

# JACOB

## Summary

The Jacob is an ancient breed, established in Britain as a parkland sheep by the eighteenth century. It is a fairly hardy, goat like animal with proven ability to assist in scrub control. Relatively placid and intelligent, but well able to intimidate dogs, the Jacob may be a good choice for grazing conservation sites where there is public access.

**Hardiness** – a fairly hardy lowland breed that thrives on poor quality forage, but is less tolerant of extreme weather than the hill breeds.

- *Fairly hardy* – able to out winter in lowland Britain, but may suffer in extreme weather, particularly in extended periods of rainfall, as its fleece is not particularly dense or waterproof.
- *Supplementary feed* – except in extreme weather the breed generally maintains condition well on poor quality forage, although lactating ewes tend to loose condition and may require supplementary feeding.
- *Requires shelter in winter* – requires a more substantial form of shelter (e.g. a wooden shed) than the hill and primitive breeds, unless good natural shelter, such as woodland is available.

**Physical Attributes & Husbandry** – generally requires less routine husbandry than commercial and even some hill breeds.

- *Handling* – generally easy, as the Jacob is a docile and intelligent breed that can be bucket trained or moved with dogs. However, it has less of a flock mentality than other breeds, and may not gather well. Individuals can be strong-willed and awkward, influencing the others and making control difficult. Capable of intimidating dogs.
- *Fencing* – except for individuals the Jacob is not inclined to escaping, although it is a good and athletic jumper. Respectful of electric fencing.
- *Brambles* – rarely a problem, as the Jacob is a tall, strong sheep and can avoid getting trapped.
- *Flies* – a horned breed, susceptible to head fly which can lead to fly strike. The Jacob has a long, quite open fleece, which tends to retain moisture and makes it more likely to suffer fly strike than the denser fleeced breeds.
- *Split eyelid* – four horned animals seem more susceptible to the genetic condition 'split-eye'.
- *Lambing* – generally lambs easily and produces small, active lambs; occasional problems if horns form prior to birth. Good mothers, with abundant milk, often produced at the expense of the ewe's own condition.
- *Hooves* – good feet, which in dry, hard conditions require minimal attention.



Simon Meek/Corporation of London

**Grazing Characteristics** – good grazers, with excellent browsing ability.

- *Grazing* – eats most grasses, both coarse and fine, but not rank Tor-grass or dead grasses.
- *Browsing* – rears up on hind legs to eat, often favouring browse material to grasses. Takes a wide range of species, including Bramble, Hawthorn, Hazel, Cherry, Oak, Ash, Whitebeam, Dogwood, Beech and Rowan. Bark strips smooth trees in winter and devastates newly laid hedges. Also selects Ling, potentially suppressing it.
- *Poisonous plants* - adults browse live yew to no obvious ill effect. May also eat a little Ragwort.
- *Sexual differences* – wethers will browse harder than ewes.

**Interaction with the Public** – suitable for use on urban fringe sites and those with high levels of public access.

- *Aesthetic appeal* – attractive and unusual, the Jacob is usually popular with the public, although its tendency to look a bit thin when shorn can cause some concern.
- *Reaction to people* – generally unconcerned.
- *Reaction to dogs* – the Jacob is quite a large breed with threatening horns and generally stands up to all but the most aggressive of dogs. Used as a 'guard sheep' to protect the more vulnerable Southdown on one urban fringe site.

**Marketability** – a breed with opportunities for developing niche markets in meat and wool.

- *Meat* – niche marketing a possibility for the sale of the dark, lean meat. Otherwise, Jacob lambs are slow to finish and the cuts do not have the right characteristics for the commercial market (long, bony leg joints).
- *Wool* – opportunities for the sale of multi-coloured fleece for weaving, e.g. sale of will as a local product in National Trust Shop in Arlington.

## Sites where Jacob sheep are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
<b>Arlington Court</b> Devon  National Trust	Parkland with semi-improved pasture.	Primarily a breeding group kept as a traditional parkland breed (part of a bequest). Hardy, bucket-trained and handleable. Prefer richer, shorter swards, but also select Bramble leaves, Ferns, Thistle heads and Ivy. Browses lichens off trees during hard weather. Grazed year round outside but receive some supplementary feed. Visually attractive and popular with the public.	Murray Sharpe 01271 850891
<b>Burnham Beeches</b> Slough, Berks  City of London Corporation	Wood pasture.	Cull ewes and wethers grazed during spring and summer on an area of open wood pasture (+ Exmoor ponies) since 1996. Successfully maintaining the open nature of the pasture eating Tufted Hair-grass, Birch seedlings, Brambles and a little Purple Moor-grass. Browse up to four foot on Birch, Beech and Rowan. Also eat and suppress Ling, which is a problem. Bucket trained, handleable but nervous of dogs.	Helen Read 01753 647358
<b>Coulsdon Common, Kenley Common</b> and other sites,  City of London Corporation	Chalk grassland and scrub	A flying flock of Jacob sheep (& Southdowns), wethers and ewes. Keen browsers; goat-like in feeding behaviour; take most browse material available. Wethers used in restoration grazing, effectively working their way into scrub and rough vegetation. Harder to handle than the Southdown as they act as individuals, less likely to flock and capable of jumping fences and hurdles. Require supplementary feeding at other times of the year, besides lambing, as they struggle to keep condition if not on good grazing. Few foot problems; some headfly; defend themselves against dogs, although as with all sheep, remain vulnerable to attack.	Simon Meek 0208 660 8533
<b>Ditchling Beacon, Bevendean Down</b> and other sites, Sussex  Brighton and Hove Borough Council	Chalk grassland with scrub.	Autumn/winter grazing Jacobs (with Southdown) on urban fringe sites to maintain their open nature; restoration and maintenance grazing. Copes well on scrubby areas and rough grazing, browse regrowth. Maintain condition but not pushed hard; few husbandry problems. Partly kept as a 'guard sheep', theoretically to stand up to dogs (and teenagers!), which may attack the Southdowns. Still vulnerable, however, to dog attack, as with all breeds of sheep.	Lisa Rigby 01273 292142
<b>Pentire Head and Ephaven</b> Cornwall  National Trust	Maritime grassland and scrub.	Jacobs grazed with Swaledales and other hill sheep. Hard to differentiate their impact on the vegetation from the other sheep. Not especially hardy although maintain condition well on the poor coastal vegetation. Occasionally taken off the cliffs in bad weather.	Simon Ford 01208 863046
<b>Surrey Downs</b> 16 sites in North East Surrey  Downland Management Project	Chalk grassland and scrub.	Project running for about 10 yrs. Flying flock of Jacob (+Herdwicks, Hebrideans and others); generally winter grazed. Restoration grazing after mechanical scrub control and herbicide treatment. Jacobs cope well on the rough grazing and effectively browse regrowth. Require only routine husbandry.	Alex Baxter-Brown 0181 5417282
<b>Other contacts:</b>		Jacob Sheep Society	Val Hunt 01926 855393
		Experience of Jacob sheep.	Jim Swanson 01684 275201

## References

ALDINGTON A (1989) *The History of the Jacob Sheep* published for the Jacob Sheep Society by Geerings of Ashfield Ltd.