



The
Langholm
Initiative



Tarras Valley
Nature Reserve

Feral Goat FAQ's

Last updated 22/ 09/ 2025

| Question | Response |
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| <p><i>A Parliamentary petition says of the goats:</i></p> <p><i>'Their numbers are dangerously low, and in danger of extinction due to loss of habitat, and systematic and ongoing culling.'</i></p> <p><i>What are you doing about this?</i></p> | <p>We aim to ensure a healthy, smaller and sustainable population of goats on the community landholding. We know how they are valued by people.</p> <p>The feral goat numbers are growing in a way that threatens both the overall population's health and welfare alongside sensitive and recovering habitats. Their number have grown to between approximately 800 – 900 individuals in just over 10 years.</p> <p>The reality is that feral goats are not native to Scottish ecosystems and can quickly destroy our native habitats without careful management of their numbers.</p> <p>You can read more about the Parliamentary petition briefing from the Scottish government citizen participation and public petitions committee (SPICe) here.</p> |
| <p><i>The goat grazing has a benefit - why not leave them alone?</i></p> | <p>All herbivores graze differently and have different roles and impacts in different ecosystems.</p> <p>To our knowledge, the majority of feral goat herds in the UK are managed to some degree. Their populations can quickly grow and become invasive on our ecosystems if the numbers aren't kept in balance.</p> <p>The feral goats on Langholm Moor have always been historically managed to a herd of around 100-200 individuals across the landholding.</p> <p>The feral goat numbers are growing in a way that threatens both the overall population's health and welfare alongside sensitive and recovering habitats. Their number have grown to between approximately 800 – 900 individuals in just over 10 years.</p> <p>After the community buyout in 2021, this management was put on hold as we wanted to get more understanding about the goats and their impact – whether positive or negative – and to avoid unnecessary culling.</p> |

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| | <p>Our approach is that we only use lethal control of wildlife as a last resort. We know now that there has been population increase of up to 800% in just over 10 years.</p> <p>The feral goats are not native to the UK, but in some specific locations, with careful management, they can have positive impacts.</p> |
| <p><i>How big is the whole population of goats?</i></p> | <p>We estimate that the number of goats on the community landholding (Tarras Valley Nature Reserve, 10,500 acres) has now grown to between 800 - 900 individuals.</p> <p>As this does not include goats on other surrounding landholdings, the total number is likely to be higher over the whole 30,000 acre area. This population growth will continue to increase as more goats breed.</p> <p>We used foot counts, vantage point survey, local knowledge and an infra-red drone to do our counts on the Tarras Valley.</p> <p>We understand that there is a wider independent feral goat count being carried out by the Mammal Society across the area in the spring.</p> <p>We welcome the findings of that to give more of an idea about the overall population of feral goats in the area. However, we also note the challenges in doing the counts on such rough and remote terrain.</p> |
| <p><i>Why aren't you rehoming the goats?</i></p> | <p>We do not think it is a suitable option to put the feral goats into a new environment they are not used to. They are hefted to the hills here and have had no human handling.</p> <p>Subjecting them to stressful rounding up, travelling, fencing them in somewhere they are not used to is likely to cause high stress to the animals.</p> <p>This would also mean goats had to be rounded up into a suitable enclosure, ear tagged and officially registered as livestock by us before they could be moved to comply with government livestock movement controls.</p> <p>We do not feel this is fair to the feral goats to subject them to this process.</p> <p>It is not a sustainable long term population management solution to rely on rounding them up and sending them somewhere else.</p> |

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| <p><i>Why can't you round them up and fence them in somewhere?</i></p> | <p>Fencing moves the goats towards being domesticated and we do not want to alter their natural free roaming behaviour.</p> <p>Fencing them in would be against their natural roaming instincts and likely to cause stress to contain animals that are used to living freely.</p> <p>It would also be physically challenging to contain them as they are well known for climbing trees, rock faces, fences, walls and crossing cattle grids. They would likely escape past any fences that are put up.</p> |
| <p><i>Where are the goats from?</i></p> | <p>We have no solid evidence of the origins of the feral goats, but we understand that some third-party testing is planned to establish more information about their origins.</p> <p>Regardless of this, it does not avoid the need to have a sustainable management strategy in place for them to keep their numbers in balance with the environment.</p> <p>The International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) lists feral goats as one of the 100 worst invasive non-native species globally. Feral goat populations have the potential to increase in size rapidly if they are not sustainably managed.</p> |
| <p><i>Why can't you give them contraceptives to manage their numbers?</i></p> | <p>There are huge financial, logistical and ethical challenges with this option.</p> <p>It would involve purchasing licensed contraceptives for goats, rounding the animals up in very challenging hill terrain, with safety issues for staff as the goats are not used to being handled.</p> <p>Hormone treatment will alter the goats' natural functions and behaviours. We don't want to alter the natural behaviour of the goats.</p> <p>The effects of human contraceptives being excreted into the environment causing harm to wildlife are well known. We expect the same risk applies to animal contraceptives.</p> |
| <p><i>Will you kill baby goats?</i></p> | <p>No. Any population management will involve licensed experienced stalkers following all best practice, safety guidelines and will be done with regard to animal welfare. There are good practice guidelines in place for deer which provide a good structure for the management of the goats.</p> <p>As has happened on the landholding in the past, management will be done in the autumn to avoid the kidding season (February – April).</p> <p>As much as possible, we will seek to focus management on any sick, old or weak individuals.</p> |

