many breeds, despite a difficult year for many farmers. While most breeds did not change categories, a few important changes did occur.

HERITAGE SHORTHORN - NATIVE CATTLE

Heritage Shorthorns, also known as Milking Shorthorn – Native, take an encouraging step from Critical to Threatened this year. The breed's inherent versatility and some significant promotional efforts by breed associations and breeders in recent years, helped increase the Shorthorn's popularity. The Heritage Shorthorn's docile nature, milk producing ability, feed efficiency, maternal instincts, and good rate of growth make them the ideal cattle for a variety of farming situations.

Through the foresight of several breeders, there exists a large reservoir of Heritage Shorthorn semen that dates as far back as the 1950's. This valuable resource, which is still fairly uncommon for rare breeds, offers Shorthorn breeders access to genetic material for diversifying their herds.

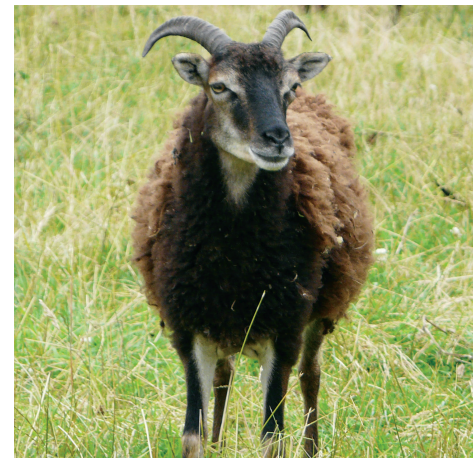
From family milk cows to commercial beef production, Shorthorns are a true dual-purpose breed. As discerning farmers and consumers become more aware of all the breed's positive attributes, Heritage Shorthorns numbers should continue to grow.

BRITISH SOAY SHEEP

British Soay come onto the CPL in 2022 as a Threatened breed. This is an ancient, short-tailed sheep that descends from a feral population on Soay, an island in the St. Kilda archipelago of Scotland's Outer Hebrides. While the primary population remains on the islands, some of the sheep were brought onto the U.K. mainland, and were later exported to Europe and North America. The population on the islands fluctuates between about 800 to 2000 sheep, and the population is now closed to emigration or immigration.

About 450 Soay sheep were registered in the U.K. in 2021, and about 90 British Soay were registered from North America. Registration occurs through the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) Combined Flock Book.

Soay sheep are small (50-80 lbs.), nimble and almost deer-like sheep, with slender bones and clean faces and legs. Their small stature belies the breed's



hardiness, resilience, and self-sufficiency. Isolated on Soay for thousands of years, the breed was shaped by the harsh North Atlantic environment into a cold-hardy, parasite-and-disease-resistant sheep. Ewes can lamb easily for up to 10 years and they are good mothers. The breed can thrive on marginal pasture that would be inadequate for other sheep breeds, but they can become overweight quickly on lush grass or grain.

Soay wool is shed in the springtime and can be rooed by hand. Fiber quality varies from woolly to kempy with colors ranging from light brown to near black. Soay also produce a mild-tasting, low-fat meat. With their small size and lighter impact on the soil, they are useful for ecologically-sound grazing.

Two types of Soay sheep are present in North America: the British Soay and the American Soay. The latter is a larger sheep that is not listed on the CPL. British Soay sheep born in North America can be registered in the RBST Combined Flock Book if their parents were registered in that Flock Book. The British Soay sheep will be added to the Shave 'Em to Save 'Em Initiative this year.

POULTRY

It's been just over five years since our last poultry census, and many changes in breed numbers have occurred since then. The 2021 National Poultry Census was completed last winter, and the very detailed data provided by more than 2,000 breeders is being analyzed for a final report. The 2021 census took a different approach from past surveys by counting not only the numbers of flocks but also the sizes of the individual flocks. Information on the color varieties within the breeds was also gathered.

CHICKENS

The species with the most changes this year is the chicken. A total of 18 chicken breeds became more endangered during the last five years. The Buttercup, Catalana, Java, and Shamo move down from Watch to Critical this year. Each breed's numbers plummeted from more than 1,000 breeding birds to fewer than 500 breeding birds reported in the U.S. The Cubalaya, Houdan, Sebright, and Aseel also fell in numbers, and moved from Threatened to Critical. The Ancona, Andalusian, Buckeye, Cornish, Dorking,



Buttercup chicken



Houdan chicken



Cornish chicken



Nankin chicken



Pomeranian geese



Slate turkey

Poultry photos by Jeannette Beranger.

