



PROMOTION OF RARE AND HERITAGE BREEDS IN IRELAND

A Study on How to Develop Newbridge Demesne
and Connemara National Park as Living Heritage
Centres for Native Livestock Breeds



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Alan Hill & John Ruddle



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Connemara Ponies, Connemara National Park



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study (Q1/2022) is the first of its kind to address aspects of the performance and future planning required to help conserve and promote endangered Irish heritage breeds. The work aims to examine in detail how other northern European and UK partners are delivering on these conservation and management roles and to see what good practice could be transferred to Ireland. In addition, the brief made recommendations in two distinct yet cross-referencing development plans for Newbridge Demesne and Connemara National Park, which suggest opportunities to enhance their heritage breed offerings. The final element of this work was to examine how best to configure an Irish watch list for native heritage breeds built on international best practice.

It can be stated with certainty that native Irish breeds today are in a perilous state largely down to a combination of:

- A lack of funding and resources;
- Non-existent long-term planning;
- Public indifference; and
- The lack of a capable critical mass of aligned partners to drive forward the necessary change required.

The status quo will be maintained until all these issues can be addressed adequately in unison. The key question to be asked is:

'...is there the political will to make this financial, organisational, partnership building, and skills enhancement 'investment' to conserve rare breeds in Ireland in the short and long term?'

The public case for adequate ongoing support for heritage breeds is seldom audible. When it is heard, it often adopts the argument of moral/ethical justification or heritage loss as opposed to the practical and cost-effective arguments. These include:

- Heritage breeds often make use of both prime agricultural land and marginal land that cannot be used for other forms of agriculture.
- They adapt to both fertile farmlands and harsh environments, often requiring less intervention.
- Heritage breeds contribute to Irish food security and generate value from land otherwise unusable for farming.

They help define some of our biodiversity and cultural heritage, inspiring a new generation of sustainable farming practice.

This study took six months to evolve, with domestic and international consultations at its centre. The emerging recommendations can be best presented under four categories that are anchored in the original brief - the first two address national issues while the latter focus on bespoke solutions for our leading living heritage centres.

The four are:

- **Organisational;**
- **Strategic;**
- **Newbridge House & Farm;** and
- **Connemara National Park.**



The eight short-term primary recommended actions include: -

CATEGORY	NAME	DESCRIPTION
Ref.1: Organisational	'National Rare Breeds Secretariat'.	The creation of a permanent administrative facility with a full-time capable general manager to oversee the delivery of a national rare breeds strategy. The outputs from this unit can be varied, but all focused on providing essential support and professionalising the efforts being made on the ground and through the societies.
Ref.2: Organisational	National formal engagement with rare breed societies.	Commission the international SAVE Foundation (or other appropriate body) to undertake the design and delivery of four regional workshops addressing issues and options for the sustainable development of the Irish rare breeds sector in line with best practice learnings.
Ref.3: Strategic	'Irish Rare Breeds – Strategic Plan: 2022-2032'.	Through a partnership approach, commission a team of likely international specialists to develop a ten-year strategy for native Irish rare breeds.
Ref.4: Strategic	'Irish Centre for Genetic Conservation and Research' coordinated research and knowledge transfer programmes centred on indigenous breeds addressing their economic and environmental benefits and providing functional diversity within the biodiversity sphere. Establish a centre for rare breeds research and conservation in a commercial setting in conjunction with link hubs like Newbridge, Connemara, and satellite farms. This would put rare breeds on a more equal footing with other commercial breeds.	Through a distributed leadership model centred on breeds/societies, partnered with local authorities, agencies, and academia, with a network of real-world demonstration projects. Partner with the best talent in academia and agencies in Ireland and abroad to deliver on genetic conservation and farming methods in an environmental and commercial setting. Establish a knowledge transfer programme with all the partners based on a two-way flow of information.
Ref.5: Newbridge House & Farm	Newbridge House & Farm as an Irish hub for native rare breeds. Newbridge House & Farm should partner with a new 'Irish Centre for Genetic Conservation and Research' (see above #4) to form a network of information exchange, genetic research, and practical conservation.	Partnered with a central hub for rare breeds, Newbridge to become a model outreach centre and shop window for rare breeds as well as a critical source for rare breed genetics.
Ref.6: Newbridge House & Farm	Newbridge House & Farm – new partnerships.	The attraction should cultivate a small number of critical partnerships, e.g., third-level institutions or agricultural colleges, to foster the genetic reliability and authenticity of its living heritage rare breed centre in line with best international practice.
Ref.7: Connemara National Park	Connemara National Park - an outdoor living heritage experience.	Connemara continues to develop itself as an outdoor living heritage experience on the Wild Atlantic Way for Irish rare heritage breeds led by the Connemara pony.



CATEGORY	NAME	DESCRIPTION
Ref.8: Connemara National Park	Connemara National Park - new development options.	The practical and managed integration of native rare breeds into a visitor's interaction with the Irish landscape will help protect and promote the breeds while helping to deliver unique memories for tomorrow's visitors.

The above recommendations, if successfully implemented, can make a significant impact on many important fronts from science/welfare, public perception, resourcing, organisational capacity, and the long-term sustainability of many of Ireland’s most endangered native breeds. Some of the above are relatively easy to implement, while others require new partnerships, financial resources, and critically new ways of thinking.

This study has assembled the latest research and findings from across northern Europe to help inform a national conversation on the conservation and promotion of our heritage breeds, some of which are endangered, while offering bespoke ‘roadmaps’ for our two most significant heritage breed attractions at Newbridge House & Farm and Connemara National Park.



Moiled Cattle, Connemara National Park



1

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT



1 | INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

This feasibility study is being delivered at a significant juncture for Irish rare breeds, a crossroads where survival or extinction for some breeds is being clearly signposted. This document aims to help identify good practice learnings from elsewhere in Europe to inform a future Irish collective approach to conserving and promoting our native heritage breeds, especially through the country's preeminent living heritage centres, Newbridge House & Farm and Connemara National Park.

The organisational landscape for coordinating rare breeds in Ireland is far from straightforward, with many different entities contributing. There is no national strategy document to be followed, few resources are going into the sector consistently, and capacity is low relative to our international partners. Necessary and coordinated genetic research is weak. A spirit of volunteerism, intergenerational knowledge, and individual farmer passion is largely keeping the whole enterprise alive. The breeds themselves are distinctive, unique to Ireland, and are something to be protected and valued, being part of the country's rich heritage and biodiversity. Other countries have been successful in achieving a balance of protecting their heritage breeds whilst at the same time enhancing their commercialisation through promoting them as part of living heritage experiences. Ireland has much to learn from how others have, often painstakingly, arrived at successful outcomes.

The challenge in this study, commissioned by Fingal County Council with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, is to engage in a meaningful manner with three distinct groups:

- Irish native rare breeds;
- International rare breed societies; and
- Best-in-class international living heritage centres.

From these engagements, helpful benchmarks and learnings can be identified, from science to animal welfare, and from organisational efficiency to public information and promotion. In turn, these can be fine-tuned into a set of practical recommendations concerning advancing both visitor centres and the wider conservation and promotion of Irish rare breeds.

At a domestic and international level there are some variations on the descriptions used for the conservation and promotion of endangered native breeds. In Ireland for example the generic term 'rare breeds' tends to encompass all from a farmer, owner, and representative society perspective. However, within the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and their progressive heritage breeds operation in Connemara National Park the term 'native heritage breeds' is more fitting. This study sees both descriptions as being interchangeable. Over time it is imagined a universally understood description will emerge, in the meantime this document will adopt and acknowledge both.

Achieving responsible, sustainable and more vibrant rare breed-orientated living heritage centres at Connemara National Park and Newbridge House & Farm is a key objective of this work. The advancement of both will aim to inspire a new generation of capable and geographically dispersed visitor experiences that can work together to better conserve and promote Irish native breeds. The individual development plans for both blend good current practices relating to heritage visitor attractions with good science, farm, and herd management. For example, conservation grazing is of critical importance in Connemara National Park, where conserving biodiversity is at the forefront of heritage breeds management and promotion to the visiting public.

Concerning national rare breed benchmarking, the study will examine some transferable 'watch list' models to create a simple yet accurate template for framing the vulnerability of native breeds under threat. This real-time snapshot can be a helpful addition in evaluating progress and making the case for future necessary interventions.



In terms of structure, the document firstly outlines a detailed process of consultations, both domestically and internationally, followed by the findings from these conversations. There are then site-specific plans for the two centres to help guide them to the next level of visitor offering and best practice management. The study leads with an executive summary piece that attempts to encapsulate the issues and recommendations. The 'watch list' rounds off the work.

A Vision for Heritage Breeds in Ireland

From an outside perspective, Irish heritage breed development can be viewed through the following development graphic. It identifies four interconnected and mutually interdependent pillars that need to work seamlessly together, namely:



Vision - without an informed, creative, and adequately resourced mid to long-term plan co-owned by all the necessary partners, any short-term solutions will be nothing more than sticking plasters on a gaping wound.

Capacity - a few hundred people in Ireland over the coming decade will largely determine the survival or otherwise of many of our most endangered breeds. The sector needs a capable national secretariat, as there is a leadership deficit currently at the heart of Irish rare breeds that urgently needs to be addressed. Relative to our international partners, Ireland is currently 'science lite' - this is an obstacle when attempting to make the case of the sector to the government. There exists little or no appreciation for the commercial potential of Irish rare breeds. The EU challenges this orthodoxy by stating, '*...the only successful means of sustainable conservation is to identify and/or create markets for the local breeds and their products through the development of new holistic cooperation models.*' (Source: Final Report EIP-AGRI Focus Group Genetic Resources Cooperation Models 2015).

Supports - with the significant pressures on agriculture today coupled with rare breeds in danger of being lost to farming, the existing funding models relating to rare breed supports need to be fundamentally re-examined. As the EU states, agri-environment-climate payments should continue to play a critical role in supporting the sustainable development of rural areas. There are certain key aspects to additional support, from the farmer up to national representational body levels, that need to be addressed multi-annually, including interventions such as communications, training/mentoring, and animal welfare/genetics.



Cohesion - there is huge individual passion, knowledge, and commitment to draw upon, but this alone does not guarantee successful outcomes. The voluntary time committed by an individual farmer year on year is extraordinary. This goodwill and belief need to coalesce around the concept of a self-supporting and mutually beneficial team approach. Ireland is now beginning to recognise that the threats and problems for rare breed survival are universal, and we have much to learn from how others have addressed these issues in the recent past.



Dexter & Moiled Cattle, Newbridge House & Farm

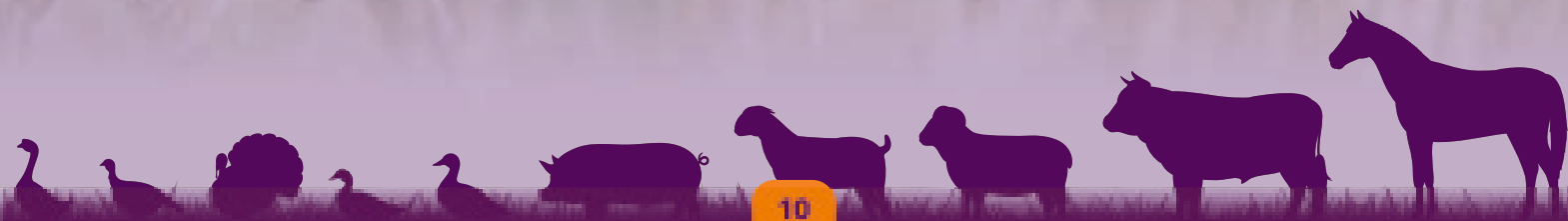


Galway Sheep, Connemara National Park



2

CONSULTATIONS – PROCESS & LEARNINGS



2 | CONSULTATIONS - PROCESS & LEARNINGS



This section of the document outlines both the process undertaken engaging with key stakeholders and the summary outcomes/learnings from those consultations. This extensive engagement work ran from June to early October 2021.

The underlying objective was to secure an honest appreciation from all those consulted on two fundamental questions: a) *'where are you now?'* and b) *'how can we best achieve your/our goals going forward?'*

The consultants (supported by the promoters of the study) attempted in good faith to engage with all the primary partners at both national and northern European levels. The outcomes of this work are largely positive, especially from an international perspective. However, enduring issues at a national level prevented a fuller engagement by some representative bodies in this foundation-laying work for the sector.

The learnings inform all the other primary parts of this work, including the development plans for the two rare breed heritage centres and the recommendations section at the end of this work.

The goodwill, knowledge, and passion for the conservation and promotion of rare breeds in Ireland and internationally were always evident. However, as can be seen below, a significant number of short and longer-term fixes will need to be delivered if the sector is to survive and thrive in the generations to come.

Across all participants in this consultation exercise, the following common assessment of the challenge emerged: heritage breeds have small breeding numbers (usually a few hundred to the low thousands), and consequently, without legal protection and coordinated support, they will become extinct.

2.1 The Process

The consultation process had two main components. The first was site visits (July 01 & 02) to the two Irish living heritage centres: Newbridge House & Farm and Connemara National Park.

The second was online consultations with different organisations involved with rare breeds, both domestic and international. There were three main targets for the consultants in their online consultations, namely:

- Irish rare breed societies;
- International rare breed societies/umbrella bodies; and
- International living heritage centres.

The online consultation process began by compiling a contact database of potential consultees that matched the requirements of the study brief. A bespoke letter was then drafted for each of our targeted groups, which included a link to an online survey (also bespoke) and a link where the consultees could book a Zoom consultation with the consultants at their convenience. The process began in early July 2021 by engaging with the Irish rare breed societies, followed by the international societies, and finally ending with the international living heritage centres in September and into early October 2021.

The international consultations involved engagements with partners in the UK, Germany, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland. It represented the most far-reaching examination into the structures, programming, capacity, and good practice examination to date in an Irish context.



There follow the primary outcomes of the consultation process. The findings from each group are broken down under the following headings:

- Issues and constraints
- Previously successful interventions
- Proposed solutions going forward
- Sample online survey results

2.2 Summary Table: Inputs from all Original Consultations

To help set the scene, the table below identifies the primary issues from engagement with Irish rare breed societies, international rare breed bodies and international living heritage centres.

CATEGORY OF PARTICIPANT	PRIMARY ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p>Irish Rare Breeds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate structures, leadership, and governance. • Role, responsibilities, and practical support from the Department of Agriculture. • Individual rare breed societies - capacity, resources, membership profile. • Absence of essential data and ongoing research gathering (including genetics). • Communication deficits, both internal and external. • Relationships between breed societies and living heritage centres. • Collaboration and joint working at multiple levels. • Absence of a clear 'roadmap' going forward with all-party endorsement. • Lack of awareness of the potential of pilot conservation initiatives across the island. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate external engagement with all the partners to establish 'common ground' through a series of regional workshops and a summary report. • Design and delivery of bespoke training/mentoring programmes for each rare breed society. • A national communications action plan for the enhancement of a common message and professional profiling of all the Irish rare breeds. • The maximising of financial supports to bolster the individual societies. • Examination of how to better deliver links between the breed societies/farmers and the academic community. • Scoping the development and adequate medium-term resourcing of a 'National Rare Breeds Secretariat'. • A public sector/agency organisational review of how best to service the needs of the societies. • Development, through a collaborative process, of a national strategy for the conservation and promotion of Irish rare breeds. • The importance of an annual 'national conference' meeting space.



CATEGORY OF PARTICIPANT	PRIMARY ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p>International Rare Breed Bodies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisational importance of multi-generational knowledge and working relationships. Many of the most stable structures in Europe (NL, UK, Germany, and Scandinavia) have been in place for decades. • The importance of good and rotating leadership building on smart succession planning. • Managing on meagre resources, often funded through a cocktail of funding coming from the likes of 'special projects', donations, membership fees, and government subsidy. Many 'paid posts' (where they exist) are at basic industrial wage levels. • Excellent international cooperation, learning, and sharing. The Scandinavian model should be closely examined by Ireland as they would be interested, in theory, in taking Ireland into this NW European 'arch' or 'rainbow'. • Greater commercialisation of rare breeds in all its facets is essential as the farmers of tomorrow need to see the time they invest in rare breeds will help support their farms and families. However, this has not to be at the expense of the voice of the 'small holder'. Neither one alone will sustain the Irish rare breeds of tomorrow, but their combined voice can sustain the breeds under imminent threat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of ongoing professional public information messaging about all aspects of rare breeds. • The advantages to having one qualified senior executive speaking on behalf of all national breeds at government, international, and policy creation levels. • The building of solid rare breed research bridges with academia through the rollout of national programmes/initiatives from genetics to farm diversification, e.g. ecotourism. • A commitment to generating more 'research papers' directly relating to the needs, threats, and opportunities of the sector to help influence EU and national government policy and allocation of resources. • EU payments to rare breed farmers to help sustain the sector. • Ensuring 'local buy-in' at local or regional levels, e.g. relationship with local authorities. • Branding and promotion of rare breed produce - high-end/artisan market.
<p>International Living Heritage Centres</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationally responsibly conducting their business in line with best international practice. • The marketplace is demanding great attention to animal welfare and 'leave no trace'. • The role and management of volunteers. • Investment in the outdoors and indoor spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a key member/person who can deliver a marketing, communications, and event management plan. • Maximise the income-generating potential of the café/restaurant/retail space. • Cultivate a relationship with suitable third-level colleges within the region, examining joint working.



CATEGORY OF PARTICIPANT	PRIMARY ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
<p>International Living Heritage Centres (cont.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breed/breed type selection and breeding programmes. • Heightened commercialisation of the farms. • Identifying how best to design and distribute the rare breed farm message consistently. • The importance of good event management skills in-house, allied to an annual events calendar targeting quieter times of the year. • Good veterinary & welfare programmes. • Conservation grazing opportunities. • Relationship of the rare breed farm(s) to possibly a large local heritage attraction - relationships can be tense, and needs are often confused. This requires coordinated management and goodwill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength in numbers - many of the most sustainable farm centres had close formal/informal working relationships with fellow centres. There was considerable sharing and cross-marketing taking place behind the scenes. • Centres need to develop and adhere to an ethical statement that underpins how they go about this business and the priorities they set. • Most centres are commercially sustainable through balanced management of the needs of the animal while giving the visitor a memorable experience. • Exceptional leadership and drive often were hallmarks of the most successful rare breed enterprises.

2.3 The International Living Heritage Centres

A primary objective of this study was to assess what can be learned from generations of good international practice in living heritage centres resulting in the better conservation and promotion of rare heritage breeds. The following profiles what has been learned from across northern Europe in fields such as management, research, visitor experience, communications and sustainability that can be helpful later in this study in providing Connemara National Park and Newbridge House & Farm with solid reference points for their individual plans.

Defining ‘living heritage’ at the outset would be helpful. A common explanation is:

Living heritage is those values, beliefs, and ways of living we inherit from past generations that we still use to understand the present and make choices for the future.

A living heritage centre is anchored in a physical destination that willingly and sensitively helps to conserve and promote rare breeds to the public. In an Irish sense, the likes of Connemara National Park and Newbridge House & Farm fit this definition well. The following summarises the inputs of various best-in-class exponents from across northern Europe. Each generously provided insights and practical advice for the development of new and upgraded Irish visitor facilities and/or the creation of Irish heritage breed hubs. These suggestions embrace multiple aspects, including educational, breeding, grazing, partnerships, operations, and research activities.

2.3.1 Issues and Constraints

- Correcting stock selection and having optimal numbers for the grounds is a perennial problem across all participant sites. Experienced staff and inherited site knowledge were key to making the correct selections.



- Several centres cited a public barn space for events as a vital all-year-round facility. This barn space (many with bleacher seating/bespoke retractable structures) greatly enhanced event programming, whether it be farm-related, e.g. live lambing or non-farming, e.g. intimate concerts or local drama or choral events.
- Animal welfare: not enough barns/indoor spaces for animals to winter in - this directly linked to enhancing the whole animal welfare narrative increasingly being demanded by visitors. Many facilities were consciously redrafting their messaging across traditional and new media to build in practical measures to improve and monitor animal welfare.
- The health of the soil is always a concern and primary focus - the Lost Gardens of Heligan (UK) is a good example of a total rethink being practically delivered, going back to the fundamental health of the soil with everything else following from this basic intervention. Also worth being aware of the 'Pasture for Life' concept in this regard.
- Public communication - try to avoid misinformation, too much technical speak, and too many words at the expense of good visuals. Aim to build a relationship with visitors after they have departed the site. Initiatives could include 'adopt a lamb', sending us your photographs of the day for our gallery, 'two for the price of one' adult ticket or free coffee all day in the café for your next visit, etc. To build up their contact databases following GDPR guidelines, many centres encouraged visitors to sign up for a quarterly eZine/newsletter (often sponsored by a local business).
- Difficulties are often encountered in trying to incorporate the rare breeds story into the local narrative/narrative of the house and grounds. Just because you have the land is not an excuse to populate it with rare breed animals. Where is the thematic link to history?
- The dilemma - farm parks with museums/country estates attached to the farms get most of the annual allocated funding. However, most of the visitors are there to see the animals. The houses/museums/estates require more maintenance, are often listed buildings, require more staffing, yet likely only have a seasonal flow of visitors. In contrast, the farm requires less staff, often runs on a shoestring budget, and is open all year round. This can lead to resentment building up within the team.
- Few facilities could run to their current level of visitor offering without a trained volunteer corp. However, this corps of up to 50 volunteers, in some cases, needs to be properly trained, motivated, rotated, and managed by a dedicated member of permanent staff.
- Many sites flagged their concern at being able to find suitable volunteers that were willing to dedicate a defined period per month to be put on a rota.
- Farm parks are largely weather dependent - the longer established and better-managed facilities, often under local authority control, have invested in weather-independent facilities and a network of drop-in shelters that are all buggy friendly and have a degree of bespoke site-specific interpretation or site mapping.
- The balance between the 'crowd pullers', e.g. reindeer or birds of prey, and the investment in specific endangered rare breeds who may not have the pulling power, e.g. fowl and similar smaller animals.
- The public can put pressure on certain centres to breed fewer animals (environmentalists/animal welfare lobby). This ultimately leads to the need for an ethical statement which informs all complex decisions. In some shape or other, all centres had a similar document which was annually reviewed and updated. Ethical messaging is a central platform of all communications.
- Local linkage - some centres had engineered significant and innovative partnerships with the local town/city. In the UK, for example, the local third-level college embedded part of its Department of



Agriculture and agricultural sciences into the council-run centre, thus supplying at any one time a team of over 30 informed volunteers and researchers. A centre in the Netherlands became the main meet-up place for locals in the town and had a bar onsite. This helps 'keep the doors open'.

