

Blackburn and Hartsgarth Estate

Goat Management FAQ

Q: These goats have been living on this moor for many years, and I would like to understand your reason behind culling these animals as many locals are very opposed to this culling?

A: We are working to restore habitats across the Blackburn and Hartsgarth Estate through extensive native woodland creation alongside restoration of peatlands, wetlands, heather moorlands, and species rich grasslands. One of the key pressures on the habitats across the Estate is browsing from sheep, deer, and goats, and we need to address this to allow the environment to recover.

Scottish Government policy is moving away from using fenced enclosures to protect regenerating habitats, towards management of herbivores through culling. At B&H this means managing deer and goat numbers down to a level which allows natural habitats to recover.

Just as we've done for deer management, we've developed a plan that balances the needs of the land, wildlife, and wider ecosystem. The reality is, the presence of goats is having a significant impact on the natural environment, and will create incredible pressure on our wider conservation plans including both woodland and peatland restoration.

Q: The goats only occupy 1% of the land you own and have not caused any problems up till now, why now?

A: We commissioned an independent thermal drone survey of the estate to obtain a census of deer and goat numbers in October 2023. At the time there were around 20 goats on the Estate. When we completed our in-house annual thermal drone survey in January this year the number of goats was 138. This is a massive increase in a small amount of time, and we are already seeing the impact of their browsing on the few remaining trees on the Estate. If we don't manage numbers now, the growing goat population will have an increasingly negative impact on the environment.

Rehoming wild animals is not feasible due to their rapid population growth and the risk of causing ecological damage to other habitats. Culling is not a decision we take lightly, but it is a necessary measure that landowners across the UK are undertaking in response to environmental policy and ecological best practices.

Q: How did the decision end up being made?

A: As part of our woodland creation scheme at B&H we are required by the Scottish Government to prepare an herbivore management plan. To inform the development of this plan we spent 18 months surveying the Estate to understand the habitats and pressure from herbivores. We also consulted with a range of key stakeholders, including NatureScot, Scottish Forestry, Newcastleton and District Community Council, and neighbouring communities at Tarras Valley and Buccleuch, to inform our plan. The decision to manage goat numbers was taken in response to the data collected which found that it is necessary to reduce browsing pressure to allow trees to regenerate across the Estate. As soon as the decision was made we informed our neighbours and prepared a statement to inform the local community.

Q: What impacts do the goats currently have on the environment?

A: The large population of goats pose a serious threat to delicate habitats, particularly peatlands and areas with regenerating trees. Their constant browsing and bark stripping, which is very evident on the Estate prevents natural woodland recovery by consuming young saplings before they have a chance to establish. Additionally, their movement across peatland damages its fragile structure, leading to soil degradation and increased erosion. By stripping vegetation, goats also disrupt ecosystems by removing shelter and food sources for native wildlife. Without proper management, their impact will lead to long-term environmental damage and hinder habitat restoration efforts.

Q: How many of them will be culled?

A: We are not aiming to remove goats from the Estate entirely but to reduce numbers to a level which allows the regeneration of habitats on the Estate. This means that the number of goats culled will vary each year depending on how the environment changes.

Goat population surveys will be conducted on an annual basis using thermal imaging to assist in making informed decisions on target cull figures. These decisions will be governed by goat density, sex, and location across the Estate.

Alongside surveys of the goat population, Herbivore Impact Assessments will be undertaken on a regular basis to track the impact the cull is having. Seven

indicators including ground disturbance, bark stripping, and seeds and saplings will be used to assess the impact browsing and grazing herbivores are having.

Q: Is there a way for people to keep up to date with your work in Langholm?

A: To stay up to date with our work across the Estate we'll be sharing regular updates through a quarterly newsletter. If you'd like to stay informed, please sign up here: <http://eepurl.com/i0QxQ2>. We will also be launching a website which provides details about our plans for the Estate, including our deer and goat management plan. Links to the website will be provided in the quarterly newsletter.