Hamburg, Langshan, Minorca, New Hampshire, and Sumatra, moved from Watch to Threatened.

The good news for chickens is with the Crevecoeur, Modern Game, and Nankin breeds. All three moved from Critical to Threatened. The Faverolles, which have enjoyed a big uptick in interest, moved into the Watch category. They are attractive birds that lay well and are also good meat birds, assuring their place on many farms.

DUCKS, GEESE, AND TURKEYS

Only three breeds within these species have CPL changes this year. There are no changes for ducks, but within geese, the Pomeranian slipped in numbers and moves from Threatened to Critical. The

Slate turkey also declined in numbers and moves from Watch to Threatened.

The big success story of the year is the Cotton Patch goose. The breed was very near extinction, but has become more secure in the last five years and moves from Critical to Threatened. These geese are a regional American treasure with a deep history in the Southern agricultural practices that kept families together and fed for generations. The Cotton Patch is a small-to-medium-sized goose. It has the autosexing trait of white ganders and grey or grey saddleback geese. The breed is fortunate to maintain a foothold in its traditional setting while also expanding in numbers among poultry breeders across the nation who appreciate their heritage and unique attributes. The 2021



Colonial Spanish, Choctaw strain, foals play at Rickman Spanish Mustangs Ranch in Oklahoma. Photo by Brittany Sweeney.

poultry census found roughly 950 geese, with many small flocks in the U.S. and Canada. There are also a few large flocks and a good many medium-sized flocks in North America. That population structure offers great hope for the security and future of Cotton Patch geese.

COLONIAL SPANISH HORSES

The Colonial Spanish group consists of a number of different populations that all descend from horses brought to the New World by Spanish explorers and conquistadors hundreds of years ago. These horses served as valuable mounts, pack, and draft animals for explorers, indigenous peoples, cavalry, and ranchers, and they were once widespread and numerous. Over time, feral, tribal and ranch herds became differentiated from one another by both natural and human selection.

Despite their enduring hardiness, endurance, and beauty, numbers of Colonial Spanish horses declined greatly during the 1800s, and many regional strains were simply folded into other breeds that were growing in popularity.

A few of the remaining pure Colonial Spanish strains were carefully stewarded for generations to maintain their genetic integrity and distinctive traits. Some strains have established independent,

stand-alone registries and conservation programs, and those strains are listed individually on the CPL.

Strains with populations that are too small to easily stand alone are classified under the CPL heading of "Colonial Spanish Horses." These include the Choctaw, Baca-Chica, Santa Cruz, Sulphur, and Wilbur-Cruce horses, as well as some other small but purebred populations. With persistently low numbers of registrations for several years, this Colonial Spanish group moves from Threatened to Critical in 2022. While the strains are low in numbers right now, each one persists due to the work of tenacious breeders who are dedicated to conserving the horses.

Many of these horses are found in the Western states, where they fit beautifully into roles like ranch work, competitive trail riding, endurance, packing, and equitation. Some are even making a name for themselves on the East Coast within fox-hunting, driving and dressage circles. With more collaboration, promotion, and genetic conservation, these hardy and intelligent horses deserve to see a resurgence in the future.

SECURING A STRONGER FUTURE

There is no simple recipe for saving breeds. A great many factors play a role

in securing breed populations, including some luck, but those that do move up on the CPL and eventually graduate seem to have some things in common:

- Strong breed associations and groups that are committed to maintaining the pure breed;
- Owners and breeders who understand the value of registration for breed conservation and commit to registering their animals;
- Associations and clubs that maintain consistent support and communication with their membership and provide mentorship for new breeders; and
- Marketing and promotional strategies for the breed, its uses, and its products.

Collaborative efforts among breeders, and even among breed associations, can help secure a strong future for heritage breeds. As we move together through this new year of conservation, The Livestock Conservancy will continue to work with individuals and groups to facilitate such partnerships. We will continue to support breeders and breed associations with sound technical content and advice. Working together, we can ensure that irreplaceable heritage poultry and livestock breeds will enrich many lives in future generations.