2.3.2 Sample: Previously Successful Interventions

- **MEMBERSHIP SCHEMES:** There were a large variety of creative approaches employed, from membership hierarchies, lifetime membership, season access, free car parking, and recreational and playground access only for locals, to children going free to pay-in facilities/exhibitions or events. In a staycation/post-Covid world, there was an increased demand for secure campervan overnight parking facilities adjacent to farms.
- **ONLINE RESERVATION SYSTEMS:** In a post-Covid world, this is now becoming the norm. However, its introduction needs to recognise that a certain cohort of visitors still like to pay at the door. Good, prudent management must have a weighting towards an online booking system while acknowledging this has to be slowly eased in, possibly through significant discounts for those booking online. Newer and more efficient online systems are more attractive than they possibly were five years ago.
- **'BE A FARMER FOR A DAY' - KIDS COME AND CLEAN OUT STABLES:** This is the type of event schools and families are increasingly looking for from a farm park experience.



Tamworth Pig, Newbridge House & Farm



- **THE COUNCIL CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT** (Tannaghmore Farm Park, Co. Armagh, NI): Provides lands for conservation grazing, so most of the animals are out grazing rather than adjacent to the centre in pens. However, this does not prevent a 'good story' from being told. Secure trails with guides if required to enable linkage to be made. The story is further told/enhanced during the learning journey from the centre to the herd.
- **DEMONSTRATIVE GARDENS:** Where kids can grow and pick vegetables and learn about animals and animal products (where meat comes from) are a cornerstone of many centres in the UK and across northern Europe. The garden and farm go together as part of the total farm visitor experience.
- **RESTAURANTS/RETAIL ONSITE USING THE ANIMAL PRODUCTS:** Garden shops selling the other animal products, local and fresh themes (and possibly organic), Farm to Fork message. Critically, many of the restaurants were significant income generators, cross-subsidising the rare breeds research work. There was an equal split between those centres that leased out their restaurant/retail and those that kept it in-house. Local authorities tended to keep it in-house while charities licensed it out. Many centres cited the restaurant as having a commercial life of its own and a destination in and of itself, driven by the quality/freshness of the food offering, easy accessibility, no bookings required, outdoor dining if desired, accessible children's play facilities and often free car parking.
- **COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES:** There are multiple examples of the facility putting relatively simple income-generating initiatives in place, from electric road trains/tractor trains to dispensing vending machines, where kids buy food for ducks/chickens to feed them under guidelines. The list is extensive and includes pony rides, cow-pat bingo (especially for charity events), brushing donkeys, watching goats getting milked, and walking animals to holding pens.
- **AN ANNUAL PROGRAMME OF CREATIVE FESTIVALS AND EVENTS:** From large to boutique helped many centres extend the season and keep temporary staff in employment. For example, Christmas/Santa experiences, Halloween, and Easter events often around lambing.
- **MARKETING/PR FUNCTION:** Having an accessible onsite marketing manager who promotes rare breeds is acknowledged as a significant advantage. This person can also oversee the festivals and events programme above. They also tend to look after all signage, graphic design requirements, and social media marketing activities. There is, in many sites, a direct correlation between investing in this function and increased visitor numbers and income generation. It's seen as a necessary investment in professionalising and sustaining centres across Europe.
- **DESTOCKING POLICY:** Improving the land being grazed is linked to the ethical statement mentioned above.
- **GOOD VETERINARY PRACTICE/WELFARE:** The leading centres regarded themselves as being animal-focused: eliminating all limping in sheep, introducing vaccination protocols, and ensuring stock are better presented, better housed, better watered (e.g., mobile watering in all fields). This is all seen as a part of essential good practice today.
- **COMMERCIALISATION OF RARE BREEDS:** 'Think traditional, eat local' has worked well. Many centres butcher animals and sell packaged cuts/sides/baskets to order, online and/or in the farm shop. Demand always appears to outstrip supply.
- **WORKING CLOSELY WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS:** Allowing students to get practical experience. There were multiple examples of this type of mutually beneficial coexistence. In practical terms, this enables the next generation of farms to become aware of the unique charm and demands of rare breeds while building up the body of local/national research into rare breed conservation and promotion.



2.3.3 What We Have Learned from Best Practice in International Living Heritage Centres?

This research has involved a range of in-depth consultations with several living heritage centres outside Ireland. Two countries, in particular, the UK and the Netherlands, provide helpful insights into progressive management systems. These countries have developed more extensively into this area of sustainable farm park operations (non-National Park facilities), displaying rare breeds and the commercialisation of the farm experiences as part of sustainable living heritage centres.

The following are a set of summary learnings to inform future planning for Irish living heritage centres:

- Many living heritage centres or farm parks that are initially built upon a sound commercial model become sustainable operations. These parks operate a range of income-generating activities that more than cover costs, guaranteeing financial sustainability and re-investment potential into breeding programmes, heightened awareness, and increased animal welfare.
- Other successful living heritage centres combine native rare breeds with other complimentary authentic activities to create a cluster of attractions on a single site, such as:
 - Local heritage stories like mining, social history, transport, and farming practice.
 - Family-friendly activities, such as mini trains, tractor rides, play areas, petting areas, tearooms, educational programmes and buggy trails. The challenge is to ensure these secondary activities do not dilute the message of heritage breeds.
 - Events that link directly with the rare breed story, animals, and associated activity.
 - Food production and retail of farm-related products such as meat, cheese, and eggs often work in tandem with local micro suppliers/producers offering a 'field to fork' food experience.
- Income generation at living heritage sites typically comes from admission fees, café income, retail, sale of farm produce (including online), events, and membership schemes. Other sites have mini train rides or similar quirky family-friendly activities that blend with the site offering overall (see point above about 'diluting the message'). Rewarding customer 'loyalty' is often skilfully employed to grow consistent/repeat business. Membership schemes are a traditional route into servicing this market.
- Volunteering, properly managed, is a common tool employed, enabling people who have time and skills to contribute to a good cause.
- Living heritage centres form collaborations or clusters, with each cluster member focussing on what they do best. Centres that work together avoid competition and work efficiently by sharing festivals, events, resources, joint purchasing, and specialist skillsets like festival organisation. This clustering concept is gaining momentum across northern Europe and has many upsides but is very dependent on a high level of trust, capacity, and goodwill as the agreements are loose and not legally binding.
- There is a trend toward organic and environmentally sound farming methods, especially in relation to the new CAP and the roll-out of the green agenda in response to climate change and a more carbon-neutral economy. A book written by Isabella Tree called 'Wilding' tells the story of the Knepp Castle estate - an excellent example of transforming the whole farming process and making it sustainable within a thirty-year period. This book illustrated that some of the most significant 'pushbacks' to landscape change might come from quarters closest to home, like the local community.
- The rare breed farm is a shop window in which breeders and farmers can display sustainable processes to the wider public. Access to these centres is now opening, and the public can see how the animals and plants are managed and protected. The whole public education ethos has become mainstream in all sustainable living heritage centres.



- The living heritage centres put animal health, safety, and protection at the centre of their vision and messaging. The whole operation revolves around this 'animal first' principle. There are few shortcuts.
- Living heritage centres are discovering that both children and adults want to enjoy a hands-on experience by mucking out stables, filling the hay nets and participating in activities that bring them closer to the animals.
- In almost all cases, the heritage breed animals are the winning feature of the living heritage centre and a crucial part of its overall sustainability. Investment is being made into making this a reality in all international centres consulted. This is in stark contrast to the constant uphill battle that rare breed societies have in protecting and promoting the individual rare breeds in Ireland today.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has had a particularly positive impact, to the extent that it increased awareness of open spaces and farmlands generally as attractive spaces to enjoy. Consequently, this has been a positive for the breeds.
- In the UK, many living history centres are registered with the national society RBST and approved by it. This system ensures a level of standards and good practice is shared across the centres. It helps in standardising animal welfare and in the promotion of good practice. There is no such quality mark in Ireland.
- Many living heritage centres have a strong classroom/citizen science laboratory/educational facility and programmes that involve collaboration with a local agricultural college. This can facilitate a college hosting a progressive school of land and animal science courses, as seen previously at Temple Newsam Farm, Leeds Council.
- In today's popular culture/social media frenzy, never forget the importance of the selfie/immediate image shared. Many of the better centres flag up 'photo points' on the farm in advance.

2.3.4 Proposed Solutions Going Forward

- Covid has increased the public's awareness of conservation, environment, animal welfare, etc. Living heritage centres brand themselves as sustainable farming – 'farm to fork', free-range, etc. There was a feeling across northern Europe at the end of 2021 that the pandemic and visitor habits (e.g. authentic experiences and outdoor environments, especially for urban dwellers) would benefit individual facilities and the conservation of endangered rare breeds.
- Rare breeds in farm parks are commercially sustainable - there is potential in using farm parks to breed and promote rare breeds in a more commercial manner.
- Connect or twin parks/centres with an educational institution.
- Connect them with a network of local restaurants or pop-up cafés to quickly get produce from field to plate without a heavy carbon footprint.
- Connect them with horticulturalists/gardening groups - there is an attractive linkage between the conservation of animals and plants/seeds. See Kew Gardens Seed Collection, www.kew.org, and Irish Seed Savers, www.irishseedsavers.ie.
- Many centres bring their rare breeds to traditional agricultural shows. The general PR value of this is seen as significant, and farm managers/farm labourers become spokespersons for the centres and rare breeds generally. Shows are good meeting places for connecting with farmers. They also provide a useful educational outlet through maps, publications, videos, and demonstrations.
- Provide adequate classroom space/conference space - these facilities are becoming more demanded, especially for the educational off-season market where a whole day immersive farm experience can be offered. Likewise, there is a growing demand from a corporate perspective,





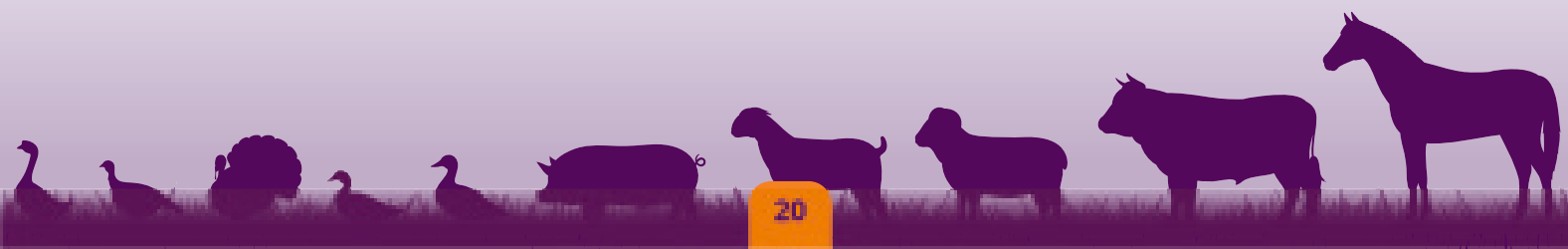
Irish Draught, Newbridge House & Farm

especially where the 'theatre style' facilities matched with good food with a 'story' and reception type events in the 'big house' can attractively be packed up for clients. This is the type of creative commercialisation of rare breed centres coming more to the fore across Europe.

- 'Cute' promotional posts on social media pay handsome dividends through increased visibility, awareness, and visits.
- Many best-in-class centres have established a 'friends of...' foundation where people can donate/bequeath money to the centre.

2.3.5 International Living Heritage Centres - Sample Online Survey Results

- All survey feedback helped inform findings and recommendations later in the study.
- What is the role of living heritage centres and educational centres within the national context for the conservation and promotion of rare breeds?
 - They are the mainstay of Danish conservation.
 - Very important places to promote the breeding and conservation of rare breeds.
 - The living heritage centres and educational centres function as a support network for breeds at greatest risk of extinction and as a promotion of indigenous breeds in the places where they are found.
 - They play a pivotal role, as the government mostly stands on the sidelines waiting for initiatives to be taken by the non-profit sector.
- What do you believe should be the primary qualifying criteria for living heritage centres?
 - The breeders' knowledge about conservation and the breeds. It is necessary to have a strategy for the breeding to keep as wide a genetic material as possible despite yield and growth. All breeding must be based on pure breeding and large diversity without any foreign breeds. The animals must be kept in situ.
 - A permanent collection or exhibition of rare breeds, pedigree breeding programme.
 - The centres should be classified by their role (promoting, maintaining, or safeguarding) in the conservation of the breeds.
 - Optimal combination of people from the academic world, the government, breeders of rare breeds, professional organisations, and enthusiastic supporters.

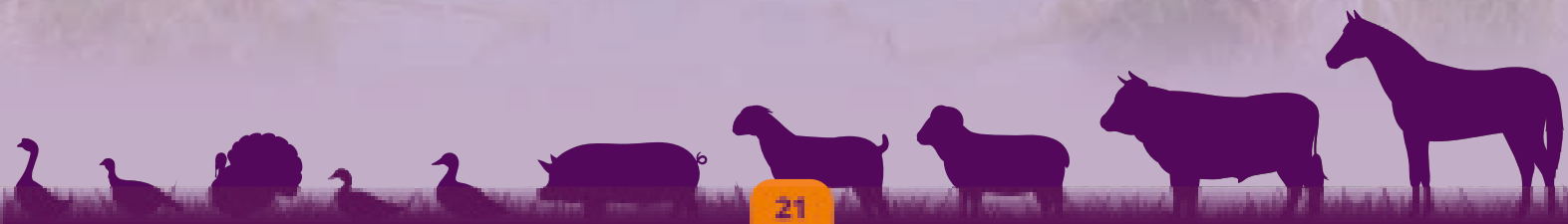


Connemara National Park



3

CONNEMARA NATIONAL PARK



3 | CONNEMARA NATIONAL PARK

Introduction & Context

This study into Irish native heritage breeds is sponsored jointly by both Fingal County Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the two promoters of the most significant living heritage centres in Ireland, namely Connemara National Park and Newbridge House & Farm. At the outset of this section it is important to recognise that the National Parks and Wildlife Service employs a slightly different terminology when describing native heritage breeds, namely 'heritage breeds' as opposed to 'rare breeds'. The two descriptions speak about the same endangered breeds (see Introduction to the document for more clarity).

The following two sections review both attractions in sequence and make practical recommendations as to how they can enhance the visitor experience and help conserve and promote native Irish heritage breeds.

The team leading this study spent time at Connemara National Park and met the main site management going through a detailed examination of the site, visitor flow and its operations. The motivation for investing in the development of heritage breeds on site was examined. A workshop on site followed this, which posed the following questions:

- What is the historic significance of heritage breeds to Connemara National Park?
- What is the current situation at Connemara National Park regarding heritage breeds - breeding stock, breeding programmes, conservation grazing, and future direction?
- What is the financial and operational situation at the park, and how is this influenced by native heritage breeds?
- What development could be made to improve the park in its management of heritage breeds, and how could new opportunities be operationally and financially sustainable?

The following emerged as the main objectives for further developing the heritage breeds offering in Connemara National Park:

- Providing visitors to the National Park with a new authentic experience (aligned with Fáilte Ireland/Wild Atlantic Way strategy).
- Supporting nature conservation through conservation grazing with heritage breeds and related academic research.
- Practically conserving heritage breeds, especially those breeds that are associated with the west of Ireland and are endangered.
- The promotion of heritage breeds in Ireland, including the delivery of awareness and education programmes/activities.
- Developing fraternal co-working relationships with fellow heritage centres, farmers, and breeding societies.

The team subsequently carried out a wide range of consultations looking in detail into best practice, nationally and internationally, in protecting and promoting heritage breeds and heritage breed living heritage centres (see consultation section above). This included engaging with directors/managers of international heritage breed associations and living heritage centres.

All this information was recorded and disseminated to inform the future direction of the living heritage centres in this study and to help inform any future direction in managing native heritage breeds in Ireland. That is the background research context for the following sections.



3.1 Analysis of the Current Position - Connemara National Park

3.1.1 Background

Connemara National Park is an expansive landscape of 2,000 hectares of mountains, bogs, heaths, grasslands, and woodland. The park is a significant open public area in County Galway and was opened to the general public by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1980. The National Parks and Wildlife Service is responsible for the management of the park along with Ireland's five other National Parks, as well as over 70 nature reserves. The vast majority of visitors enter the National Park via the main entrance on the N59, west of Letterfrack village.

Much of the present lands of the National Park formed part of the Kylemore Abbey Estate and the Letterfrack industrial school, the remainder having been owned by private individuals. There is a very strong connection with the cultural heritage of Connemara and its peoples. The heritage breeds also shape this sense of identity and are an everyday part of the running of the park.

The living heritage centre would enable us to honour our ancestors who have previously worked the land, where coincidentally the visitor centre consists of a range of old refurbished farm buildings. The southern part of the park was at one time owned by Richard Martin, who helped to form the society for the prevention of cruelty to animals during the early 19th century. These park lands are now wholly owned by the state and solely managed by the National Parks And Wildlife Service as a National Park.

The visitor centre buildings at Letterfrack were formerly the farm buildings belonging to the Letterfrack industrial school, and the park office was the school infirmary. These buildings were erected around 1890 and are still in good condition and house the existing café, reception, audio-visual room and exhibition spaces. A field laboratory is housed behind the park office that is now being used as staff accommodation. Historically it was used by research students working on various projects connected to the environment and wildlife in the National Park.

The lands of the National Park were once used for traditional agricultural purposes, mainly for grazing cattle and sheep. Vegetables were grown on some of the more fertile lowlands. There is still evidence today of old cultivation ridges and hollows where vegetables were grown. The bog of the national park was also used as a fuel source, and many of the old turf banks that are no longer used are still evident.

Many remains of human habitation can be seen in the park. The oldest is the megalithic court tomb, which is over 4,000 years old. Stretches of the 'old Galway Road', which was in use over a century ago, can still be seen in the northern sections of the park. Ruined houses, disused lime kilns, old sheep pens, an icehouse, drainage systems, and old walls in various parts of the National Park are evidence of greater population and more extensive use of these lands in the past.

The National Park provides spectacular vistas to the north, south, east, and west. The horizon is dominated by more than fifty magnificent mountains in four tightly packed ranges that span Connemara and the southern parts of neighbouring county Mayo. These ranges include the Twelve Bens, Maumturks, Partry Mountains, and Sheffrey Hills.

Diamond Hill rises some 450 metres high above Letterfrack and is the main iconic attraction for visitors to the National Park. The summit of Diamond Hill commands an expansive ocean, island, and mountain view.





Connemara National Park

3.1.2 The Current Operation

Connemara National Park is managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) on behalf of the state, which is centrally managed from Dublin and has local management for each of its National Parks. Local management has responsibility for all aspects of the National Park, from heritage breed conservation and management to environment, biodiversity, and visitor management. This is a hugely diverse area of responsibility. Resources are tight and don't always lend themselves to longer-term strategic planning. Adequate staffing levels to support the recommendations in the study need to be addressed by the NPWS as a matter of priority.

The National Park has a current annual budget based on a regional allocation; there is no dedicated budget for heritage breeds in the park. This reality makes future planning and scheduling of investment difficult to manage.

The management team at Connemara National Park are also responsible for the management of Wild Nephin National Park, which encompasses 15,000 hectares.

3.1.3 The Current Visitor Offering

Connemara National Park has many key advantages in terms of its positioning as a significant heritage breed location, albeit one that requires further development.

Summary of advantages include:

- The National Park has been considered the home, for many years, of the internationally recognised **Connemara pony**. The association with the Connemara pony and other native breeds to Connemara provides an authentic attraction to visitors seeking a connection to those breeds and their relevance to the unique landscape. This 'critical mass' helps justify necessary future investment in infrastructure and skills.
- The **management of Connemara National Park** has a deep understanding, reputation and capacity when it comes to native heritage breed management. The park can organically develop its offering 'from within'. The park management appreciates that fundamentals are already in place to build an internationally significant visitor experience that complements the iconic status of Diamond Hill over the coming decade.



- From a messaging perspective, the National Park has a strong legacy and association with heritage breeds to build upon.
- The **landscape and space itself** lend themselves perfectly to the protection and promotion of native heritage breeds in Ireland.
- There is **operational and financial sustainability** in animals and heritage breeds as part of the attraction of the National Park, and this will no doubt be further built upon in the future.
- The heritage breeds aspect of Connemara National Park is well connected to other heritage breed sites in Ireland, such as Newbridge House & Farm (Dublin) and Tannaghmore Farm (Lurgan, Northern Ireland) and all breed societies. This gives a unique advantage in that skills and knowledge can/is being shared, breeding programmes can be compared, and animals can transfer between farms when and where required. This current sharing culture between sites is of an exceptionally high standard and offers hope for the future networking of similar Irish facilities.

