

# SUFFOLK

## Summary

A lowland breed that has been developed for commercial meat production, the Suffolk has limited potential for use within nature conservation grazing. Docile and happy within confined areas, it may be particularly well suited to grazing areas such as churchyards or small, flat lowland grassland sites.

**Hardiness** – a lowland breed that is not very hardy.

- *Poorly adapted to extremes of weather* – has a 'woolly, fine-fibred, but dense fleece which provides good insulation but does not repel rain well. May suffer from the heat during hot weather.
- *Not well suited to poor quality grazing* – is likely to lose condition on less palatable vegetation, such as rank grasses, rushes and scrub.
- *Supplementary feed* – likely to be necessary in the majority of conservation grazing situations if weight-gain for the commercial market is required.

**Physical Attributes & Husbandry** – requires regular, routine treatment.

- 1 *Handling* – placid, thus easy to gather and pen, but heavy and long-bodied, so as with other large breeds, not easy to shear or trim hooves.
- 2 *Fencing* – comfortable in confined areas; not particularly athletic, so unlikely to attempt escape. If trained, respects electric fencing.
- 3 *Brambles* – short, dense fleece unlikely to hook up in Brambles, except for young stock.
- 4 *Hooves* – likely to require regular hoof trimming and footbaths. On heavy clay soils, suffers from mud balling between the hooves, exacerbated by its heavy weight.
- 5 *Insects* – not vulnerable to head fly. Short dense fleece with low lanolin content reduces risk of fly strike.
- 6 *Background* – bred from crossing Norfolk Horn ewes with Southdown rams.
- 7 *Appearance* – white fleece, with black legs and face. Both sexes are hornless.
- 8 *Size* – a large, heavy breed. Average weight of ewes 84kg; rams 130kg.
- 9 *Breeding* – tends to produce large lambs, which may cause difficulties birthing. Ewes good defensive mothers. Few lambing difficulties and lambs generally self-sufficient and strong.
- 10 *Agility* – heavy and not very agile; happier on flat ground.



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**Grazing Characteristics** - suited to maintenance grazing on flat lowland grasslands.

- *Grazing preferences* – strongly favour the most nutritious, easily accessible and finer grasses of short swards.
- *Browsing ability* – insignificant, although may nibble a little of the softest scrub regeneration, such as the leaves of Blackthorn. Like all sheep, will hollow out the base of hedges if not protected.
- *Sedges and rushes* – not keen.
- *Ranging behaviour* – limited on steep or awkward sites; tends to stay on the flatter ground and on the best grazing if plenty of forage available.

**Interaction with the Public** – suitable for grazing public sites where dogs are controlled or excluded, and where dry, nutritious grazing is available.

- *Public perception* – placid, unhorned and not a threatening breed. However, these benefits may be offset against the likely concern of the public, which may be caused by its susceptibility to lameness and loss of condition.
- *Dogs* – hornless and not very athletic, so unlikely to escape from dog attack, although large size may help deter some dogs.

**Marketability** – a commercial lowland breed.

- *Rams* – highly rated as terminal sires for producing lambs for slaughter. Crossed with commercial lowland breeds, hill breeds and crosses.
- *Meat* – Suffolk cross lambs are fast to mature and produces a large, lean, commercially desirable carcass.

## Sites where Suffolk sheep (& Suffolk Crosses) are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
<b>Parsonage Down</b> Wiltshire  English Nature	Chalk grassland.  680 acres	Suffolk rams are used on Scotch Half Bred ewes. Also breed purebred Suffolks for replacement rams. 17 rams and 25 ewes.	R W Marris 01980 620486
<b>Little Breach</b> Devon  Private	Rough pasture with Bramble, Gorse and Bracken on Upper Greensand.	Suffolks and crosses. They kept mainly to the paths managing them heavily and causing concern for Sheeps Sorrel – food of the small copper, but it survived. Did not eat coarse grasses. Had to use volunteers to cut Brambles and Gorse. May do better now site has been cleared (if tried – no longer used.)	Roger Sutton 01823 663510
<b>Fulking Escarpment</b> Sussex  National Trust	Chalk grassland, semi-improved grassland and scrub.	Sheep grazed for the last 10 years. Initial restoration grazing with Welsh Mountains; Suffolks (+ Mules) introduced more recently. Tend to graze only the flatter, lush areas. Lazy & unwilling to work hard for their forage; lose condition during the winter months. Easy to manoeuvre as they seldom run.	Charlie Cain 01273 834830
<b>Cogden</b> Dorset  National Trust	Reverting grassland on calcareous clay.	Occasional brief use of Suffolk crosses for Ragwort control. Have also taken new Blackthorn leaves, and if pushed, Creeping Thistle. Experience of Suffolk Ram is that he was a little more aggressive, large and needed more molly coddling, but a good commercial terminal sire. Flock are treated fairly harshly – extensive range over varied, mainly poor pasture and over wintering on almost no concentrates at all. Our experience is that animals from outside find our austere regime hard to adapt to but those born into it and brought up used to it manage well.	Adam Simon 01308 897781
<b>Other contacts:</b>		Southern Suffolk Sheep Breeders Club	Jane Aldhouse 01580 852363
		Suffolk Sheep Society	Penny Lawrence 01684 893366

## References