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| <p><i>Why are the goats a problem, given that there is so much grass up there and 10,500 acres is so much land for the goats?</i></p> | <p>The reserve is classed as a ‘less favourable area for agriculture’. Even our hill sheep sometimes need to be brought additional nutrition in winters as the grass and wild forage is largely nutrient poor. Animals need to graze a lot to get the nutrition they need.</p> <p>There are thousands of other species of plant, insect and animal that live on the reserve, we have to consider the whole system.</p> <p>Grass is not an endless resource. Grazing animals need to be managed so that their grazing has positive rather than negative impact on habitats and to ensure there is sufficient forage to sustain them.</p> <p>Management is important for the health and welfare of the grazing animal population as well as the health of the land.</p> |
| <p><i>Why can’t you just leave the goats alone to manage themselves.</i></p> <p><i>Haven’t the goats always managed themselves?</i></p> | <p>The feral goat population cannot manage their own numbers. Without intervention, they will continue to breed and expand their populations.</p> <p>The feral goats have always been historically managed to a herd of around 100-200 individuals across the landholding.</p> <p>After the community buyout in 2021, this management was put on hold as we wanted to get more understanding about the goats and their impact – whether positive or negative – and to avoid unnecessary culling.</p> <p>Our approach is that we only use lethal control of wildlife as a last resort. We know now that we have approximately 800 to 900 goats on our landholding.</p> <p>As a responsible landowner, we cannot let their numbers continue to exponentially increase unchecked with no management intervention.</p> |
| <p><i>Are you working with other landowners?</i></p> | <p>We engage with all of our neighbours. We share boundaries with a number of different landowners who all have different land management objectives and business models.</p> <p>Any management activity on Tarras Valley is contained on our own landholding and led by us. However, we share information and updates with neighbours as and when necessary.</p> |
| <p><i>Why can’t you guarantee the goats protection on your land? And why haven’t you signed the parliamentary petition?</i></p> | <p>We aim to ensure a healthy, small and sustainable population of goats and we will work to maintain a viable population of goats in balance with the land, including sensitive and recovering habitats and other herbivores.</p> <p>Whether feral goats are protected or not makes no difference in how we would look to manage them. There are good practice</p> |

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| | <p>guidelines in place for deer management which provide a good structure for the management of the goats too.</p> <p>We would avoid the kidding season and would only do management in the autumn to avoid sensitive times of year when mothers have dependant young.</p> |
| <i>Where will culled goats go?</i> | Our aim is that the goats will go into the food chain. |
| <i>Will you keep reducing feral goat numbers past your planned 20% reduction over two years?</i> | <p>We will keep monitoring numbers and impact on the ground. Any activity will be under continual review and informed by survey and monitoring.</p> <p>Being realistic, it is likely that we will need to undertake ongoing future management to prevent numbers from increasing to such levels again. It will be part of a longer-term herbivore management plan which will also cover deer management.</p> <p>It is not a static population of animals that will stay the same after their numbers have been reduced, they will continue to breed. In the absence of natural predation, herbivore management by humans is a routine land management activity across the UK.</p> |
| <i>Why can't you just castrate billy goats?</i> | <p>There are many practical and resource implications linked to castration, including; rounding up billy goats on challenging terrain, the process of castrating them humanely and the stress this will cause to animals not used to human handling.</p> <p>We don't want to alter the natural behaviour of the goats.</p> |
| <i>Are you going to allow trophy hunting of the goats?</i> | No. |

This document will be added to and updated if any further questions are submitted to us which aren't answered above.