Summary of challenges includes:

- The main vehicular entrance/car parking area is a significant pinch point, especially at peak times. Officially there are 100 marked car spaces whereas there is a need for more than 500.
- The existing visitor centre was initially renovated in the early 1980s to accommodate annual visitor numbers of circa 10,000. Today 300,000+ visitors visit the park each year with no corresponding investment in centre facilities.
- The main visitor centre building offers visitor reception, interpretation, café, retail, educational, and an outdoor seating area. A guide is available for guided tours and to orientate and inform visitors about the National Park and plan their visit. Information regarding heritage breeds will have to be incorporated into interpretation and visitor services at Connemara National Park.
- Lack of investment. It is important to note that there has been little investment in the visitor experience in Connemara National Park, apart from a small extension to the visitor centre and upgrading of the exhibition in the 1990s, and the development of the Diamond Hill trails in the 2000s. At the time of installation, the exhibition would have been innovative, but due to underinvestment, is in serious need of updating. Currently, the experience is underwhelming and not in keeping with the expectation of today's tech-savvy visitors. Editorially, the messaging needs to be more holistic, e.g. there is little about the uniqueness of the broader Connemara landscape. The site's local story is very obviously missing, while the story of native breeds is invisible. The interpretative experience needs a fundamental review.
- The signature attraction/experience is a walk up and around Diamond Hill, which provides a commanding backdrop to the National Park. Few visitors venture much further than Diamond Hill and the visitor centre. However, this is about to change with the proposed development of a new looped farm walk, which has been approved by Galway County Council and is currently under consideration by An Bord Pleanála. This integrated recreational and learning experience will open new landscapes and enable the telling of a rich library of native heritage breed stories and their relationship to the local community and culture.

In summary, the current visitor offering is relatively uniform, physically accessible to most visitors and possesses little inbuilt innovation. It possesses significant brand value. Given its location, profile as a National Park and provision of primary services/infrastructure, the current visitor experience will likely continue to attract and satisfy visitors on the same scale as today, but without appropriate strategic investment, it is unlikely to grow and prosper over the coming decade and beyond.



3.1.4 Heritage Breeds - What, How, Why

Connemara National Park currently manages a range of farm breeds, understandably focusing on the Connemara pony. There are also cattle, pigs, donkeys, sheep, and goats.

The park supports and promotes the protection of the near-extinct Cladoir sheep (a native breed to Connemara), with almost all the remaining population currently within the National Park. These are universal ‘good news’ stories to be developed.

The park has clearly identified the following as their priority breeding heritage stock:

- **Connemara pony**
- **Irish Moiled cattle**
- **Cladoir sheep**
- **Galway sheep (novelty)**
- **Tamworth pig**
- **Old Irish goat**

Details of the current stock of breeds at Connemara National Park (2021):

ANIMAL BREEDS	NO. OF ANIMALS AT PRESENT	PROJECTED NO. OF ANIMALS
Connemara Ponies	7	10
Moiled Cattle	7	10 (breeding cows)
Pigs	2	2
Donkeys	2	2
Sheep - Galway	10	10 (breeding ewes)
Sheep - Cladoir	70+	50 (breeding ewes)
Goats (Old Irish)	200	100 (managed)

Breeding Programmes

There are currently breeding programmes for Connemara ponies, Irish Moiled cattle and Cladoir sheep. These are the primary breeds; however, the park is collaborating with other heritage breed societies such as the Old Irish Goat Society.

The park management demonstrates high standards of animal husbandry and veterinary. They have standard operating procedures (SOPs) covering interaction with domestic animals and all relevant areas of animal welfare. Given the lack of resources available, this is an impressive and important commitment.

Connemara Ponies

The Connemara pony is a heritage breed closely associated with Connemara and Connemara National Park. It is a ubiquitous image in promotional material relating to the National Park. This association represents a significant opportunity for the National Parks and Wildlife Service in terms of future promotion, experience development and brand development.





Connemara Pony, Connemara National Park

The Connemara pony is famous for being sure-footed. As the breed evolved as a small workhorse on the farms on the rocky coast of western Ireland, it had to develop an ability to move quickly across rough terrain. The breed is resilient and adaptable, and these are the qualities that are valued today where the pony is used as a sport/riding pony. It has a 'natural home' in the National Park.

The recognised colours are grey, bay, brown, and dun and a very occasional black, chestnut or palomino. In terms of conformation, Connemara ponies can vary greatly in appearance but generally should have a kind eye and a medium pony head with pony ears and well-defined cheekbones. The shoulders should be well sloped, and the back should be muscular. The hindquarters should be rounded and deep. Connemara ponies should have a good length in the forearm, short cannons, and well-defined knees. The average height is 13 to 15 hands, but they can be taller than this.

The Connemara Pony Breeders Society was formed in 1923 and has been crucial in protecting the breed from extinction and has very much strengthened the future of the ponies into the future.

The society has about 3,000 members across the country and 100 overseas. There are approximately 2,300 breeding mares registered with the pony breeder's society. It is an all-Ireland society and is overseen by a board of directors. The operation and challenges for the Connemara Pony Breeders Society are referenced elsewhere in this document. There has always been a close working relationship between the society and the park management and staff. These relationships have facilitated considerable co-working and are to be welcomed.



Irish Moiled Cattle

The Irish Moiled cow is one of the oldest and most distinctive breeds in Ireland. The name takes its origins from the Irish word Maol meaning bald, and references the fact that these cows do not have horns; they are 'polled' or hornless. They are generally red with a white line on the back and stomach. They are dual producers, being used for both beef and dairy products, which is uncommon with most breeds. These cows are slightly smaller than average, weighing around 550 kg. The breed originated in the north and west of Ireland. The breed was popular throughout Ireland in the 1800s on a wide variety of habitats but thrived on the ground of the hill farmer and other marginal land. However, with the introduction of more specialist dairy and beef breeds, numbers began to decline.

The decline in numbers was significant over the last century. By the late 1970s, the pedigree herd numbered only thirty breeding females and two bulls, maintained by only two breeders in Northern Ireland. In 1979 the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) recognised the Irish Moiled as endangered and placed the breed on its 'critical' list. Enthusiasts began to work actively to revive the breed, and their efforts have been rewarded, ensuring that the Irish Moiled remains part of our proud agricultural story. Connemara National Park is now part of this story, intending to maintain a herd of 10 breeding Moiled cows at the National Park. The offspring are sold locally, and they are working with a number of co-ops and herdowners to establish new herds of Irish Moiled cattle. The park uses the prefix 'Connemara' when naming all pedigree stock born at the National Park. Connemara National Park and their sister National Park, Wild Nephin National Park, are working with the Irish Moiled Cattle Society and other interested parties to promote and re-establish Irish Moiled cattle in the west of Ireland.

The Cladoir Sheep

The Cladoir sheep are native to Connemara and have been functionally extinct as a separate breed since the 1990s. Cladoir sheep are a small white-faced breed of sheep which were once common in



Cladoir Sheep, Connemara National Park



south Connemara. They were kept mainly for their wool which is fine and suitable for spinning and weaving. The sheep are generally white but can be coloured. They are an unimproved breed with a narrow shoulder and generally a narrow white face; they have a light (poor) carcass. Their carcass is not currently valuable. They got their name as they spent much of the time grazing on the seashore, sometimes eating seaweed. Cladoir is derived from the Irish word “Claddagh” or “Cladach”, which means from the shore or shore dweller.

When Michael O’Toole was officer in charge of the Maam research station in the 1970s, he assembled a flock that resembled the original Cladoir. When the Maam research station closed, these were moved to Creagh research station, Ballinrobe. That flock was dispersed when Creagh closed. Tom King from Westport took an interest in the Cladoir several years ago and accumulated a small flock. He became acquainted with farmers from south Connemara who had stayed somewhat loyal to the breed. The National Parks and Wildlife Service are the custodians of the flock assembled by Tom King.

From a genetic standpoint, in 2020, sixty-five sheep from Connemara National Park had DNA analysed. Fifty-six of those sampled had a significant amount of unique DNA attributed to the Cladoir breed; the remaining nine had a smaller amount of this DNA.

A small number of committed people have recently launched the Cladoir Sheep Conservation Project, which is closely associated with the National Park. It seeks to regenerate this heritage breed which post-famine was ‘pushed out to the margins, literally to the water’s edge on the west coast, as other breeds found favour with farmers and landowners’. This story, properly told, will resonate with today’s visitors seeking authenticity and ‘connection’ with place. The initiative is in its infancy and needs support and resources to strengthen its ability to make a real impact on the sustainability of the breed and its association with the park. The Cladoir is fast becoming a significant heritage breed ‘good news’ story that can bring international attention to the park while broadening the visitor experience while at the park.

All the Cladoir sheep in the project are currently in the ownership of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. As the project develops, it is intended that ownership of animals would be transferred to farmers interested in conserving the breed. The National Parks and Wildlife Service wants Connemara National Park to be seen as the birthplace of the rejuvenation of this heritage breed and intends to maintain a flock of at least 50 ewes in perpetuity at the National Park.

Grazing Schemes

There has been a strong focus on using local breeds at Connemara National Park for conservation grazing for several years. This practice is part of the ‘living heritage’ commitment that the National Parks and Wildlife Service are committed to at a national level. These schemes provide the ideal means of managing grasslands in upland and lowland areas as the animals are flexible and cause no damage to the sensitive environment.

The current ambition is to graze up to 80 hectares in the National Park.

The native heritage breeds are ideal animals for conservation grazing and naturally managing open spaces. This is a low-impact farming scheme in action. This practice also appeals to visitors looking for authentic experiences in the National Park and who observe sustainable farming practices in action. Native breeds are interwoven with the story of the long-term sustainability of Connemara National Park.

The future focus of grazing schemes will be to better understand what animals are best for which spaces and to try to manage the various herds in a way that delivers enough animals into the various places



around the National Park at the opportune time. While achieving this aim, it is important that the park and its resident breeds are not treated as an academic experiment but are a part of our living heritage. It would be advisable to have a practical means of showcasing/disseminating the results of bespoke research/work to local breeders and others, and not just at Connemara National Park. For instance, the work done through the National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway) could be built into the scripts of the on-site guides and any new interpretative material, both online and traditional. Also, currently, a student from the University of Santa Barbara in California is developing a PhD research project on the benefits of heritage cattle breeds, which will look at the Irish Moiled cattle at Connemara National Park.

3.1.5 How Living Heritage Centres are Promoted - Best Practice Transferred

The team specifically asked the operators of best practice living heritage centres in Europe how they go about promotions and communications to maximise awareness. The following are a sample of the main learnings:

- Social media was common, with the maximum advantage being taken when there were 'good news' stories to report.
- Good quality websites that carry integrated offers and messaging about what is on offer, which also carry information on vision, purpose, and objectives.
- Attendance at agricultural shows to promote their heritage breeds through that medium.
- Attractive banners, posters, and flyers promote ongoing activities at the living heritage centres and specific events material, e.g. annual shows or season events at Christmas, Easter or Halloween (often reusable).
- Promote 'good news' stories and progress via appearances on radio and TV where possible. Media are always looking for interesting stories and angles, and heritage breeds bring that distinctiveness, often providing a visual and child-friendly narrative.
- Most centres are in tune with the local/regional educational curriculum needs of schools, enabling them to attract visitors in the shoulder off-seasons. A dedicated member of staff usually serviced this market.
- The family-friendly market was a significant segment across all centres that fed into this study. Multiple examples of simple and inexpensive methods of engagement were noted, from grass rubbings to 'passport stamping'. The most effective and long-lasting communication was highly visual, colourful, and often cartoonish. There was consistent brand management across the whole park/centre through old and new media.

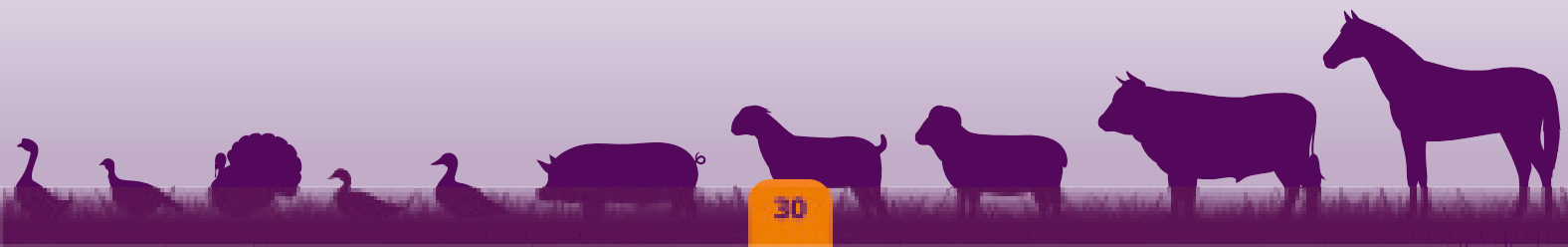
3.2 Research Findings

3.2.1 A National Park Celebrating its Native Distinctiveness - The Opportunity

There is an opportunity for Connemara National Park to create an enhanced sustainable living heritage centre focusing on the native breeds and related authentic cultural heritage that would appeal to a wide variety of visitors from home and abroad. Additional resources will be needed to deliver on this new vision. A more commercial and visitor-centric approach will be needed by the National Park in its future planning. The following gives an idea of the concepts to be examined in this regard.

3.2.2 The Connemara National Park Heritage Farm Walk

There is a potential opportunity to create a looped walk experience that celebrates and highlights a range of authentic stories of the park. This development could significantly improve the visitor appeal



and financial sustainability of the National Park in the future. This new looped walk will complement the existing visitor offering but crucially appeal to a wide variety of visitors who want the outdoor experience with layers of interesting cultural heritage facets from the National Park. It also importantly provides another incentive for those who may have already done Diamond Hill to revisit the site.

The themed looped walk offers a chance to tell the story of the National Park in a way that leaves the visitor with a greater understanding (gained through physical experience and encounters employing modern storytelling tools) of where the National Park fits into the social, natural, cultural, geological and biodiversity story of Ireland itself through the lens of heritage breeds. It is a story that likely spans 13,000 years of change.

In summary:

1. The agricultural heritage theme needs to be further developed and properly resourced as the ecology, geology and history of the unique landscape can be delivered on other walks in the park.
2. Related stories may include the arrival of the first people/farmers 6,000 to 5,800 years ago and their introduction of livestock: how today's native heritage breeds are descended from the animals of that time and have adapted to the local environment; how there was a decline and now a rejuvenation of these breeds; the role of these breeds in the diet, local economy, ecological services and culture down the ages. This story provides a unique wormhole in Connemara's past.
3. One seamless narrative sweep experienced through a gentle to moderate pedestrian agriculture/farm trail(s). The park should appear to be one integrated natural to semi-natural ecosystem passed down through the ages.
4. There is already a natural and accessible area that lends itself to be suitably designed, engineered, interpreted and maintained.

The central feature will be the exhibition of the Connemara pony as the host breed of the park. This builds upon impressive work already undertaken in progressing the pony paddock where ponies of differing ages, colours, and styles can be displayed. This complements the existing Sruffaunboy trail. The paddocks could have viewing areas (possibly raised) or shelters to allow visitors to enjoy the ponies in all weather. The longer-term ambition would be to have this as interactive an experience as possible through panels and a downloadable special app. All this would be within good practice guidelines and available resources.

The looped walk would include a range of additional stories and insights, including:

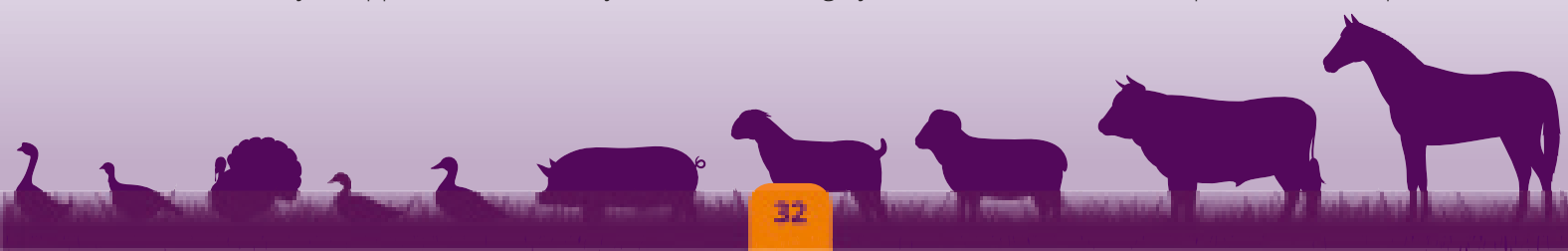
- Inside stable/barn areas that tell the full heritage story of the Connemara ponies and their importance to the story in the park. There could be a tack room and an area that includes trophies won by the ponies over the years and a range of photos. This indoor space could host the Connemara stories that have been provided in the past by guides at the park. It is recommended that traditional types of barn are used, e.g. stone structures that would have been traditionally used to house heritage breeds. The current pony stables could be used for this.
- A range of other heritage breeds in a combination of paddocks, pens, and fields, including Cladoir sheep, Moiled cattle and Tamworth pigs. The display of livestock must present a common thread for the visitor to follow, not a random collection of animals without a relationship to each other in an 'open farm' type presentation. The Irish heritage breeds collective is the underlying narrative theme in an authentic farm environment.
- It is important not to overcrowd the area with too many breeds of livestock and their interpretation. The breeds that are local and adapted to the landscape should take precedence, while relevant



information on the others can be displayed on information boards or smartphone apps. This concept of balancing the 60/90min walk in the unspoilt natural Connemara landscape with suitably positioned exposure to native animal breeds and their interpretation will be important to its success in the eyes of the visitor.

- Where possible, the farming methods suitable to the landscape should be displayed, i.e. the old equipment that the ponies worked, old farm machinery, milking equipment, and butter-making tools. This can be simple and low-tech and remain authentic to place and practice.
- A range of interconnected stories can be told in either converted existing farm buildings, new suitable structures erected along the route (e.g., traditional wooden shelters, pods), or interpretive panels along the way. Pop-up storytelling can also be interwoven into the experience by occasionally employing living history actors.
- Stories about the old bog road and the heritage of turf cutting in the area, including wayfinding for the old bog road. The above reference to living history as a memorable storytelling device could be employed along the road where the visitor stumbles upon a family going to cut turf (not encouraged any longer) or, more dramatically, emigrate with all their worldly belongings to the New World.
- Additional narrative layers include the native biodiversity of the National Park animals and how the diversity and scale of the National Park offers protection to them, along with how the farm animals and traditional agricultural practices can be central to the survival of some co-adapted species and their habitats.
- Also, to be factored into the rolling narrative is the archaeological history of the park, including megalithic tombs and related discoveries made over the years.
- Specifically, there is an old village that has since disappeared visible from the route being proposed for the looped walk(s). This village could be 'revealed' in the unfolding story where interesting facts about life in that village are highlighted.
- There was a strong connection with Quakers in the area, and the story of the contribution of Mary and James Ellis and Sophia Sturge to the National Park and the wider community in this part of north Connemara should be explored.
- Emigration is an important recurring story for the area, and like many others, thousands emigrated, particularly during and after the famine years, from remote windswept homesteads. Potential linkage and synergy with the likes of the Irish Emigration Museum <https://epicchq.com> should be carefully examined.
- Management of the uplands bog areas as semi-natural habitats that have co-evolved with agriculture over millennia is an interesting and important conservation story that visitors would be interested in hearing about, especially the role that the livestock play in keeping it open, mitigating fire risks, and the species and habitats that depend on the light grazing to survive.
- There are some old items of agricultural equipment around the park, and these could be collected in one area or spread out along the new looped walk. Their story could be told in an integrated way, linked to the animals and the ghosts of communities past. (It might be an idea to link in with the relevant curator in the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life in Castlebar.)

The primary concept would be to keep it simple and have a looped walk(s) that is self-guided and takes visitors through a range of landscapes, interesting stories, and interpretations. In addition, guide walks may be offered at certain times of the year to coincide with Heritage Week, Biodiversity Week, Connemara Green Festival, Clifden Agricultural Show, Connemara Pony Festival, ploughing championships, etc. Initially, it appears there is no justification for highly technical interactive interpretation; the spirit of



keeping it simple and authentic should work. Virtual tours should be considered that are available in different languages to accommodate our international/non-English speaking visitors, e.g. <https://story.com/> or <https://greatvisitorexperiences.com/>

The style could be a traditional interpretation but to a very high standard of branding, copywriting, and visuals. The stories can be arranged sequentially so that visitors can wander through a linear signed journey. Essentially, this is a combination of animals, artefacts, and interpretive content within a physically defined route, likely starting and finishing at the existing visitor centre.

Detailed research could be done on each of the areas above, and potentially others, to create a single integrated narrative, route and experience backed up by a plan to design and operate this new offering in Connemara National Park.

There are several traditional farm buildings along the route of the potential looped walk, and these could be re-purposed or displayed as working farm buildings. This gives the additional advantage of refurbishing existing authentic buildings that are interesting in themselves. Any new build should be avoided, but if sheltered areas are needed, traditional materials could be used with light touch structures that do not compromise the heritage of the local environment.

Traditional crafts like lime plastering could be employed. Potential synergy with the National Centre for Excellence in Furniture Design and Technology (GMIT, Letterfrack) could pay handsome dividends, adding an interesting new layer to the narrative and the physical design and layout of interior spaces. In theory, these buildings could become a 'shop window' for the outputs of the neighbouring college. Additional recommendations for the looped walk(s) attraction include:

- Agree on a simple path surface that fits the sensitive environment and is practical and safe. Future-proof this in relation to climate change/flash flood scenarios. This will be easier at lower levels where the existing paths are already in existence and only need to be extended. The bog road area is much more sensitive, and natural materials such as stones already in place should be used where possible to create an authentic look. New cutting-edge solutions such as raw wool as foundation enhancements on bog paths could be examined. This initiative would be subject to planning and appropriate assessment.
- Use multilingual signage and consistent directional mapping as many visitors to the National Park are from overseas. Information should be available in different languages to assist overseas visitors. The new NPWS branding project addresses the multi-lingual requirements for wayfinding by focusing on the use of symbols for more inclusivity.
- Build upon existing NPWS branding and messaging initiatives.

3.2.3 The Cladoir Sheep

In addition to the above development scenario, an opportunity may arise in the medium to longer term for a new trail in the National Park that tracks the Cladoir sheep. In essence, we learn about the sheep and then take visitors across a trail to find them.

The Cladoir sheep could be employed as a signature native breed for the National Park, their role in the landscape and their importance to the people of the area over thousands of years.

