

PE2151/J: Grant protected status to primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders

The Wild Goat Conservation Trust written submission, 5 November 2025

This further submission to the Public Petition PE2151 provides important additional information to the CPPPC regarding the new Scottish Government submission and submissions by JNCC and NatureScot.

The Wild Goat Conservation Trust (TWGCT) is disappointed that the Scottish Government, JNCC and NatureScot are set on maintaining the status quo in respect of the legal status of the wild goats of the Langholm-Newcastleton Hills, citing difficulties with current legislation and herbivore grazing impacts as obstacles to change.

We make the case that there would be little point in the Public Petition process if changes were never required. Change is the whole point of the ask of PE2151 and what over 13,000 people are calling for. We contend that there must be change.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

- Recent landowner changes and their commercial interests are putting real pressure on these animals through unregulated and indiscriminate culling. This happened to the ancient Bewcastle herd, mentioned in 15th century parish records, that was shot to extinction in the late 20th century.
- Currently, one landowner has just put forward plans for a 130MW windfarm and wishes to plant 1.5 million trees on a significant part of the 30,000-acre Langholm-Newcastleton Hills. To date, that company has been merciless in its culling of the wild goats that roam its land.

FERAL vs WILD

The Government and its agencies carefully refer to these goats as “feral”, this is to put the goats outside of any protective framework for wild animals or domestic livestock allowing landowners to legally cull with impunity.

However, the very rare race of goat (British Primitive Goat) to which the Langholm-Newcastleton goats belong, are no longer farmed animals, last being recorded in agricultural service in 1952. They now only exist either in the wild or in conservation grazing projects. They are fully naturalised, as they have been for centuries, meaning that they are sustaining a population in the wild independent of human intervention... they are therefore properly described as WILD ANIMALS.

Moreover, the Langholm-Newcastleton goat has been genetically isolated for such a long period that the unique adaptation to its environment means that it is a distinctive type. This was recognised by Scottish Natural Heritage [became NatureScot in Aug 2020] who stated:

“... ensuring both the survival and genetic integrity of the Langholm-Newcastleton goat as a distinct population will require recognition, protection and sympathetic management ...”¹

With reference to Soay sheep on the St Kilda islands that are also naturalised, the Government was recently happy to refer to these as WILD ANIMALS² and has rebutted protestations by vets calling for more sympathetic management of Soay sheep numbers in the face of the restricted grazing the remote islands offer.

On the basis of the view that these sheep are wild animals, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), which owns St Kilda, and the Scottish government have stated that the sheep are covered by the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996 rather than by farm-animal welfare laws. A recent article in The Scottish Farmer quotes a government spokesperson saying “Soay sheep on St Kilda are considered wild animals due to their unique history of adapting to life without management for many generations”.

Despite being called **feral** pigeons, these birds are afforded statutory protection under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended)³.

¹ Scottish Natural Heritage, 2011, Langholm-Newcastleton Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest Site Management Statement.

² “**Vets press for action on starving Soay sheep in St Kilda**”, The Scottish Farmer, 2 October 2025.

³ RSPB Wildlife Enquiries, personal communication.