In time (likely 5-10 years), a new waymarked route over the lower hills could be developed for visitors to experience the park's rich biodiversity. This trail could include information panels at intervals to make it more interesting and interactive. Possibly guided at key times of the day, with the experience being branded as a 'Heritage Breeds Safari' open to families with children.





Cladoir Sheep, Connemara National Park

3.2.4 What Is on Offer - Event Programme, Guiding, Interactive Activities

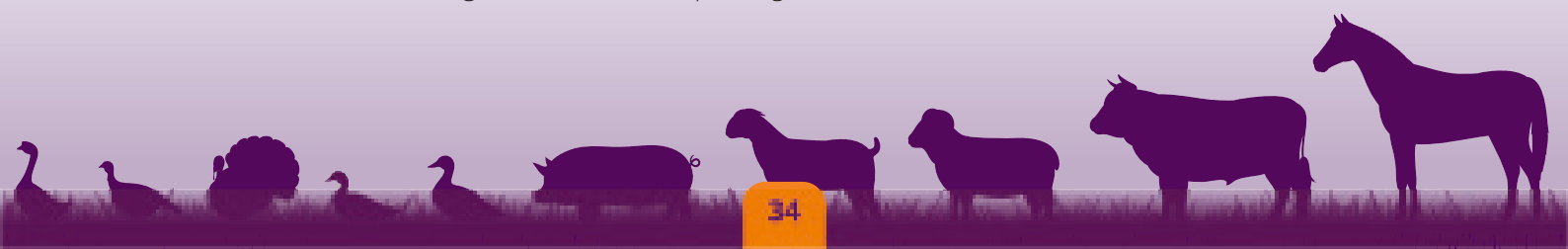
It is worth examining building the capacity to stage specialist events at different times of the year. Festivals that tie in with local activities could offer guided tours on a given theme, Connemara pony sales in Clifden, sheep shearing demo, and building exciting new events programming around time shoulder/off season. Interactive cards could be sold to the public in the shop, including questions that can be answered by visiting the information boards around the park. Other cards could have plants, animals, and insects rare and common to be 'discovered' and marked off. This would give visitors a purpose and challenge. These would be educational, fun, and possibly sponsored to offset design/printing costs.

It would be wise to examine the potential to upskill existing guides through bespoke training, further marrying existing offerings and some of the proposals made above. The team is currently made up of seasonal/temporary or fixed-term contracts, and this needs to be addressed as a team of permanent guides is needed. This team is then supplemented with people on seasonal contracts from late spring to early Autumn. Tailored training may include topics such as visitor management, script development, health and safety, soliciting feedback, employment of props, identification of viewing points and dealing with visitors with mobility and sensory disadvantage - practical courses bespoke to the needs of existing guides.

3.2.5 How It Operates - Rare Breed Section/Team

The emerging heritage breeds dimension to the National Park can be divided into a few different zones:

- The looped walks, which are display areas with information, discovery, and experience
- The surrounding hills with hill sheep and goats



- The outlying areas with cattle and sheep
- The breeding programme for the animals, relationship with farmers/breeders, and happenings.

Some of these are seen by the public while others are less visible/more sensitive, but all are equally important to the overall project. The heritage breeds offer a vital element in developing a better understanding of the park with its rich biodiversity, ecology, history and culture.

Current management has the vision, a clear understanding of the issues and a practical grasp of the task at hand. They have a pivotal role in how the National Park is presented to this and future generations, for foundations and practices laid down now will evolve over time and help define the visitor experiences for the next decade and beyond. The Cladoir sheep project referenced above offers a pathway to dealing in a joined-up manner with an endangered heritage breed at local level from organisation, structures, and breeding programmes. These examples of good practice can be extended to the other breeds, such as goats and cattle, where the park can become a reservoir for endangered genetic lines of the breeds in question. However, we should always be mindful of the labour and facilities that limit the park in this regard. Solutions exist and are being put into practice in Connemara National Park, such as building up relationships with breed societies and farmers, which can benefit all.

3.2.6 Financial Sustainability and Operational Management

This section outlines how some development options could lead to significant improvements in operational and financial sustainability.

The National Park currently is allocated part of the central National Parks and Wildlife service central budget. The park is an important community service that has far-reaching benefits to the wider community and is an important tourism offering. The costs include:

- Staffing costs
- Maintenance
- Landscaping
- Animal feeding
- Livestock purchases
- Visitor centre costs, including energy costs.

The income sources for the park include:

- Retail income (limited income source)
- Café income (limited income source)
- Sale of livestock.

There is no car parking or admission charge due to the National Park status and the desire of the National Parks and Wildlife Service to maintain its parks free of charge to visitors.

The option of the new looped walk and other attractions, such as the higher ground sheep trail, will make the park more attractive to a greater variety of visitors, including families and groups, while accelerating the motivation for a repeat visit. These additional visitors will create a more commercial sustainable visitor centre through increased numbers and higher spending on site per visitor. The development of the rare breeds section to the scale versioned above will result in greater sales of stock in the short



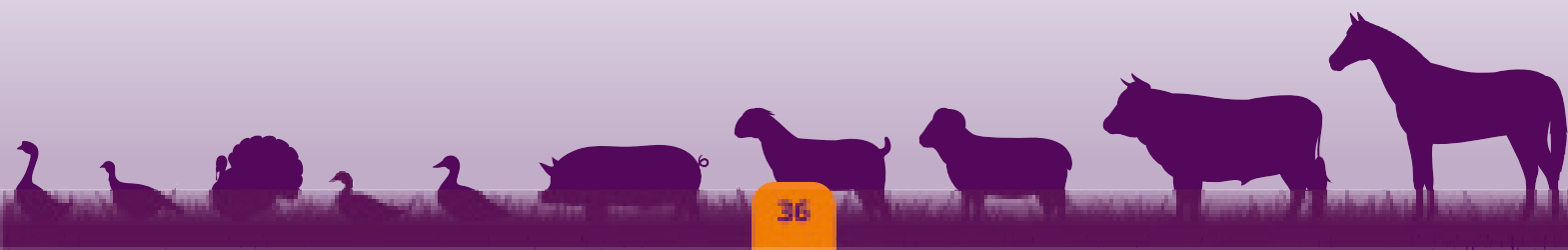
to medium term with little additional input costs. The development of the looped walks will require an initial investment (likely externally publicly funded/part-funded), but the next-level development of the park will certainly attract more visitors and enhanced revenue, particularly in the shoulder season. A practical example of this would be the sale of park merchandise which would significantly feature local heritage breeds.

At some point, car parking charges may be considered by the NPWS for its sites. However, we are likely a considerable distance from this change of culture of being 'free at the point of entry'. The additional attractions outlined above would make a nominal charge much easier to justify, especially if all profit were reinvested into on-site heritage breed projects and animal welfare. Today's visitor is in tune with ethical/non-for-profit entities like the NPWS offering visitors the opportunity to contribute directly through them towards the likes of the conservation and promotion of Irish heritage breeds being nurtured in the park. Perhaps innovative ways of donating or crowd funding exist to help directly support the park's heritage breeds.

3.3 Recommendations for Connemara National Park - Living Heritage Centre

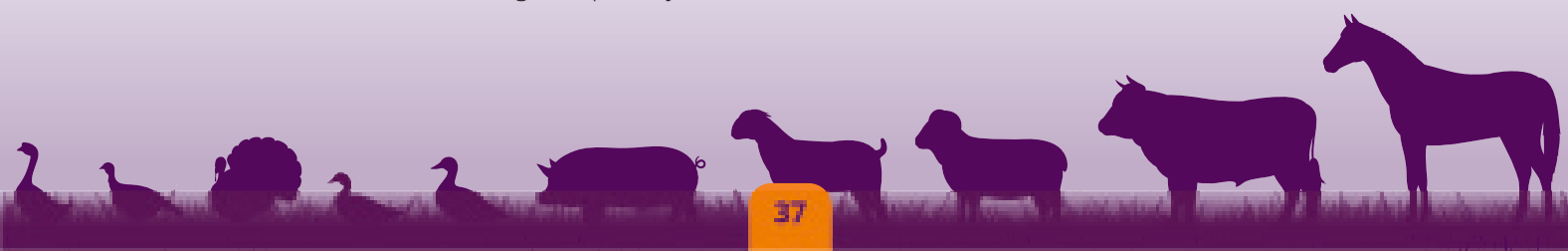
The following is an outline of 12 key recommendations to help conserve and move heritage breeds forward in Connemara National Park:

- 1. CREATION OF A NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN:** To include the management of the National Park as a living heritage centre conserving and promoting heritage breeds.
- 2. COOPERATION & SYNERGY WITH NEWBRIDGE HOUSE & FARM:** Both facilities should have formalised cooperation and agreements (e.g. memorandum of understanding). There is potential also to include other sites like Tannaghmore Farm (Lurgan, Co Armagh). Going forward, the two farms should be viewed as a combined resource and managed accordingly. Joint working could include the potential for staff exchanges/training, sharing resources/joint purchasing, educational programming development, and joint promotion via new and traditional media.
- 3. FESTIVALS & EVENTS:** The potential for co-delivering festivals and events with a heritage breeds theme is significant. The living heritage centre should organise and host events around Heritage Week (August), Biodiversity Week (May), Alcock and Brown Festival (June), Connemara Pony Festival (August), National Ploughing Championships (September), Climate Action Week (October), Connemara Green Festival (October) and organise open days and demonstration as part of the centre's events programme over the summer. The living heritage centre should also attend and display at local agricultural shows, and where possible, display some of the heritage breeds. Connemara National Park should attend and display (along with Newbridge) at the National Ploughing Championship (September). See the Newbridge section for further joint-promotion activity.
- 4. BREEDING CO-OPERATION:** The breeding programme on the two farms should complement each other to prevent duplication. Connemara National Park does not intend to breed any other stock (other than those outlined above) but could work with Newbridge farm on displaying some of their heritage breeding not traditionally kept at Connemara National Park with a reciprocal arrangement in place.
- 5. COMMUNICATIONS & INTERPRETATION PLANNING:** Connemara National Park to do this as part of the current interpretation and exhibits on offer and include the heritage breed story. Communications and interpretive planning should be developed in closer collaboration with Newbridge farm, as cross and joint marketing would be to their mutual benefit. Joint video production



(generic videos X2) is an obvious area for practical cooperation where the farm is put into the context of the wider telling of the Irish heritage breeds 'story'. This commitment to enhancing the quality of the interpretative displays in both sites could extend to site-specific dedicated interactive interpretation displays within the two visitor centres, interpretation panels along the farm/park trails in both locations, traditional leaflets/booklets, jointly organised photographic shoots to build a comprehensive library of breed images, the enhancement of the guided farm walk experience in both farms, development of school tours, and practical demonstrations (e.g. sheep shearing and milking). There is considerable scope for both farms to develop these programming threads further.

6. **STORYTELLING ENHANCEMENT:** Further research and promotion of the agricultural and cultural history of the National Park (early settlements/archaeology, lime kiln, turf cutting - old bog road, industrial school farm, gifting of Connemara ponies to the park, etc.) and its presentation across multiple platforms (see below). This research should suitably integrate into the scrips being developed by the park's tour guides.
7. **WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA:** There is a need to dedicate part of the Connemara National Park's website to the living heritage centre. Heritage breeds are an integral and fully functioning part of Connemara National Park. A dedicated part of the website should spell out the experience, talk about the individual breeds, pilot or research projects, and outline the visitor services available. Importantly this new exposure needs to be properly managed, e.g. regular (2/3 weekly) updates on social media on the heritage breeds, e.g., cows calving, moving cattle into a new paddock, updates on conservation programmes and conservation grazing projects.
8. **COMMERCIALISATION:** There is significant potential on the commercial side, in particular a farm shop, which could be run ideally by the rare breed societies. The shop could sell produce from the Connemara National Park farm (meat, wool-based products), whose products ideally would be organic and sustainable. Other heritage breed products and merchandise could also be made available from across Ireland and possibly beyond. The subtle public relations value for heritage breeds of such a practical initiative would likely be considerable, as well as income-generating. A collaboration with a local abattoir and the restaurant franchise onsite could allow for produce from the Connemara National Park to be served in the tearooms, further enhancing the living heritage experience at Connemara National Park.
9. **STANDARDS & INTERNATIONAL REGISTRATION:** It is advised that Connemara National Park and Newbridge House & Farm (living heritage centres X2) should seek registration with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (UK), whose system ensures a level of standards in living heritage centres on animal welfare and in the promotion of good practice. This 'standards-based approach' to managing the leading centres in Ireland will enhance animal welfare while improving the overall visitor experience.
10. **EDUCATION & RESEARCH:** Connemara National Park has a long history of research, and the park should be seen as a centre for learning and education. Prior to 2006, it had a close relationship with NUI Galway, which provided several bursary students annually. Note there is a new BSc in Agricultural science in NUI Galway. The heritage animals from Connemara National Park are presently involved in a demonstration farm for the LIFE Lough Carra Project, and a PhD from the University of Santa Barbara is presently undertaking research on the heritage breeds. Both Connemara and Newbridge should co-develop an ambitious education programme involving the heritage breeds for national school children, as well as a programme for agricultural science students in secondary school (including encouraging transition year placement). Expansion of collaborations and student placements from agricultural colleges should be facilitated, and both centres should continually seek students and research from third level institutions.
11. **FARM WALKS AND THEMED TRAIL DEVELOPMENT:** The walks for the heritage breeds should include the following as a priority:



- › The proposed farm walk is currently with An Bord Pleanala for approval: This walk will be dedicated to agricultural heritage and the heritage breeds.
- › The proposed all-ability looped walk, again currently with An Bord Pleanala, will pass through the stables and the paddocks above the visitor centre.
- › The Sruffaunboy walk (existing) passes by the paddocks above the visitor centre.
- › The development of a possible waymark trail for experienced hikers could bring visitors into the mountains where they could observe the goats. Note: it is not envisaged that the park will graze the Cladoir sheep up on the mountain.

12. CONSERVATION GRAZING PLAN: The primary reason for heritage breeds in the Connemara National Park is their role in conservation grazing and environmental services; considerable research is ongoing. It is of the utmost importance that the heritage breeds at Connemara are managed in a sustainable manner, and that the park remains a nationally significant demonstration site, where these animals can be seen fulfilling their ecological function in promoting biodiversity. Now there is no conservation grazing plan for Connemara to provide a roadmap to see this essential goal realised.

13. OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT & RESOURCING: Connemara National Park’s living heritage centre offering is significantly under-resourced. This needs to be immediately remedied, especially in relation to staff and annual budgeting. Currently, the heritage breeds kept at Connemara National Park have no specifically dedicated resources other than the upkeep and interpretation of the Connemara ponies and the donkeys, which are outsourced. A team of staff is required to deliver the living heritage centre working in conjunction with the existing staff at Connemara National Park. The living heritage centre and heritage breeds need a coordinator. The maintenance of the animals and the farm are in addition to other duties. As the farm has developed, there has been no allowance or additional allocation for this work. It is recommended there should be dedicated staff (or staff time) for the animal husbandry, welfare, stock transportation, herding, breeding programmes and conservation grazing projects. This staffing resource should equate to two full-time general operative staff. There also needs to be dedicated staff (or staff time) in relation to visitor services and interpretation for the living heritage centre (for example, interpretation, guide walks, school tours, development of content for leaflets and publications, updating the website and social media, all covered above). A team of permanent guides is required, supplemented by seasonal staff working from late spring to early Autumn. There is a recommendation for two general operative staff (or staff time equivalent) to manage the farm and animals, and one visitor guide for visitor services and interpretation. Also, resourcing should deal with training and upskill of staff and set out minimum requirements for staff dealing with animals (possibly needing at least one staff member with a green cert, or equivalent, in farming). Bespoke training/upskilling should focus on animal welfare and husbandry, heritage breeds, conservation grazing, and could also look at staff exchanges with other similar centres and facilities. The projected additional staffing costs to properly deliver the living heritage centre at Connemara National Park would be as follows:

Living Heritage Centre Co-Ordinator (Area Manager Grade)	€60,000
GO for Managing Heritage Breeds (x2)	€70,000
Visitor Guide for Heritage Breeds	€30,000
Total Additional Staffing Cost	€160,000 Per Annum



- 14. CO-ORDINATION.** Most significantly, there is a need to resource a position to implement this plan and spearhead the coordination of the living heritage centre. This role will also cover the management of the heritage breeds at Wild Nephin National Park and throughout the Western Region. The role may not be at present a full-time position and may include some other tasks within the region. However, we would expect that the workload with time would warrant a full-time level of commitment. The duties of the position would be to:
- Coordinate the rollout of the recommendations included in this study;
 - Liaise with Newbridge House & Farm on developing a formalised agreement on both living heritage centres working together. Develop and build on this partnership, including synergies and breeding programmes;
 - Work with visitor services at Connemara National Park in developing interpretation and content for the website for the living heritage centre. Continually update the website and social media regarding the living heritage centre;
 - Coordinate with visitor services at Connemara National Park regarding the annual events programme for the living heritage centre;
 - Manage the modest budget for the heritage breeds and living heritage centre;
 - Management of the flock book/register for all heritage breeds, including timely registration of all new additions;
 - Ensure compliance with all SMR (Statutory Management Requirements) for the farm at Connemara National Park, as set down by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine;
 - Liaising with all relevant breeding societies, ensuring that Connemara National Park is playing a full role in the conservation and promotion of heritage breeds;
 - Coordinate registration, planning and attendance at festivals, shows and events;
 - Coordinate the development and implementation of conservation grazing plans and schemes within and associated with Connemara National Park;
 - Liaise with and attract research by universities and other research institutions regarding heritage breeds;
 - Secretary and PRO of the Cladoir Sheep Preservation Committee;
 - Develop, source and organise appropriate training for staff.

The role of living heritage centre co-ordinator would involve a significant body of work, and whoever is expected to fulfil the role must be afforded the resources, especially time, to undertake these responsibilities.

In addition, it is worth being mindful that in terms of financial resourcing, the upkeep of animals is presently paid for from the current budget with some modest capital funding for the purchase of stock. There is no current dedicated budget for heritage breeds. Specifically, there is also a recommendation that there is a dedicated annual budget of €50k (excluding staffing costs) for the upkeep and transport of all animals. The €50,000 would be broken down as €30,000 to cover all animal feed and welfare, as well as maintenance of animal housing, fencing, livestock trailers, and transport cost; €10,000 to cover all promotion of the living heritage centre, including travel and livery for events and shows; and €10k annually for animal purchases. However, it would be expected in time that animal purchases would be cost-neutral as they would be offset by sales.



Finally, given the previously mentioned interpretative-type initiatives, the development of the next generation of promotional, educational and interpretation material, including website, publications, displays/panels/signage, and festivals/events relating to heritage breeds at Connemara National Park, should be immediately considered. This would have a dedicated budget of €150k (delivered at €30k per year over five years), which would represent the minimum expenditure required.

3.4 Conclusion

Connemara National Park is a significant, nationally respected location for the promotion and protection of Irish heritage breeds. It is likely to undergo exciting enhancements over the coming decade. There exists an exciting opportunity for the National Park to play to its strengths in line with global tourism trends and adopt a stronger position in the active conservation and promotion of its native breeds. These breeds have been central to Connemara's identity but, to date, have been underplayed in the central Connemara National Park narrative. Traditional heritage breeds can help enhance the visitor experience and add to the positive public perception of Connemara National Park now and for future generations.



Connemara National Park

Connemara National Park Action Plan

AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE: Short Term - Within 6 Months; Medium Term - Within 2 Years; Long Term - 2+ Years	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS: Small - Less Than €1k; Medium - Less Than 10k; Large - More Than 10k	OUTCOMES
STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT PLAN						
Create a Connemara National Park Management Plan	Connemara National Park needs an integrated management plan coordinating the strategy and actions around the multiple management issues over the next five to 10 years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set out an overall strategy. Outline conservation management and recreation management within the National Park. Motivation for conserving rare breeds, promotion and education regarding rare breeds. Outline objectives and targets. Vision for the living heritage centre at Connemara. Timetable of things to achieve over the next five years. 	NPWS - management at Connemara National Park.	Medium term - within the next two years.	The main work is internal, and the project needs to be coordinated by local NPWS management facilitated by outside consultants. Medium budget - €10k.	A management plan for Connemara National Park that reflects all the key issues, including how rare breeds fit into the overall plan.
ANIMALS & STOCK MANAGEMENT						
Plan & Programme for Heritage Breeds	Document plan for heritage breeds at Connemara National Park. Breeding programme at Connemara National Park in conjunction with Newbridge farm -	Put a formal plan in place, setting out breeds and numbers. Breeding numbers must be realistic and in line with carrying capacity. Irish moiled cattle - 10 breeding cows, Cladoir sheep - 50 breeding ewes, Tamworth pigs - 1 breeding pair, Galway	Connemara National Park needs an integrated management plan coordinating the strategy and actions around	Short to medium term.	Low budget - mainly time resource.	Output is a planned breeding programme that is aligned with resources, carrying capacity and with Newbridge plan.



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOMES
Standards & International Registration	avoid any duplication – work with Newbridge on displaying some of their heritage breeding not kept at Connemara and vice versa.	sheep - 10 breeding ewes, Connemara ponies - 5 mares and some followers, Donkeys - 2, old Irish goat - manage feral population within NP.	the multiple management issues over the next five to 10 years.	Short to medium term.	Time resources only.	Connemara National Park is recognised as a high standards site for the protection of native rare breeds.
Conservation Grazing	Connemara and Newbridge farm should register with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust UK, whose system ensures a level of standards on animal welfare and good practice.	Adopting this standard-based approach will improve the onsite conditions, visitor experience, and the national reputation of Connemara National Park as a rare breeds location.	Connemara National Park management.	Short to medium term.	Time resource mainly for staff.	Output is a planned breeding programme that is aligned with resources, carrying capacity and with Newbridge plan.
Conservation Grazing	Establish a conservation grazing plan for Connemara National Park.	This is a central function and the primary reason for heritage breeds in Connemara National Park – the park needs to be a demonstration site displaying sustainable management.	Connemara National Park management.	Short to medium term.	Time resource mainly for staff.	Output is a planned breeding programme that is aligned with resources, carrying capacity and with Newbridge plan.
VISITOR EXPERIENCE						
Physical Elements of the Visitor Experience	There are various areas of the physical visitor experience for development. (1) Proposed farm walk dedicated to the agricultural heritage and rare breeds.	Detailed planning work for the new farm looped walk (once planning has been received). Assess any outside and internal funding sources. Complete any reports/applications/reports for funding.	NPWS - Management at Connemara National Park.	Medium term – within the next two years.	Work is a combination of internal management time and potential external consultant assistance. Works may be delivered as part of the strategic partnership with Fáilte Ireland. Large budget.	A new quality visitor experience – will really add to what is on offer at Connemara National Park. Reputation as rare breed location enhanced.



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOMES
	(2) The proposed all-ability looped walk will pass through the stables and paddocks above the visitor centre.	Detailed planning work for the new farm looped walk (once planning has been received). Assess any outside and internal funding sources. Complete any reports/ applications/reports for funding.	NPWS - Management at Connemara National Park.	Medium term - within the next two years.	As above.	A new quality visitor experience – what is on offer at Connemara National Park. Reputation as rare breed location enhanced.
	(3) The development of a possible waymarked trail for more experienced walkers – into the higher mountain area to observe goats. Note: it is not envisaged that the park will graze the Cladoir sheep up on the mountain.	Complete initial work on potential routes and paths available. Compile all relevant interpretation, stories and material relevant to this trail. Assess funding options. Apply for planning permission – reports, drawings and detailed plans.	NPWS - Management at Connemara National Park.	Medium to longer-term - 2+ years.	As above.	A significant enhancement to the visitor experience.
Messaging & Communications on Rare Breeds	Create a common and consistent set of messages on rare breeds at Connemara National Park that communicates the key messages - script, imagery, ethos and strategy.	Employ a specialist to create all of the relevant messages for each medium.	Connemara National Park management.	Short term.	Medium budget - €10k - capital allocation.	Consistent and quality messaging on rare breeds.
Inter-pretation	Develop visitor interpretation for Connemara National Park in collaboration with Newbridge Farm.	The following areas to be explored and actioned: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint publications • Commission a video on the history of heritage breeds in Connemara National Park 	Connemara National Park management.	Medium term.	Medium/large budget (€10-20k) – may involve interpretive consultants and/or signage provision.	Improved visitor experience.



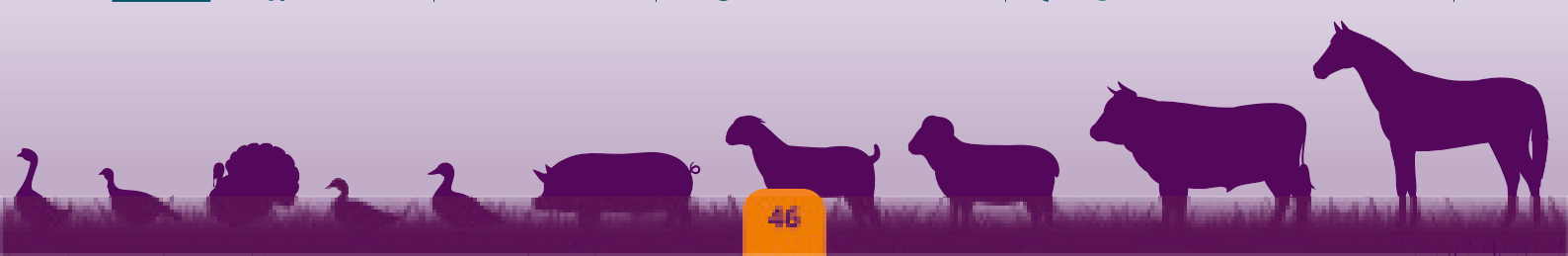
AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOMES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated interactive interpretive displays within the visitor centre Interpretive panels along the farm trail Leaflets/booklets/daily guided farm walks Demonstrations on the cultural history of the National Park. 				
Market Research	The site would be greatly assisted by up to date market research on the target market.	Bring in a market research specialist to carry out detailed work.	Connemara National Park management.	Medium term.	Medium budget.	Improved information to base visitor experience improvement on into the future.
Storytelling Enhancements	There are opportunities to improve the storytelling at Connemara - additional and new content.	Involves further research and promotion of the agricultural and cultural history of the National Park and its presentation across multiple platforms.	Connemara National Park management.	Medium term.	Low budget – mainly internal staff time.	Improved visitor information, leading to a better visitor experience.
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS						
Website & Booking System	The website needs to be upgraded, and part of it dedicated to the living heritage centre and rare breeds.	The website should spell out the strategy, talk about the individual breeds and projects and outline the visitor services and experiences available at Connemara National Park in relation to rare breeds. Also, regular updates on social media with interesting projects and news stories.	Connemara National Park management.	Short term.	Medium budget – operational.	Improved information available to visitors online – improve expectations and understanding.



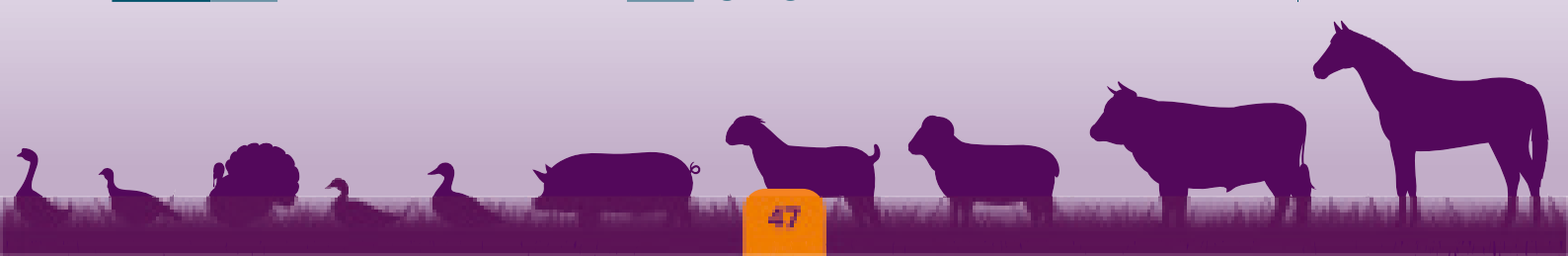
AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOMES
Photography of Rare Breeds	Create a bank of professional high-resolution images of rare breeds on site that are suitable for circulation or promotions.	Employ a local professional photographer to take a bank of images of rare breeds and their setting.	Connemara National Park management.	Short term.	Small budget.	Bank of images that can be drawn from for promotions, social media and website.
Commercial Retail Products - Rare Breeds Related	Identify suitable products for selling in the retail area that link to rare breeds to strengthen the consistent messaging further.	Establish a list of rare breeds related, organic products that could be sold in the café or a farm shop that specialises in local produce – suppliers may be crucial here as unlikely that product could come directly from the farm to the café or farm shop.	Connemara National Park management.	Medium term.	Small budget.	Improved linkage between rare breeds and other parts of the experience – better promotion for rare breeds.
Rare Breeds Consistent Messaging	The whole communication process and content for rare breeds need to be created.	Identify a suitable professional to create all the relevant information and messaging.	Connemara National Park management.	Short term	Medium budget	Improved bank of information and consistent quality messaging.
SPECIAL PROGRAMMING & PARTNERSHIPS						
Partnership with Newbridge Farm	This relationship has been deepened through the work done on the rare breeds study and can now be further built upon. It can now move to a formal agreement between the two sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree on formalised cooperation and agreements. • Set out a memorandum of understanding supported by a range of areas for formal cooperation. • Staff exchanges/sharing resources/joint training/preventing duplication. 	Coordinated by Hans Visser together with William Cormacan.	Short to medium term.	Small budget.	Establishment of a formal agreement/partnership between Connemara National Park rare breeds strategy and Newbridge Farm.



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOMES
Rare Breed Societies	The relationships and partnerships with the Irish rare breed societies could be improved and built upon.	Establish communication channels with all key rare breed societies that are relevant to Connemara NP.	Connemara National Park staff.	Medium term.	Small budget.	Improves cooperation leading to sharing of information and best practice.
Festivals & Events	There is an opportunity to create a small number of new events at Connemara based around the rare breeds theme.	These events could involve a Heritage Week/Biodiversity Week event, etc.	Connemara National Park management.	Medium term.	Small budget - mainly time input.	Greater awareness of rare breed activity at Connemara National Park.
Department of Agriculture	This is an important partnership from a rare breeds point of view, and the department has expressed interest in working closely with Connemara and Newbridge on developing their rare breed programmes.	Establish a working group with the department and meet every 12 months to keep each other fully updated.	Connemara National Park management.	Medium and longer term.	Small budget - mainly time input.	Output is a good working relationship with the department and a closer understanding between the parties.
Annual Rare Breed Conference	The initiation of an annual rare breeds conference is included in the Newbridge Farm rare breeds action plan - it is mentioned here as collaboration on that annual conference would also be beneficial to Connemara.	Connemara National Park may not opt to host the conference in the early years but, over time, can play an important role in its creation, organisation and content.	Connemara National Park management.			



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOMES
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH & EDUCATION						
Education & Research	An educational programme can be developed involving the heritage breeds for national schools as well as a programme for agricultural science students and student placements (including TY placements).	Expand the current collaborations and student placements and work closely with Newbridge Farm to seek students and research from third level. There is an opportunity to share information and experience to assist this work.	Connemara National Park management.	Medium term.	Mainly time resource - may also be some funding for this.	Recognition as a centre for education and research - this creates confidence and reputation.
OPERATIONS & CAPACITY BUILDING						
Overall Resources at Connemara National Park	The farm staff resources are extremely limited.	Allocate additional budget as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Living heritage centre coordinator (area manager grade). 2. Additional general operative staff to manage the farm and animals. 3. Visitor guide for visitor services and interpretation. Budget - additional annual €50k for upkeep costs and management of the animals. Additional budget to develop interpretation of €30k per annum (additional €150k over five years).	Connemara National Park management.	Short to medium term.	Medium budget.	Additional resource allocation creates the ability to professionally manage the rare breed programme and develop it in line with the rare breeds report.

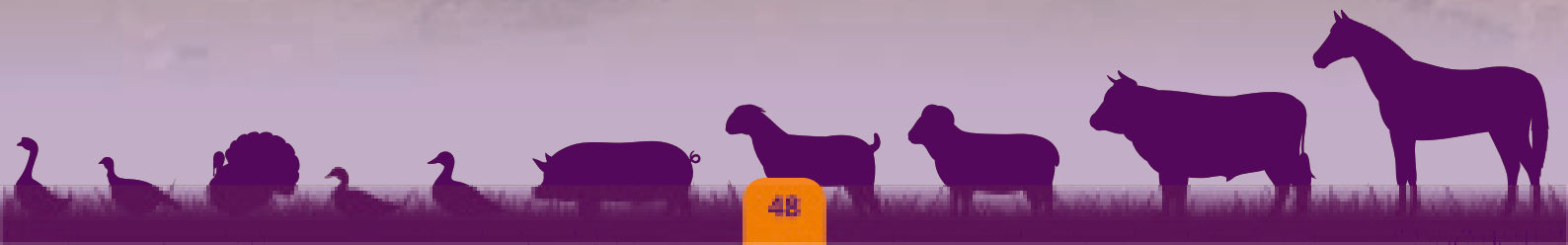


Newbridge House & Farm



4

NEWBRIDGE HOUSE & FARM



4 | NEWBRIDGE HOUSE & FARM

4.1 Background & Context

This first of its kind study on native Irish rare breeds is sponsored jointly by Fingal County Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Much of the relevance of the study lies in the fact that two of the main public living heritage centres for rare breeds in this country are under their direction and management, i.e. Newbridge House & Farm and Connemara National Park.

One of the specific objectives of this work is for these living heritage centres to have a spotlight shone on them, highlighting their strengths and shortcomings, analysing how the transfer of best practice elsewhere at living heritage sites can work to their advantage and to make practical suggestions as to how their future direction and operation could be improved. This would include joint working between both sites.

The consultants leading this study spent a full day onsite at Newbridge House & Farm. They had discussions with managers from both Fingal County Council and Aramark, going through a detailed examination of the farm site. This was followed by an onsite workshop, which posed the following questions:

- What is the historic significance of native breeds to Newbridge House & Farm? Where did rare breeds at Newbridge originate?
- What is the current situation at Newbridge House & Farm regarding native rare breeds - breeding stock, breeding programmes, conservation grazing and future direction?
- What is the financial and operational position at the park, and how is this influenced by native rare breeds?
- What developments could be made to improve the farm for rare breeds, and how could any new opportunities be operationally and financially sustainable?

To support this research, a wide range of consultations examining best practice nationally and internationally in conserving and promoting rare breeds at living heritage centres was undertaken. This included engagement with directors of international rare breed associations and managers of living heritage centres across Europe. This original body of research has helped shape the recommendation in this chapter and elsewhere in the study.

A further workshop was held with Fingal and Aramark staff at Newbridge farm to help scope out necessary action planning, which is included in this document.

4.2 Analysis of the Current Position

Newbridge House & Farm - Background

Newbridge Demesne is situated near Donabate in north County Dublin in the Fingal County Council administrative area. The Demesne includes extensive parklands, a traditional farm and a historic house. There is public parking, walkways and a children's playground onsite. Newbridge House is considered a perfect example of an early Georgian mansion. It was built in 1736 for Archbishop Charles Cobb, and it was designed by the famous architect George Semple (1700 -1782) and the Scottish architect James Gibbs (1682-1754). The house remained in the Cobb family until 1985, when it was sold to Fingal County Council in an agreement that allowed the family to stay in part of the house from time to time. The Cobb

family's furniture and artwork are still in the house, and it is open to the public along with the farm area. Newbridge farm covers 29 acres and is home to an array of native Irish and English rare breeds. The farm is a working farm that includes a courtyard, a dairy and a forge. There is a collection of animals, both rare breeds and other typical farm animals. They are arranged in a farmyard, paddocks and a pens area which is attractively laid out for visitors to wander through and enjoy the animals. There is some basic information on each of the animals, but interpretation is generally light.

4.2.1 The Current Operation at Newbridge House & Farm

The Newbridge House site was opened to the public in 1986, and the farm opened to the public in 1990. It is very popular with young families as the children can get close to the animals and there is a good range of interesting family activities to enjoy.

Newbridge Demesne is owned by Fingal County Council, which manages the animal, agricultural and services side of the operation, while the visitor attraction side is under a management contract with Aramark Limited (previously Shannon Heritage).

The farm and animals are all managed by Fingal County Council staff. The staff in charge of the farm area are competent, skilled and knowledgeable in rare breeds and farm management. Rare breeds were introduced into Newbridge from the early days, and each succeeding site supervisor continued the process of keeping rare breeds. Kerry cows were the first rare breed to be kept at Newbridge Farm. The breeding strategy for each generation was determined by the park supervisor. This succession in managing and promoting rare breeds was ad-hoc at best and tended to be more reactive than part of a well-structured strategy. Senior management in the council are supportive of the current rare breed arrangements onsite. There is very little recognition within the council of the part that rare breeds play in the overall operation and promotion of the site.

The visitor experience is currently managed by Aramark on a management contract which is renewed every three years. The visitor experience is traditional and well-arranged and appeals to families with young children. There is also a café and retail area that generate revenue for the site, both now operated by Aramark.

The Aramark site manager reports to the overall area manager for the Fingal sites operated by Aramark. The overall area manager is based at Malahide Castle and gardens, as it is the largest of the Aramark operated sites in the area.

As the visitor management side is performed by Aramark, there could be a practical disconnect between the development and maintenance of that farm attraction piece and the overall management and promotion of the site.

4.2.2 The Current Financial Structure

The site receives admission income along with commercial revenues from retail and café areas and the operation of a programme of events. All of the operational income is received by Aramark, which retains this income and accounts for it. They then incur all operating costs of the visitor side of the attraction, including management, guiding, promotion, HR and commercial staff. The site operates at an annual deficit which is covered by Fingal County Council under the management contract. The costs, therefore, outweigh the income in a typical year.



4.2.3 The Current Visitor Offering

The farm is responsible for attracting most of the visitors to Newbridge Demesne. The house is popular, but families and children are more drawn to the farm and animal area. This farmyard is reputed to be the best-preserved farmyard in the country, with a 300-year history.

The visitor experience is generally focused on the animals in their pens and shelters and visitors meandering through an open farm area. It is very enjoyable for both children and adults. It is very light on education and much more directed at light entertainment.

The existing interpretation panels are very good for children and are entertaining and educational for them, but there is very little for adults to enjoy and appreciate. There is no mention of rare breeds on the interpretive panels, which appears to be an opportunity missed. The rare breed stories could be really well told in interesting ways at the farm.

4.2.4 Visitor Profile

The current level of visitors is around 80,000 to 90,000 annually. These are mainly domestic visitors and locals and are predominantly families with young children. There are many walkers, joggers and cyclists who use the parkland area for general recreation, and there is a play area that is very popular adjacent to the car park. Many park users are not aware that the farm exists. The vast majority of visitors are attracted by the farm as only about 4,000 visitors of the total go into the house.



Farmyard, Newbridge House & Farm

Fingal County Council has counters at the main gates of the site to monitor the numbers of vehicles arriving and leaving the site.

The site has performed well during Covid-19, as the open-air aspect meant it could continue to open during much of the pandemic and only close during the peak of the lockdowns.

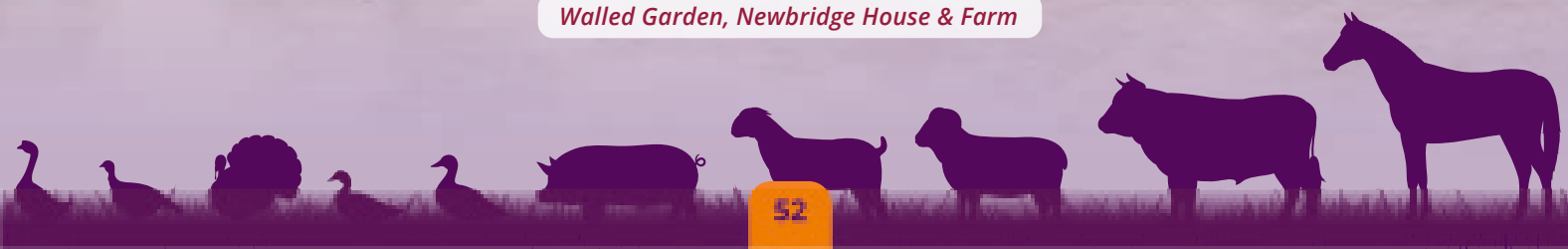
Domestic tourism has boosted the numbers since Covid-19. During the season in 2021, the number of visitors per day reached 1500 to 3000, whereas during 2019, this number was 1500 to 2000 per day. There are a high number of school tours from mainly primary schools that visit Newbridge farm each year. The tour is extremely attractive as a school outing for national school level.

4.2.5 The Walled Garden

There is a very significant intact walled garden. The walls are in excellent condition, and the area is well presented generally. The various garden structures, such as the pineapple house, are in ruin but could easily be restored if funding became available. At the moment visitors are disappointed with this area and are expecting something more from it.



Walled Garden, Newbridge House & Farm



4.2.6 The Flavours of Fingal Event

There is an annual event that has been running for many years in July called the Flavours of Fingal. It features promotions of food and sustainable farming and community from around the Fingal area. It is extremely popular, attracting over 70,000 people across a two-day event. The event has become even more popular with the increasing trend in organic natural foods, and Fingal is seen as one of the best areas of the country for growing produce for the natural foods market. This event is considered extremely on-trend regarding the popularity of organic Irish food and sustainable farming.

4.2.7 Promotion of Newbridge Farm & the Native Rare Breeds

The promotion of the visitor attraction at Newbridge is now the responsibility of Aramark, having transferred recently from Shannon Heritage as the operator of the site. All of the usual channels of promotion are used to attract both domestic and international visitors.

The current promotional methods are used:

- **Website**
- **Social Media/digital media**
- **Radio advertising for specific promotions/events**
- **Flyers/brochures**
- **Various other methods as directed by Aramark marketing**

Branding the attraction and farm is the responsibility of Fingal County Council. They develop the overall branding, and then the operators use that branding to promote the park.

4.2.8 Rare Breeds - What, How, Why

There is a large collection of rare breeds onsite that are listed overleaf.

Although there is an impressive collection of rare breeds onsite, there is very little information about them, and they are not promoted as a key part of the visitor attraction. Without a doubt, this is an area of potential, and the story of rare breeds could become a unique selling point for the farm and form part of the heritage story. The information booklet that people receive on entry has very little about the rare breeds onsite and the background story of each.

The farm is currently working with various breeder from across Ireland.



The current stock of rare breeds at Newbridge Farm

ANIMAL	BREED	MALE	FEMALE
Cows	Moiled	1	3
	Kerry	2	8
	Dexter		4
	Droimeann	1	3
	Short Horn		1
	Highland		4
	Longhorn		1
Horses	Draught		1
	Connemara		3
	Kerry Bog	1	1
	Falabella	1	3
Donkeys	Miniature		3
Sheep	Galway	1	8
	Jacobs		6
	Blue Face Leister		5
	Soays		12
	Shetland		2
Pigs	Berkshire	1	1
	Tamworth		2
	Saddleback		2
	Gloucestershire		1
	Potbelly		2
Goats	Pygmies		8
	Golden Guernseys		5
	Nubian		1
	Saanen		1

Note: Irish Red Deer are not part of the farm but are part of the parklands.

Breeding Programmes

Trying to have any sort of a breeding programme for each breed is very difficult at Newbridge due to the huge number of breeds and the small number of each breed. The enclosed farm, where the visitors go to view the animals, is far too small as a farm per se, and it is used more as a shop window or viewing gallery for the animals. This results in a huge workload for the staff, moving and feeding animals twice a day. No plan for breeding other than trying to have young animals at different times of the year appears to operate. This needs to be addressed as part of the overall strategy of the site and is returned to in part B.



Grazing Schemes

The grazing system for the animals in the display area is under too much pressure due to the sheer numbers of animals in the paddocks at any one time, resulting in additional feed being used to make up the shortfall. This is time-consuming for the staff and expensive to operate, not to mention the resulting overload of parasites infecting the animals. There is a huge area of grassland around the house used for meadows but not used for grazing. The whole area of conservation grazing is one that has opportunity and is returned to later in this section.

4.2.9 Advantages or Unique Selling Points of Newbridge House & Farm

Newbridge House & Farm has several key advantages in terms of its positioning as a nationally significant rare breed farm destination. These can be further developed as follows:

- The management and staff are particularly enthusiastic and skilled in looking after animals and rare breeds in particular. They understand the task and have a strong empathy for the site.
- The Fingal management has good knowledge of all the key players on the rare breeds scene in Ireland.
- The composition of the site with natural paddocks, farmyard and courtyard lends itself perfectly to the attraction as a living heritage centre.
- The general location in North Dublin means that future visitation should be fairly well guaranteed and viability and commerciality very positive.

4.3 Recommendations for Newbridge House & Farm

Newbridge - A Historic House & Farm Celebrating its Native Distinctiveness

The opportunity

There is an opportunity for Newbridge House & Farm to further create a sustainable living heritage centre, focusing more on the native rare breeds and related authentic heritage that would appeal to a wide variety of today's visitors. A more commercial approach should be taken to increase income streams for the farm.

Creating this overall ethos would assist with managing the attraction along a very definite sustainable route that would give the site more distinctiveness, authenticity, and appeal.

4.3.1 Vision for Newbridge Farm - Irish Native Rare Breeds

A key question at this stage is what the longer-term concept for the rare breeds farm within the context of the broader Newbridge Demesne heritage destination is.

The farm vision:

'Create a unique visitor experience based around the national role of Newbridge farm in the promotion and management of native rare breeds.'

The Newbridge Demesne vision could read something like the following:

'Further enhance the integrated development of the heritage-rich house, estate, landscape, and rare breeds farm as a signature branded tourism destination within the broad Dublin brand.'



The vision above for the future of native rare breeds at Newbridge should be built upon the following pillars:

- **THE VISITORS** - provide key target markets, the domestic market and young families in particular, with the experiences they seek.
- **THE ANIMALS** - animal welfare is always paramount.
- **THE OPERATION** - deliver best-in-class responsible management systems through an expert and highly motivated team.
- **THE ENTERPRISE** - the farm dimension to the overall site is commercially dynamic and sustainable.

The word 'hub' has been employed to describe the potential future development of the native rare breed component of both Newbridge and Connemara sites. The following criteria provide an understanding of the nature of a 'hub' in the context of this study. To aspire to be a national 'hub', a site should possess all the following at the outset:

- Existing reputation, history and acknowledged acceptance of the skills and assets on site.
- A critical mass of breeds and supporting infrastructure.
- Trained, experienced and motivated team.
- Awareness and appreciation for science and environmental sustainability.
- Marketplace visibility and brand awareness.
- Integration with the local community.
- Strategic positioning with long term commitment to native rare breeds with adequate resources.

The farm should aim to position itself as more of a working farm based on the theme of 'Irish rare breeds' and less of a zoo type experience with a little of everything offered. By developing the farm as a hub for Irish rare breeds, a singular identity can then run through the whole farm with a coherent story built around it. The hub is essentially about links, especially with the breed societies and breeders. There will be a constant flow of information about best practice on breeding and a flow of genes (stock) between the farm and breeders around the country. This is in line with best international practice. Links with farmers that have Irish rare breeds and are open to the public should also be established/managed to strengthen the practical links between tourism and conservation and promotion of Irish rare breeds.

4.3.2 Thematic Link with Newbridge House & Farm Estate

The rare breeds farm is a component part of the wider appeal of Newbridge House & Farm. Rare breeds are a subset of the pulling power of the overall heritage destination site. The farm will likely remain an important yet majority motivator for mainstream visitors into the future. However, the farm gives the heritage property and estate a unique selling point (USP), and this should be further prioritised, resourced, and messaged to the public. Together, the house, farm and parkland give the visitor a unique insight into what life was like in the 18th century.

It is proposed to set up a structure that would see the site integrated better so that the house could be considered more of a central part of the attraction. The house could have farm food sales and stories around the links to the farm, organic food and sustainability. The house is no longer considered a separate visit but the central hospitality location for the site. This is based on the French vineyard model, where the chateau or main farmhouse features as the central core and hospitality base for the overall farm.



The following are a variety of areas for perhaps enhancing integration and internal cooperation between house and farm:

- Festivals and events management.
- Online marketing and brand building.
- Qualitative and quantitative visitor research and analysis.
- Guide training and mobilisation.
- Education programming.
- Application of new communications technology to help tell the 'story'.
- Signage and language provision.
- Innovative ticketing (incentives for quiet times/off season and larger parties).
- Communication with the local community (especially schools) throughout the year.
- Adoption of good environmental practice.
- Greater servicing of visitors with sensory, mobility and intellectual challenges.



House Interior, Newbridge House & Farm

Also, there is potential to ensure that the operational and staffing structure integrates better. An overall operator for the full site, including the farm, is preferable, but it is unlikely that there are operators out there with the full range of skills needed. If the management contract model is to continue, then a closer working structure is needed onsite. This needs to be capable of merging the planning for the future of the farm offering with the operations and promotions that are carried out by the operating company.

4.3.4 Irish Rare Breed Management Strategy for Newbridge

Rare Breeds at Newbridge - The Focus

The story of the rare breeds in Newbridge is confusing and being lost to a certain extent due to the vast number of breeds, especially the non-native breeds.

The day-to-day operations need to be examined and streamlined from a management perspective, be that in the number of breeds and the cost of feeding some breeds that require all purchased feed. The use of some of the meadows as grazing areas requires serious consideration from a number of angles. It can reduce the workload, reduce the feeding costs and go some way to reducing the use of medicines to treat parasite problems. The parasite problem needs urgent attention before resistance becomes a problem leading to animal welfare problems. A rotational grazing plan needs to be implemented, changing the species of animals in paddocks on a set time scale to break the life cycle of the parasites that infect the animals.

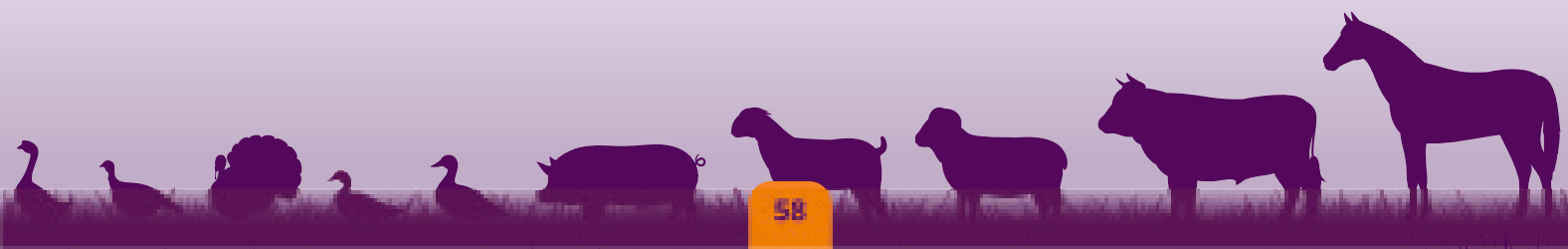
The existing working relationship with local farmers is working well, where cattle move in and out of the farm without any complications. This model should be extended to other farmers, particularly Connemara National Park. One consideration is that these breeds are firstly a food source, except for the horses. Can farmers who sell food from these breeds become partners in supplying stock, so the story of the breed becomes more integrated, i.e. someone making cheese, a dairy farmer milking Kerry cows could supply calves etc.

The farm should concentrate on the Irish rare breeds and have a viable number of each breed on the farm or surrounding lands. By keeping all the Irish breeds, a more comprehensive and coherent message or story can be told. Each of the breeds fits into an ecological or farming culture landscape, be that of a goat owned by a smallholder for milk for the family or an Irish Draught horse needed for ploughing and farm work. If one is omitted, then the picture of the traditional farm as a whole is poorer.

Breeding Programmes and Breed Numbers

For a viable herd of cattle, sheep, poultry, or goats, 8-10 breeding females will be needed; for horses and ponies, three breeding females; and for pigs, two breeding females. Any less than this, the benefit of genetic diversity will be lost, and the all-important selection of breeding males for the next generation will be nil. The selection of breeding males of good quality and true to the breed standard will be all-important to the long-term viability of each breed. This will also build links with the other breeders/farmers that purchase these males and build a network of people interested in purchasing other breeding stock from the farm for a premium. The possibility of placing some of the best males in an AI station for other breeders to use and preserve their genes for years to come will also raise the farm's profile. A target of one male per year would be a very reasonable target to set.

Newbridge is considering a breeding herd for the Kerry, Moiled, Droimfhionn and Bo Riabhach. Dexters with calves can be on display, but they don't need to be bred as there is a large Dexter farm across the road. A small number of Irish goats should be considered, and it may be difficult to move away from Pygmy goats as they are a significant draw for children. Horses and ponies have proven hard to keep



and require additional labour input, but it would be desirable to keep Irish Draught, Connemara and Kerry bog ponies. As regards pigs, they can focus on Tamworth and Saddleback. Other species of pigs are not necessary.

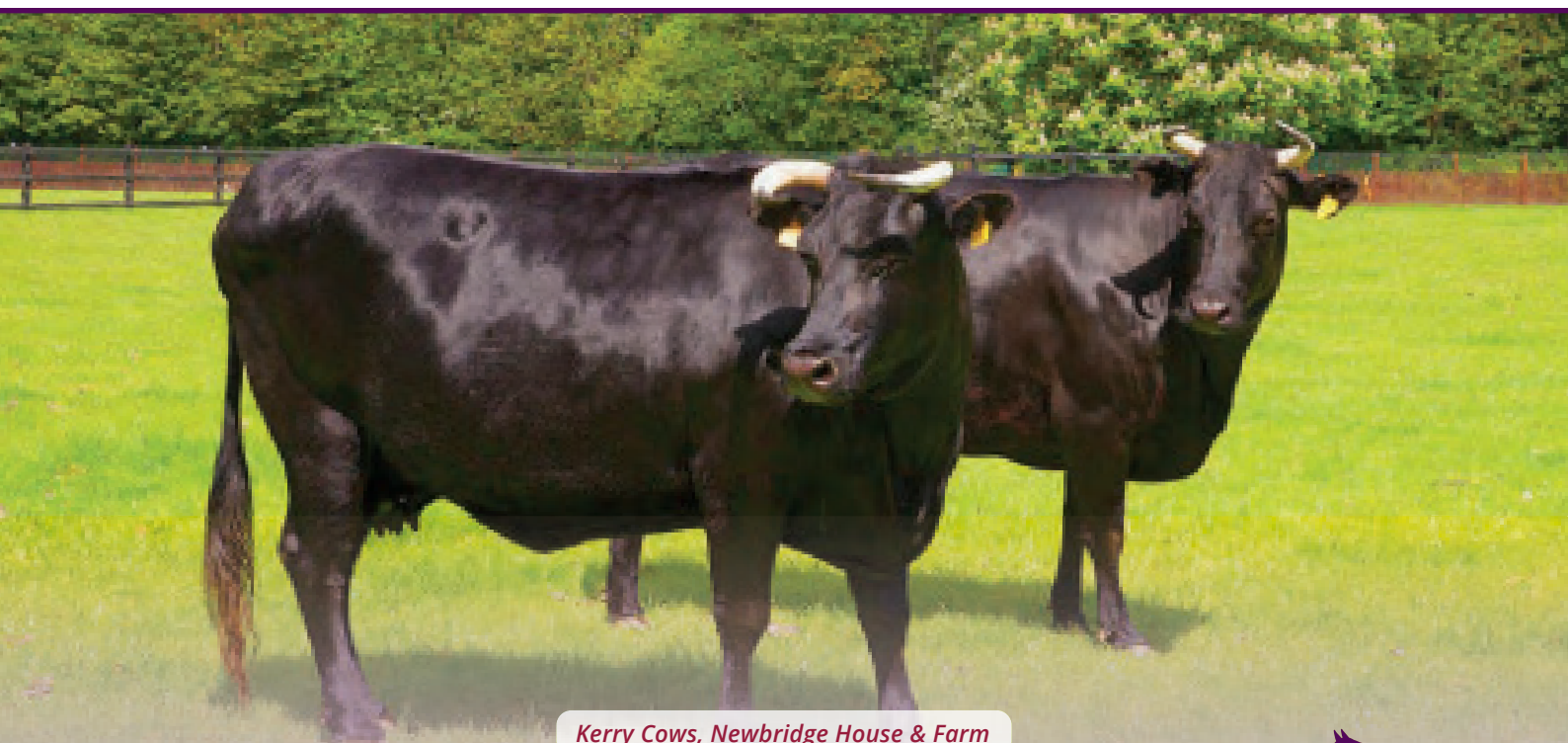
The native horses could possibly make a huge contribution to Newbridge. The grounds offer an unlimited number of options, from farm horses at work to the ponies eventing and driving. This could be achieved by building relationships with groups that plough with horses (NPA), pony clubs, etc. Special events could be organised on the grounds at different times of the year, from ploughing and sowing an area of corn and then harvesting it. There would be a knock-on effect on the wildlife and biodiversity on the farm. It could be a real win-win situation for Newbridge. It would also be a use for some of the old horse equipment around the farm.

The development of the horse side of the farm could define Newbridge as special and capture the imagination of most people regardless of age, income or background. It will take considerable staff time, planning and networking to achieve this, but not necessarily a lot of money.

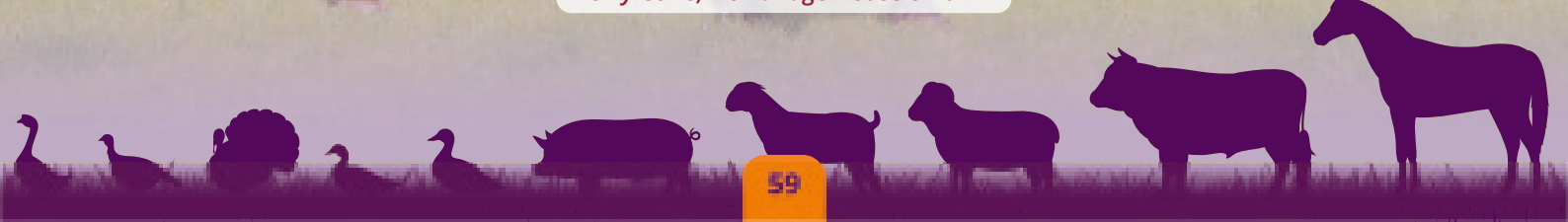
By breeding all the breeds versus just having a few display animals, then the full beauty of the breed can be seen in its full life cycle. There is nothing like young animals to get people interested in the breeds. This will make them more interesting to all the visitors on the farm. The purpose of keeping them is to generate interest and hopefully play a part in restoring them to their rightful place in the Irish landscape.

Extra Grazing in Nearby Parkland

Newbridge farm at present is very restricted in its grazing area despite having a significant amount of land available. Much of the meadowland in the demesne land is presently being mown for hay, with some of the hay going to pay the contractors for doing the work. This practice has resulted in a floristic diversity that places these meadows in the top ten meadows in Ireland, so this is a good practice to continue. Much of this land could also be grazed during the autumn and winter months after the hay crop has been removed. This would require these areas to be fenced off, or alternatively, a digital no-fence system is used to contain the livestock within the meadows.



Kerry Cows, Newbridge House & Farm



The use of other nearby parkland also offers a huge possibility for the viability of Newbridge farm. It would allow the farm to carry 50 breeding cows, nine breeding horses, 30 breeding sheep, plus pigs and poultry. At present, there are three options in the mix: Turvey, Balleally and possibly St Itas. The benefits come under several different headings:

1. The number of animals that can be carried.
2. Ease the management of the animals, such as keeping separate herds with bulls apart.
3. Having more grazing areas will reduce the time animals spend in the shed during the winter.
4. Give a financial return of animals to sell.
5. Reduce the risk of overstocking on certain paddocks and problems with worms in stock etc.
6. Display the animals other than at Newbridge, thus increasing exposure and interest in them.

Irish and Non-Irish Rare Breed Species

The keeping of the UK rare breeds is confusing the message about the importance of the Irish breeds. It takes away the importance of our unique Irish breeds; they belong nowhere else in the world, only here, and are the responsibility of nobody, only the Irish people, to take care of them. Bearing that in mind then, whatever space or recourses are available, they should then be diverted to maintaining and promoting the Irish rare breeds.

The other option is to include the UK rare breeds in one area with native Irish breeds in another, making a clear distinction between the two. The areas used should be clearly marked and interpreted. This combination is not as authentic but is a compromise if there is a desire to widen the story.



The Issue of Farming Organically

The conversion of the farm to organic status is a very interesting challenge and should be taken seriously. There are several rather large pros and cons. These come under three different areas. The first is the public perception, which is very important as their support is needed. The farm will not be selling directly to the public but can sell beef from suppliers linked back to the farm. The second is the effects on running the farm and what it will do for the production of feed, and the big effect could be the cost of buying organic feed for the animals, which could cost two to three times what it costs at present. Hay is already organic, but the nut feed is expensive. Thirdly, the purchase from non-organic farms of livestock will be restricted; while exemptions are made, it is not easy and may impede the breeding plans for the farm.

It is recommended not to go fully organic but to manage by organic principles. To go fully organic would increase costs and deliver no extra returns from the livestock section of the farm. Before making any decision on this option, a full farm audit would need to be carried out, from soil sampling to grazing plans and feed plans studied and assessed.

A significant issue to be considered is worm and fluke dosing. Organic alternatives to this need to be checked aside from better stock rotation. Regenerative farming might be a good option in the short term as it is environmentally friendly and carries no real restrictions. The inclusion of the nearby parkland would make either of the options easier to implement.

Animals in Winter and Communicating the Message

Outwintering the animals is a subject that needs to be approached from multiple angles.

The most significant of these is from the perspective of the animal and the responsible managing of the stock. Dry, free-draining soils are a must if any number of livestock are to be kept out. Avoiding muck is the key to this practice. This can only be avoided if the feeding of hay or other feed is moved from one area to another continuously. The weight and number of animals play a key role as more and heavy animals churn up the muck and damage the field. It must be noted that most animals are better off outside most of the time so long as they are not in muck. They are designed to be outside; remember, it is only in the last 100 years that most livestock has been housed.

- It is important to have information available to the public as to the welfare of the animals in situations they are not familiar with. There is very good data available in Ireland and from around the world to prove that the animals are okay outside. This information should be displayed where this stock is.
- Some livestock will have to be kept inside stables during the wetter winter months. The existing barn in the paddocks is not in compliance with good agricultural practice and needs to be replaced. It is recommended that a new barn be built next to the depot area within the farm to provide supervision and easy access to this barn for hay and straw. This barn could be designed in such a way that it allows for the public to visit the barn and thereby contribute to the overall visitor experience.

Rotational Grazing Plan

A rotational grazing plan can deliver a lot of benefits for the stock and management while cutting the cost of keeping the animals and increasing their growth. This involves several paddocks where the animals only spend a few days in each. As an example, take ten paddocks. On day one of the rotation, young stock are put in, and after three days, they are moved into paddock 2. Then larger animals can then be put into paddock 1 to finish the grass there before they go to paddock 2 three days later when the young stock move to paddock 3. This continues until the young stock finish paddock 10 and move



to paddock 1, when the whole cycle starts over. This system reduces worms in stock as well as delivering other benefits like faster growth in the animals. Other species, i.e. sheep and cattle, can be mixed, and the benefits become even greater. The farm workers have indicated that this is a very time-consuming practice and needs careful consideration in the light of available resources.

Animal Welfare

The care and management of the livestock is excellent on the farm, with the only issue being the worm buildup in the display areas due to the high and continuous use of these paddocks. More grazing areas are the only real solution to this. Rotational grazing can then be implemented and solve, to a large extent, this problem. The provision of a sick bay area might be considered if only to reassure the public that all good measures are in place for the animals. This would be a shed where individual animals can be treated separately and in comfort for any problems.

Ethical Statement for Rare Breeds at Newbridge House & Farm

'Newbridge rare breed farm will strive to research, conserve, educate and entertain the visitor through implementing a responsible credo that helps sustain endangered Irish native rare breeds.'

Core Values for the Farm

- **ANIMAL WELFARE & WELL-BEING:** The farm implements good husbandry practices to manage endangered Irish rare breeds, leading to good health and longevity of the stock and allowing the animals to play a key role in the offering of Newbridge House and Farm.
- **COLLABORATION:** The farm encourages and participates in cooperative efforts to help conserve and educate on endangered rare breeds. This includes working individually and collectively among all members of the heritage breed production chain: breeders, producers, processors, marketers, and consumers in Ireland and beyond.
- **STABILITY:** The farm works to ensure the integrity of endangered breed genetic resources by maintaining a strong alliance with breeders and Irish breed societies, promoting breeder livelihoods and breed resilience, and supporting the development of healthy markets, commercialisation, and a strong informed consumer base.
- **COMMUNITY:** The farm is mindful of its local tradition and history and will ensure future development of the farm is delivered in meaningful partnership.

4.4 Key Messages & How They Are Communicated

Following on from the vision and appreciation for the scale and character of an Irish rare breeds hub, there follows a variety of the essential messages that Newbridge could deliver through multiple media, experiences, and events:

1. Irish rare breeds are an important (and often overlooked) staple of the former rural agricultural economy and folklore. They offer a unique window on a lost pastoral world; through imaginative storytelling, this world can be illuminated.
2. All our animals receive the greatest of respect, care, and welfare. This is a happy farm!
3. Irish native rare breeds have commercial potential and practical application in today's world, from meat and related by-products to conservation grazing.



4. Irish rare breeds conservation is a cog in the wider biodiversity wheel - sustained rare breed conservation offers us a chance to go back to the future.
5. Good news! With the correct evidence-based, integrated, and resourced approach, many of the most endangered breeds can be brought back from the brink of extinction, and we all have a role to play.
6. Ireland is not alone, rare breeds are increasingly endangered worldwide, and we can all learn from and be inspired by new approaches, partnerships, and technologies.
7. Reveal the mystery behind the conservation and breeding of endangered native breeds through the likes of genetics.

4.4.1 How the Key Messages Will Be Communicated

The purpose of the following section is to provide the study with a selection of twenty sample marketing and sales activities to help promote and commercially refresh the rare breeds farm over a twelve-month period. However, many actions will roll over into subsequent years and become regular features in future marketing planning. They are not in any order of priority, but all are felt to be important actions and tasks for the team to consider. The initiatives below can be seen to make up an important part of the work programme for a dedicated marketing/sales/PR/social media management role, possibly under the Aramark team.

The actions below are divided into three distinct categories to aid understanding. They are:

- Farm communications management
- Traditional media
- New media.

Section 1 - Communications Management

The following is a brief action plan for communicating the key messages.

- a. THE FARM BRAND DESIGN IS ALREADY CREATED, AND THAT WILL REMAIN** -It is necessary to ensure the brand is well communicated and carried in all relevant messaging. Carry out an audit of all existing material; briefing document for graphic brand redevelopment for the farm (ideal if this also includes the house and estate, thus providing further branding integration and economies).
- b. ENSURE THAT RARE BREEDS STORY IS CONSISTENT** - seen as part of the overall branding and messaging of Newbridge House & Farm and its parklands. Planning and delivery - identify where, when, and how, ensuring this soft event coincides with the start of the season. There should be enough 'news stories' to justify a relaunch of the farm, generating interesting media coverage and raising awareness. It is the start of a new chapter in the farm story.
- c. INFORMATION/INTERPRETATIVE PANELS** - currently, there is a suite of internal and external panels. This initiative will build upon these and replace them with suitably branded and 'message clear' panels which coincides with an overall relaunch of the whole farm offering. They will provide both rare breed interpretative information and practical public/visitor information.
- d. THE NATIVE RARE BREED TOUR** - this is a specific tour to focus on the rare breeds story and the various animals that are being protected and displayed by Newbridge. The idea here is to combine a new rare breed animal tour with other heritage stories of the estate that marry closely with this theme. From a visitor experience point of view, following this overall structure, the following areas could create additional focus at Newbridge:



- Plan out the rare breed farm tour to best achieve a linear and highly interesting tour for adults and children - overlay a full interpretive layer of good information on the rare breeds for visitors.
 - Set out an overall storyline on rare breeds to create better awareness of the reason they are there and the part that society can play in their retention and protection. This could be directed towards particular age groups and markets. Children, for instance, will enjoy naming animals and knowing about their backgrounds and challenges. A breed that is being saved at Newbridge will create a great story that visitors can engage with and feel connected to.
 - Add rare breed animals in areas not used previously to create new interest for repeat visitors.
 - Create rare breed interpretation in areas around the house and park to ensure there is much more awareness of the rare breeds on-site and the overall approach to protecting these breeds and promoting them.
 - Create an appropriate range of events that highlight the rare breeds story and align with the new vision. The Flavours of Fingal Event seem to be really on-trend, and taste and so should be more strongly adopted as the general branding message emanating from the attraction.
 - The ethos and brand should be built around sustainability in animal management, organic food production, commercial operations and visitor interaction.
- e. MARKET, COMPETITOR AND VISITOR RESEARCH** - going forward, the farm must be built on smart decision making informed by relevant research and up to date market intelligence. There needs to be a simple plan that is well executed. This ranges from analysing FI research data on trends and key market performance to a regular benchmarking of our competitors to recording and analysing what our customers 'say' back to us.
- f. TRAVELLING RARE BREED FARM ROADSHOW FOR AGRI EVENTS/SHOWS** - the design, training, and delivery of a mobile Newbridge Farm Promotional stand that can participate in multiple shows/ Agri events throughout the year serviced by the farm team and likely other partners such as Connemara National Park. Events may include traditional summer shows around Ireland to the National Ploughing Championship. By working with local rare breed societies close to the events, it would be anticipated there would be a demonstration element to the branded presentations, not just for Newbridge but for Irish native rare breeds overall.

Staff at Newbridge should be encouraged to take time to attend two to four livestock shows or similar events that include demonstrations or activities involving rare breeds. The specific benefits are as follows:

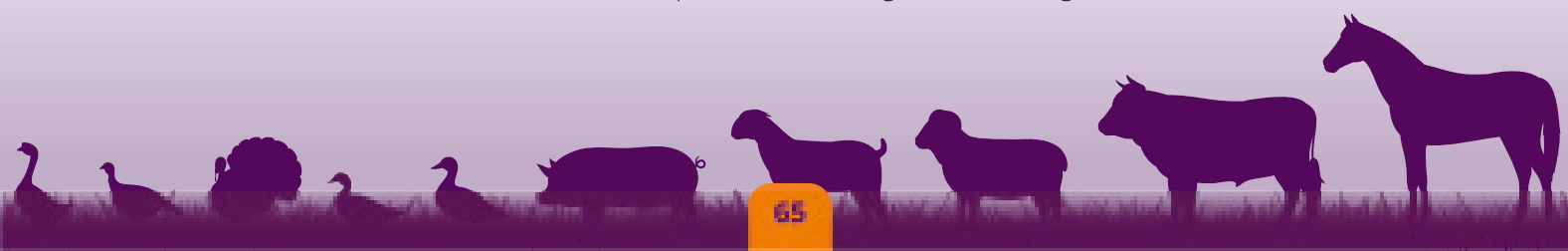
- Shows or national events tend to involve best practice where demonstrators from around the country bring out their best animals and practices. This knowledge is very useful for Newbridge staff to see what others are doing and learn from best practice.
- It gives an opportunity for Newbridge staff to promote their activity on rare breeds and assists in promoting the site and improving visitor numbers through shows like the National Ploughing Championship.
- It creates a greater awareness of Newbridge and its strong position in the protection and promotion of rare breeds in Ireland.
- New contacts are made within the rare breeds scene, which will create new opportunities for cooperation. Contact for supplies for the farm, for instance, may be something that emerges from contact made at livestock shows. Also, potential partners in the breeding programme and sourcing of animals may be identified at these events.



- g. PHOTO AND VIDEO LIBRARY OF QUALITY IMAGES** - Newbridge rare breed farm must present itself to the world in a highly attractive and stylised manner from the relaunch (i.e. integrated, consistent and innovative in graphics, photo, and copy), a must-visit rare breed attraction accessible to all. Essential will be a suite of images that will be added over the coming years that present the farm, the animals, the team, the visitors, and the science in a unique manner. Submitted visitor shots will add to this library (i.e. incentivised visitors post-visit to submit exceptional shots). The farm, in time, should create a complementary YouTube channel for related videos, including drone footage presenting the farm over a 12-month cycle. All material captured should respect GDPR guidelines. The digital library should be under the management of one nominated person either in Aramark or FCC, and permission is needed from all external parties who wish to use the material.
- h. MEDIA COVERAGE FILE** - the creation and management of a digital storage facility for all media coverage (and related publicity) received by Newbridge farm and destination. Not only will this coverage be a key performance indicator for the marketing programme, but it will also provide the necessary material to support future funding applications and reporting to partners from FCC and NPWS to the rare breed societies. It also provides an interesting section on the farm website as this coverage is likely to be from worldwide, where stories like the birthing of spring lambs and new foals may attract more interest than would be imagined.
- i. EVENTS/FESTIVAL DEVELOPMENT** - it would be wise to build a single day/weekend event each quarter around the farm (i.e., spring, summer, autumn, and winter). An attractive, fun-filled, hands-on inclusive family-orientated event with indoor and outdoor demonstrations, workshops, and special activities (i.e., think about a Heritage Week event X4). Can we add value to the event with live music, pop-up food and local storytellers/historians?
- j. POTENTIAL FOR HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES AT NEWBRIDGE** - the rare breeds at Newbridge create the perfect subject for hands-on activities either on event days or activities that can be built into the daily schedule. Visitors seek more engaging and interactive activities to make the visit more memorable and enjoyable.

Some ideas for hands-on activities at Newbridge include:

- A range of specially designed sensory activities suitable for those with special sensory needs.
 - Some hands-on farm activities with the rare breeds - milking a cow, feeding the horses, brushing the donkeys.
 - A ploughing day where the best ploughing techniques can be demonstrated by local experts. This includes competition and prizes, like a mini ploughing championship.
 - Activities for toddlers like finger paints, stories, animal feeding, animal alphabet, and adopting an animal.
 - A behind-the-scenes tour showing the animal living areas and mucking out.
- k. CORPORATE PACKAGE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION** - the farm and house are primed to enhance their already considerable packages for the corporate incentive/team-building type markets, especially for the likes of the tech/pharma FDI companies situated within one hour of Newbridge Demesne. Building this niche customer type requires resources and skills and should be approached in partnership with Aramark on a whole-destination basis. This would benefit from the creation of an information pack for wide distribution/follow-up.
- l. EDUCATIONAL PACKAGE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION** - from a cash flow perspective, the shoulder and off-season months present a challenge for Newbridge House and Farm. The domestic



school's market (1st and 2nd levels) and the colleges servicing overseas students learning English offer an opportunity to grow repeat business. The market is highly competitive and price-sensitive; however, Newbridge House and Farm has a basket of attractions and facilities in a safe environment that could make it a standout new attraction for schools to consider in the greater Dublin catchment. A special information pack will be required for wide distribution to schools within a 90-minute radius.

- m. COMMERCIAL FACILITIES AT NEWBRIDGE HOUSE & FARM** - the café and retail area in the courtyard provide a real opportunity to reflect the new rare breed strategy and create a tangible link to the animals.

The following are practical ways to introduce this change:

- Introduce some attractive graphics around the walls and entrance area to link the food to the locality and the farm.
 - Carry a small range of specific products that have their source on the farm, e.g. milk, eggs and cheese. One of the main suppliers will be able to assist in creating that product.
 - The retail area could have a 'Newbridge farm rare breed' range specifically created by a retail supplier. A small logo and information ticket give the source and story of products like food, cheeses and wool. An easier product to create would be children's play items with animal characters from the farm, giving the rare breed animal a name and personality and using that on imagery on jigsaws, building blocks, board games etc.
 - This is an area that may require some specialist assistance, and there are experts in the retail and catering area that could devise a very simple action plan around creating strong linkages from the rare breed farm activity to the retail and café spaces.
 - Refurbish the kitchen area and create a working demonstration kitchen representing the output from the farm and how the traditional food was prepared and cooked.
- n. THE RED BARN AS AN INTERPRETATIVE SPACE** - the red barn is located in a very prominent and public space in the direct path of visitors at Newbridge. It provides an excellent opportunity to include the barn in the day-to-day visitor interaction or use it for one-off farm and animal related activities.

Some suggestions for activities in red barn include:

- Interpretive space to tell the story of rare breeds using traditional media methods. This could be the key location where visitors first learn of the unique approach that Newbridge farm has taken to rare breed protection.
- Event space for farm-related activities, e.g., demonstrations on milking the cows, shearing the sheep, grooming the ponies - allows the children to see the animals up close.
- Additional space for animal pens to display rare breeds to visitors.

Section 2 - Traditional Media

- a. NEW SIGNAGE** - internal and external. This should begin with an audit of existing signage with a view to developing a briefing document for possible suppliers. There is a close linkage with Action 01 above.
- b. PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MEDIA MANAGEMENT** - a simple plan well executed is required. Clarity and professionalisation of consistent messages are critical to success. Personal rapport is important



with about 20-30 key media people across Dublin/Ireland to garner the ongoing coverage required, from the editor of the 'Late, Late Show' to Microsoft's head of corporate affairs.

- c. INTRODUCTION OF NEWBRIDGE RARE BREEDS FARM FLYER (INCL MAPS - A5 FOLDED)** - This new flyer replaces the old Shannon heritage flyer and could include more pictures of the farm and its rare breeds. A physical generic print piece will be required, distributed free at reception with tickets and available as a downloadable pdf. It incorporates the new brand and is pictorially heavy, with a site map being at its centre (e.g., Dublin Zoo print piece).
- d. ROLLING PROGRAMME OF NEWS PRESS RELEASES** -there is a requirement to plan for the release of a set of regular (possibly two per month during the relaunch phase) press releases. These need to be distributed to an ever-expanding media contact database. It would be wise to consider issuing Newbridge farm media passes (free admission for pass holder +1) to all essential contacts. The relationship here between Aramark marketing personnel will be essential to avoid duplication; cooperation is the essence of success here.

Section 3 - New Media

- a. WEBSITE ENHANCEMENT, RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA AND MANAGEMENT OF SAME DRAFT BRIEFING DOCUMENT AND IDENTIFY A SUITABLE CONTRACTOR(S)** - An ambitious, original, and targets-orientated marketing and sales plan will be required, a plan that is suitably integrated into the broader Newbridge communications planning likely being undertaken by Aramark.
- b. ONLINE MARKETING CAMPAIGN** - a variety of online marketing tools need to be tested over the first year, including a relaunch pay per click budget towards Google AdWords, with the aim of driving traffic to the online booking engine for the farm/Newbridge.
- c. CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MARKETING COLLATERALS** - collecting contact data and getting approval to harvest this valuable data is a key task into the future. Building and managing a contact database will support the regular delivery of messages and offers to farm visitors and those making enquiries. The aim is clear: to build a positive relationship with thousands of people from across Dublin, Ireland, and the world by the end of year three. The more time invested in this task, the greater the returns in bookings/re-bookings from quarterly e-zines (i.e., electronic newsletters) to special offers to season greetings from the farm animals. This space needs to be carefully managed.
- d. MANAGEMENT OF ONLINE CUSTOMER REVIEWS** - in today's peer review conscious world, it is critical the Newbridge House and Farm keeps on top of soliciting and managing all online reviews and related 'likes', referrals, posts, tweets and uploads. Ideally, this is managed by the person contracted to actively manage all the online marketing and communications.

Onsite Marketing and Education of Rare Breeds

As indicated in the sales and marketing section above, a wide range of potential activities could be carried out to raise the profile of Newbridge House & Farm, all leading to much greater visitor numbers and revenues. There is a strong justification for a marketing and education officer based at Newbridge farm whose cost could be split across more than one organisation. The new site operator might contribute to this if they thought it would drive numbers and revenues. The role could also promote rare breeds nationally and at Connemara National Park, with part of the cost being picked up by the Department of Agriculture and possibly NPWS. This would only work if that part of the role could be fully aligned with national policy on rare breed awareness and education. This person could also do guided tours on rare breeds at Newbridge farm. The role could also be responsible for coordinating the implementation of this rare breed strategy, delivering training to existing and new guides, as well as developing content for social media, interpretative panels and rare breed events.



It is recommended that this new opportunity be considered part of the response to the serious lack of awareness and support for rare Irish breeds both locally and nationally.

4.4.2 Working With Others

Volunteer Programme at Newbridge Farm

Volunteering at visitor attractions, particularly open space attractions (and not just those that are not-for-profit), is commonplace at heritage sites across Ireland and the UK. These volunteers are often vital to maintaining the activities at these sites to the level that visitors have come to expect from world-class standard attractions. If local people know the site and its activity and have free time to offer, then the opportunity to volunteer can be very welcome. Volunteers can help to supplement the work of the farm staff to undertake either ongoing maintenance or operations but also can be extremely useful for special projects. This may not be just retired people but also people who do not wish to be in paid employment for one reason or another.

Volunteering is not simply for the benefit of Newbridge House and Farm. The benefits of being in and working in open spaces and farm settings are well documented: from improving mental and physical health and providing socialisation opportunities to learning new skills and even acting as a gateway to employment.



Droimean Cow, Newbridge House & Farm

Some guidelines for the volunteering scheme at Newbridge:

- Management must provide access to an identified supervisor or point of contact who will be the main point of contact for the volunteers. Within the current structure at Newbridge, responsibility for the volunteer programme could come under the farm manager.
- Volunteer positions should only ever be created because they add value and should not be used to replace paid staff or to reduce costs.
- All volunteer roles should either help to create functions that would not exist in the absence of volunteers or enhance an existing part of the offer that would not happen without volunteers.
- All volunteer roles should be designed to provide volunteers with a rewarding activity and the opportunity to gain new or enhance existing skills and experiences should they want them.
- Newbridge must ensure that they provide appropriate volunteer insurance cover.
- Volunteers should always receive an induction or introduction to Newbridge House and Farm and all aspects of the operation and any training relevant to their role, as should any staff member. This should ensure they can carry out their role safely and understand their responsibilities.
- Wherever possible, volunteers should be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses incurred while volunteering. This may include travel expenses or refreshments. The volunteer must always be informed whether expenses are reimbursed before they start the role. The volunteer role description should be transparent around this issue.

4.4.3 Partnerships for Newbridge Farm and Its Rare Breeds

This study helps to profile two of the most significant visitor destinations in Ireland for the conservation and promotion of native rare breeds. Each farm site (Newbridge House & Farm and Connemara National Park) is equally similar yet different. This should be acknowledged and celebrated in the future design and delivery of the experience and the manner in which it is communicated.

In practical management terms, the following are some of the advantages of developing a closer working relationship between the two farms. The list is not exhaustive but illustrates the opportunities for greater co-working.

- Staff training and skills sharing
- Joint purchasing and related economies
- Joint marketing/promotion/selling/ticketing and packaging
- Science and learning cooperation
- Co-administered pilot projects, e.g. conservation grazing
- Online and social media cooperation
- Integrated educational offering and field studies
- Joint event and festivals organisation, e.g. joint management of future national rare breeds conferences
- Joint case making to inform national policy for native rare breeds
- Joint applications to secure additional funding or sponsorship
- Enhanced support and facilities (through coordination) for the Irish rare breed societies
- Coordination of visitor research and analysis
- Mutual support in strategic planning



Under partnerships, it would be wise to look at options for the formal twinning of the farms at Connemara and Newbridge. The starting point would be the creation through careful negotiations of a practical Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between both parties that would address many of the points mentioned above. Work on developing this should commence as soon as possible to cement the excellent bonding to date between management and staff in the two distinct attractions on different coasts of the island.

Linkage to Agricultural Education and Courses

As the vision outlines, a crucial part of the future of Newbridge farm as a rare breed hub is to take an active part in the education process of rare breeds. This education programme includes the technical side of the rare breed process but also involves the education of the public on the benefits of protecting and promoting rare breeds in Ireland. As we have outlined in other parts of this study, rare breeds in Ireland are not well understood or promoted, and this living history model brings a unique opportunity to bridge that gap.

Opportunities for Engagement With Students

There is a range of very practical ways that Newbridge can enhance its direct engagement with the student population. Some are specifically activity-driven and need resources and time, but others are more general and can reach a wider audience through good communications.

Some ideas of engagement are as follows:

- Provide a **special work placement programme** linked specifically to an agricultural college to form part of the academic course with practical hands-on experience.
- Devise an **education visit programme** to include content for a range of education levels, including worksheets of activities that are directed at students participating in an educational visit.
- Devise a **transition year outing programme** of interesting activities for that age range. Most secondary schools in the country offer a transition year as an option, and all are actively looking for day-out options for these students. These should be fun-based and wider than just the rare breed subject to attract the maximum number of groups.

4.4.5 Financial Sustainability and Operational Management

The current operation and financial arrangements were already mentioned, and this section outlines how some development options could lead to significant improvements in operational and financial sustainability.

Some areas that rare breed promotion and management can assist in the financial and operational sustainability of House and Farm are as follows. Promotion of the rare breeds can:

- Attract a wider range of visitors.
- Become an attractive venue for farm/environmental events.
- Attract sponsorship for individual actions or events.

Management of the rare breeds can:

- Increase revenue from stock sales.
- Barter stock to the advantage of the farm.
- Develop a group or groups of volunteers to help in the different aspects of the farm, including school/college links for work experience and projects. All help is welcomed.
- Develop a link with food producers that enhance the food/restaurant area sales.



Developing an educational side to the whole farm experience will enhance the visitor experience and help promote the site.

Appreciation of the fact that rare breeds are a positive for attracting visitors to a site, so they are an asset rather than a cost.

Utilise the rare breeds as a unique and distinctive factor to promote the farm. Virtually no other attractions across the country keep Irish native rare breeds, and therefore Newbridge stands out in the crowd. The market for attracting visitors is noisy, and this distinctiveness will set the experience.

4.6 Conclusion

There is no doubt that Newbridge House & Farm is already a significant location for rare breeds in Ireland. The analysis above outlines a site that is complex in its operation. The opportunities ahead are significant. The potential strategy takes advantage of an emerging trend not only in Ireland but across Europe for sustainable farming and clean food linked to a wider environmental story.

This potential strategy needs to be well thought through, and its creation should be well resourced with all the key stakeholders involved. It is a win-win situation for all and particularly favours the often-neglected Irish native rare breeds.



Moiled Calf, Newbridge House & Farm

Newbridge House & Farm Action Plan

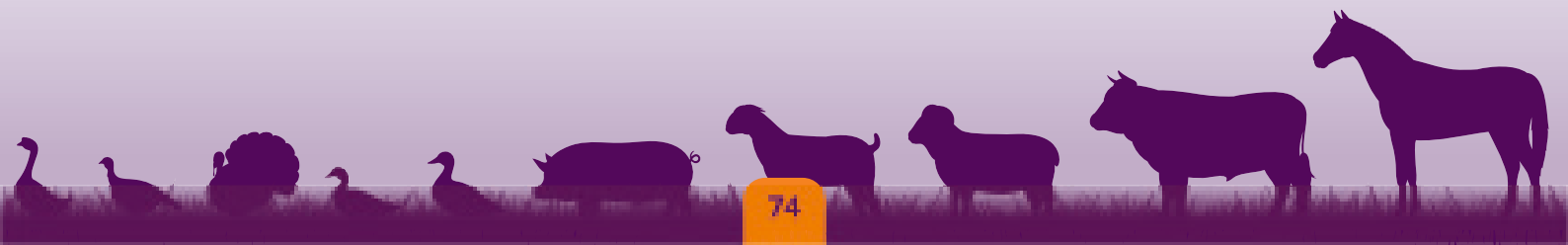
AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE: Short Term - Within 6 Months; Medium Term - Within 2 Years; Long Term - 2+ Years	OUTCOMES
VISITOR EXPERIENCE					
1 Messaging & Communications on Rare Breeds	Create a common and consistent set of messages on rare breeds.	Create a common and consistent set of messages on rare breeds that communicates the key messages – script, imagery, ethos and strategy.	Management of Newbridge in conjunction with Aramark.	Short term.	Consistent and quality messaging on rare breeds.
2 Live Staff Interaction with Visitors	The site has trialled live interaction with visitors using trained seasonal guides. This was very successful – this now needs to be extended and professionalised.	Expand this trial by bringing in additional seasonal staff in 2022 and onwards. Train these staff and create quality scripts and props for them.	Aramark management and staff.	Short term.	Significant improvement of interaction with visitors – real improvement in visitor experience.
3 Website & Booking System	The new website and booking system need to be upgraded and need the rare breeds message blended into them – detail out the rare breeds messages, information and offers that need to be incorporated into the digital media systems.	Ensure all the correct quality information is on the website and booking system regarding rare breeds and what is available at Newbridge House & Farm.	Aramark management and staff.	Short term.	Improved information available to visitors online – improve expectations and understanding.



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES
4 Development Plan – Key Areas of the Newbridge Site – Including Physical Elements of the Visitor Experience	There needs to be an overall plan for improvements to the visitor experience that is integrated and includes the rare breeds message, particularly at the hatchery, courtyard, red barn and walled garden.	Create a team from Aramark and Fingal to work on creating this development plan – it incorporates many of the issues and actions listed below.	Aramark and Fingal management and staff.	Medium term.	An overall development plan will create a framework that all detailed actions and plans can draw from.
5	There are various areas of the physical visitor experience that need attention. (1) The hatchery being upstairs causes congestion and access difficulties, particularly for people with wheelchairs or prams.	Move hatchery to more accessible location.	Aramark and Fingal management and staff.	Short term.	Significant improvement of interaction with visitors – real improvement in visitor experience.
6	(2) The walled garden needs some attraction within it or greater animation or interpretation.	Create new visitor engagement and interpretation in the walled garden. Other possibilities – cider making demos, sheep shearing, wool spinning, etc.	Fingal and Aramark – likely to be food-related attractions.	Medium term.	Improved visitor experience.
7	(3) The paddock areas in winter are relatively bare and need additional attractions.	Create something new in the paddocks for winter.	Fingal farm management.	Medium term.	Improved visitor experience.
8 Rare Breed Tour	Develop a rare breed tour.	Develop promotional package for travelling rare breed farm roadshow for Agri events. Explore the potential for hands-on activities for visitors at the farm. Develop an educational package for primary and secondary schools, add rare breed content and new promotional flyer for Newbridge.	Fingal farm management.	Medium term.	Improved visitor experience.



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES
9	Interpretation The rare breed story needs to be brought out through interpretation and engagement on-site.	Brainstorm some ideas around how visitors are engaged directly in the rare breeds story – this could be through interactive panels in sheltered areas, visitor app or audio guides or appropriate media. Explore what people take for granted.	Fingal and Aramark.	Medium term.	Improved interpretation leading to a better visitor experience.
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS					
10	Photography of Rare Breeds Create a bank of professional high-resolution images of rare breeds on-site suitable for circulation or promotions.	Employ a local professional photographer to take a bank of images of rare breeds and their settings.	Aramark marketing with assistance from farm staff.	Short term.	Bank of images that can be drawn from for promotions, social media and website.
11	Retail Products – Rare Breeds Related Identify suitable products for selling in the retail area that link to rare breeds to create the link through other parts of the visitor attraction.	Examine whether wool products or farm type products could be sold – these could be sourced from local suppliers as it is unlikely to be practical for on-site supply.	Aramark and farm staff.	Short term.	Improved linkage between rare breeds and other parts of the experience – better promotion for rare breeds.
12	Online Content on Rare Breeds The rare breeds content for online platforms needs to be created and communicated.	As above, expand the information and messaging process to include all online media.	Aramark marketing staff.	Short term.	Improvement of online content and communications.
13	Study Visit & Practical Cooperation Formal exchange visits between Newbridge and Connemara NP on a twice-yearly basis. Built upon the agreed details in a memorandum of understanding between both native rare breed facilities.	Spring and Autumn visits (one-day duration) beginning in Autumn 2022.	Key farm staff and management.	Facility managers in both locations.	Building and managing professional relationships and delivering practical cooperation between two of Ireland's most significant native rare breed centres.



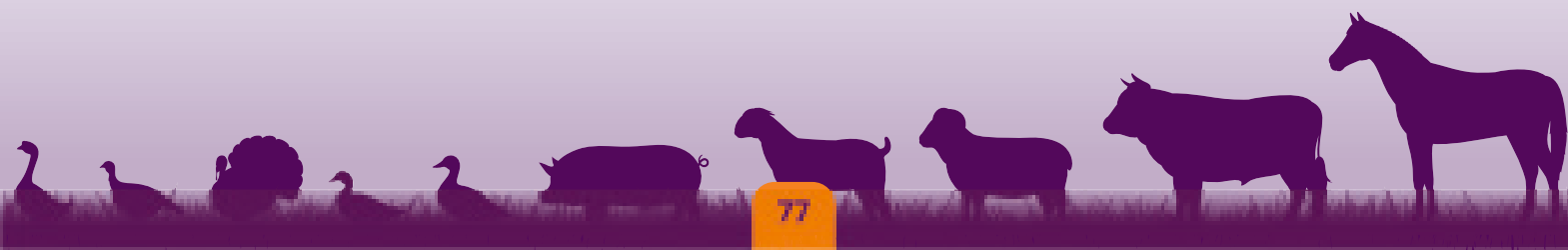
AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES
<p>14 Stocks of Rare Breeds & Conservation Grazing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newbridge Demesne – Irish Moiled with no-fence collars 9- 10 animals for winter grazing. Location area (on grounds); 5 hectares site + neighbouring site = 16.2 hectares, 2 Balleally landfill - 7-8 animals with five cows Droimfionn + 2 horses can be supplemented with sheep at the top of the landfill (9ha) during the winter. Location Area: 19.5 hectares 3 Turvey site – 14 animals with 10 Kerry (incl bull) and four horses (+2 Tamworth pigs). Location Area: 45.3 Hectares. 	<p>Ongoing programme.</p>	<p>Farm staff.</p>	<p>Rolling stock management programme.</p>	<p>Optimisation of stock to land available, enhancement of animal welfare. Responsible breed management is reflected in the stories being told on-site and the authenticity of the experience being offered to visitors.</p>
<p>New Barn</p>	<p>New barn to be constructed next to depot that is following best agriculture practice. This will provide space for overwintering livestock and a sick bay for injured and/or sick animals. Barn to be designed to allow for public access during winter months.</p>	<p>Design and develop a new barn.</p>	<p>Newbridge farm staff and FCC architects.</p>	<p>Short term.</p>	<p>Better livestock management, viewing gallery in the barn will allow for close up views of livestock during the winter months.</p>



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES
Rotational Grazing	Better rotation of animals will help to reduce the parasite load in the pastures. This will benefit animal health.	Develop a rotational grazing plan.	Farm staff.	Short term.	Reduction in parasite loading in pastures and associated medication requirements for all livestock.
15 Demonstration Milking	<p>Pilot a demonstration milking project for visitors. Identify preferred location, time(s) of day and months of the year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a narrative around and promote the practical, interactive demonstration. Recruit, train and develop the experience for the milking guide. Gather visitor comments on reactions to help refine the experience. 	Pilot summer months, (run for 6-8 weeks).	Farm staff.	Evaluate feedback after year 1 to determine if the experience should be replicated/enhanced for year 2.	A new family-friendly attraction at a programmed time(s) of the day during the summer months. Significant photo opportunity. This interactive, safe experience could be added elsewhere on the farm.
SPECIAL PROGRAMMING & PARTNERSHIPS					
16 Rare Breed Societies	The relationships and partnerships with the Irish rare breed societies could be improved and built upon.	Establish communication channels with all key rare breed societies relevant to Newbridge farm.	Newbridge farm staff with input from Biodiversity Officer and Fingal staff.	Medium term.	Improves cooperation leading to sharing of information and best practice.
17 Connemara National Park	This relationship has been deepened through the work done on the rare breeds study and can now be further built upon.	Establish a working group with two or three representatives from Newbridge and the same from Connemara to take forward some common agenda items and programme of linkages.	Coordinated by Biodiversity Officer with Newbridge farm staff	Medium term.	Improvement in partnership between Newbridge and Connemara National Park.



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES
18 Department of Agriculture	This is an important partnership from a rare breeds point of view, and the department has expressed interest in working closely with Newbridge.	Establish a working group with the department and meet every six months to keep each other fully up to date.	Newbridge farm staff and Biodiversity Officer.	Medium and longer term.	Output is a good working relationship with the department and a closer understanding between the parties.
19 Annual Rare Breed Conference	Initiate and Host a rare breed conference at Newbridge House & Farm - invite, say, 100 delegates to meet and discuss all rare breed-related items. Run the conference over more than one day with an overnight so delegates can meet and share information and experience.		Farm staff and Fingal County Council (Biodiversity Officer).		
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH & EDUCATION					
20 Agricultural Colleges	A small number of relevant colleges are situated within reasonable proximity of Newbridge farm and carry relevant courses.	Identify key contacts and work through practical ideas for utilising Newbridge farm as a research and knowledge base for students to benefit from.	Newbridge farm staff.	Short term.	Could lead to education exchanges and students carrying out fieldwork and gaining practical experience.
OPERATIONS & CAPACITY BUILDING					
21 Operations	Initiate regular action plan meetings between Aramark and farm staff discussing rare breed strategy in particular.	Establish working groups to meet regularly and update each other.	Fingal, Aramark and Newbridge farm team.	Short term into medium term.	Improved team working between main operations on-site.



AREA	EXPLANATION OF ISSUES	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES
22 Farm Area	The farm staff resources are extremely limited and do not allow for time and effort to be directed to interaction with visitors and more active rare breed activity – increase resourcing on-farm by a new farmworker and a farm general assistant, both employed full time.	Allocate additional budget to farm staff at Newbridge to allow more focus on the rare breed area. More interaction with visitors and improved visitor experience.	Fingal and farm staff.	Medium term.	Improved rare breed activity within the Newbridge farm area – better visitor appreciation and understanding of rare breeds.
23 Resources – Marketing & Education	Explore the option of a rare breed marketing/ educational officer at Newbridge Demesne with Aramark, Dept of Ag, NPWS and rare breed societies.	Appoint rare breed marketing and education officer	Fingal, Aramark, Dept Ag, NPWS and rare breed societies.	Medium term.	
24 Sales & Marketing	The sales and marketing area are traditionally poorly resourced – add an additional part-time staff member dedicated to promoting Newbridge House & Gardens and the rare breed story in particular.	Allocate additional budget to sales and marketing staffing.	Aramark and Fingal.	Medium term.	Much improved promotions of Newbridge generally and rare breeds within Newbridge.



Kerry Bog Ponies



5

**NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL
RARE BREED SOCIETIES**



5 | NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL RARE BREED SOCIETIES



5.1 The Irish Rare Breed Societies

There is no doubt that the conservation of endangered heritage breeds would be in a more perilous situation if it weren't for the goodwill and commitment of thousands of committed farmers and enthusiasts across Ireland and Europe. The following attempts to pull together what has been learned from individual and collective engagements with stakeholders in the sector. It is hopefully an accurate profile of things as they stand today and throws light on what may be in the future.

5.1.1 Issues & Constraints

The following set of issues and constraints are in no order of priority; however, they fall into three distinct categories, namely:

- Political;
- Organisational; and
- Programming.

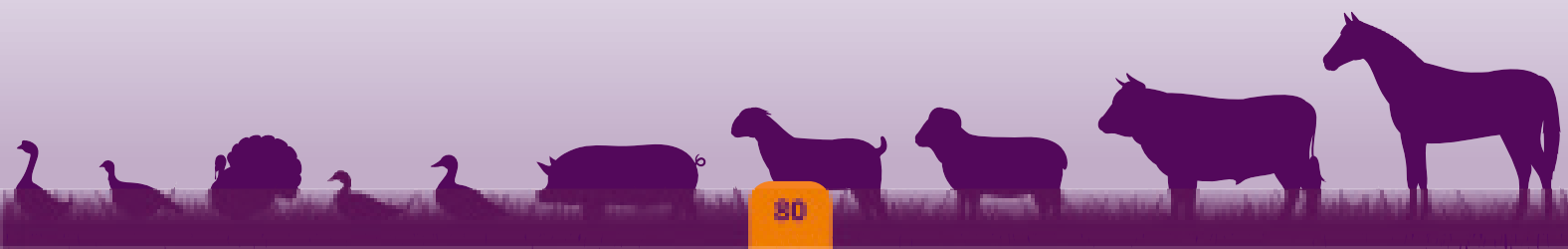
Each will be reflected upon later in the document.

Political

- From government down to the farmer level, there have been decades-long underinvestment and under-appreciation of endangered Irish rare breeds in relation to their worth and potential.
- This underinvestment not only leads to an obvious lack of vision and strategic planning deficit but has resulted in some discord at the national societies representative level. This has, on occasions, resulted in an unnecessary external loss of credibility for the sector, the likely loss of much-needed resources and ultimately has led to a significant disservice to the core aim of conserving vulnerable Irish heritage breeds.
- Poor case making to the Irish government by the rare breeds community resulted in a lower prioritisation at the government level relative to 'sister' NGOs like Irish Seed Savers.
- There is sometimes a perception by the societies of obstruction, lack of commitment or a lack of capacity at various levels of government to help support their case.
- Need more direct access to the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM); currently, there is a perception the doors are often closed to individual societies, or the standards are set too high for voluntary societies largely self-managed by busy farmers. There was criticism of inflexibility concerning application deadlines administered by the DAFM. Note: the DAFM made a practical, positive, and informed input into the study, especially from the international policy perspective.

Operational

- Rare Breeds in Ireland are not seen as commercially viable or sustainable in the longer term. There are few examples of the 'commercialisation' of any Irish rare breed. The argument for funding has largely been a call to support the delicate living heritage of the island, not that some of these breeds have a sustainable commercial future if properly supported.
- There are different definitions in Ireland as to what a rare breed is; these need addressing to ensure clarity.



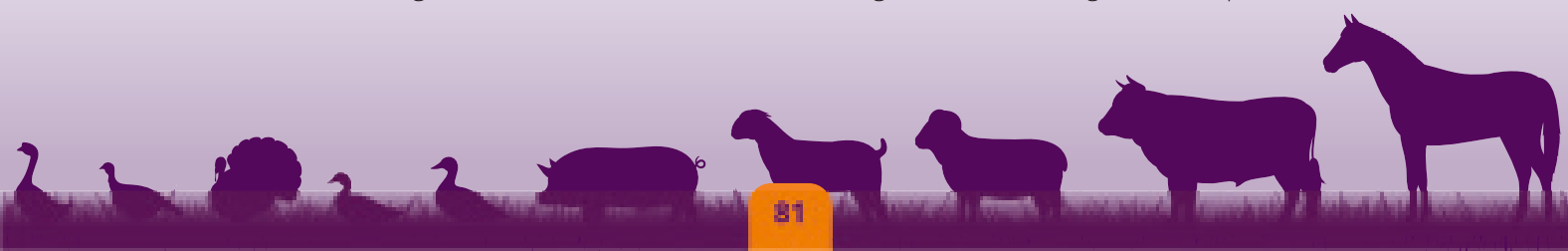
- Collaborations are difficult in the current environment, operating with marginal resources and without a national/island plan or strategy. This vacuum is seen as a significant problem, for without a roadmap, the status quo will be maintained.
- Most societies have an urgent need for support from government bodies and support agencies. The age profile and capacity of many societies is a critical concern for the future viability of these organisations. Some of the more vulnerable societies are barely functioning, and their longer-term survival is uncertain.
- Except for the largest of societies, they are all volunteer-based, doing it for a deep-set appreciation of the breed, often at a personal loss financially with significant hardship. However, with this personal sacrifice often comes understandably some lack of professionalism in the management, governance, and strategic partnership-building needed to survive and thrive.
- Practically, there is an acute lack of capacity or support funding for websites or social media communications either internally between members, inter-society, or with the public.
- A real sense of urgency regarding a lack of capacity for administration and networking in an increasingly administratively heavy/form filling world.

Programming

- Funds need to be made available for genetic resources, and a significant training/capacity-building programme needs to be put behind this ongoing initiative, all built on best international practice.
- There is a general fear that the living heritage centres (sometimes called farm parks) are more concerned about showcasing the breeds and not interested in ensuring the survival of the breeds. However, there is also an appreciation of the work and opportunities that these centres like Newbridge and Connemara open to individual societies to work directly with them on a project-to-project basis.
- Getting purebred status is an issue for many societies, with many societies needing practical and immediate help establishing pure breed lines. Many identify necessary support in the most basic tasks, i.e., finishing carrying out their breeding programmes and obtaining passports. There is undoubtedly considerable appreciation for the role and inputs by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine in this regard, but there appears to be a disconnection between the management of funds and the bureaucracy underpinning this and the practical day-to-day capacity of the often-depleted smaller societies to deliver on that which is asked of them.
- There is little appreciation for what 'good practice' looks like with the management of rare breed societies. Except for the annual Irish rare breed conferences (pre-Covid), there was an absence of a meeting place/organised programme that introduced Irish societies to how other societies and networks in Europe have overcome similar problems.
- In its totality, there is a universal appreciation that the standard of interpretative and educational material relating to rare breeds is falling far short of community expectations. There is a lack of any unified approach, guidance, design templates, brand, or practical support in this regard for educational-related material in particular.

5.1.2 A Sample of Previously Successful Interventions

It is easy to forget that there has been some significant innovation delivered under the umbrella of rare and heritage breeds over the recent past. The following is a random selection of animal-focused projects that demonstrate capacity, imagination, and partnership-building. Often these projects are delivered through volunteer action on minuscule budgets but deliver significant impacts.



- Teagasc's 'Let's Talk Equine' training programme (2022) is a practical, accessible, and warmly received initiative. See <https://www.teagasc.ie/corporate-events/lets-talk-equine/>. This illustrates an example of where the age cohort driving many of these societies prefer face-to-face engagement in a hotel-type environment to spending a couple of hours online.
- Seeing the Connemara pony in Connemara National Park - the practical marriage of breed conservation and providing a shop window through the centres for greater appreciation, education, and visibility for many Irish rare breeds.
- Some societies (e.g., Connemara pony) have gone through a successful organisation review which resulted in the organisation being smaller, more efficient, and fit for purpose. A similar streamlining approach has occurred with a mainstream commitment to breeding commercial show jumping animals. However, within this conversation, it should be appreciated that these efforts to enhance the traditional breeding ethos over the more commercial returns do not always receive the visibility the opinion may deserve. See these two approaches play out in the following case study: <https://www.rarebreedsinternational.org/abreedincrisis>
- The Kerry Bog Pony Cooperative Society collaborates with the University of Limerick Equine Studies (not including genetics). At a basic level, a tourist hotel in Cork housed two Kerry Bog ponies for interactions with visitors.
- A few societies like the Old Irish Goat Society have considerable links with academia. These linkages between societies and academic partners show considerable potential to grow and support the Irish rare breed sector. This relationship-building starts from a low base. The international best practice supports this contention.
- The Connemara pony, Kerry Bog pony, and the Irish Draught horse are represented by Horse Society Ireland (HIS), which holds the stud books.
- The Irish Draught Horse Society has strong connections to other Draught horse societies in the UK and USA and further afield.
- Kildare County Council runs a project on military links with the Irish Draught horse. This, however, is one of only a few examples of significant coworking between individual societies and the network of Irish local authorities.
- It has been observed that the recently launched (2021) initiative of the innovative Howth Head goat grazing management programme to reduce the gorse fire risk on the peninsula has received considerable national/international media attention on the practical application of Irish heritage breeds to real-world problems, particularly in relation to mitigating climate change. This practical interplay between Irish breeds and an offering of practical and cost-effective solutions to real-world problems is a signpost for the future. The Old Irish Goat Society have been trailblazers in this regard.
- Several consultees flagged the current development in Connemara National Park of walking/recreational trails enabling heritage breeds to become part of the unfolding narrative for the visitor. The approach by the NPWS is not exclusively to think about a conventional indoor interpretation of specific rare breeds but an outdoor living experience. This concept has significant potential to grow and be transferred to other sites across Ireland. Many within the NPWS are beginning to see the potential of the synergy between ecological integrity, cultural authenticity, and generating memorable visitor experiences through conserving and showcasing rare breeds in creative ways.



5.1.3 Proposed Solutions Going Forward

- The creation of a national secretariat with an experienced general manager role plus administration and related support for a minimum of three years. This post/secretariat would be co-driven by all essential partners and funded through a cocktail of funding. Its programme of work/targets would be enshrined in a national strategy document that all parties would need to endorse at the outset.
- Identification of a small number of rare breed hubs across the country.
- A national plan/strategy/roadmap for heritage breeds in Ireland going forward. The alignment and synergy of research, relationship building, good practice, capacity enhancement, herd benchmarking, multiple facets of science/genetics, welfare, soft tourism, conservation grazing, commercialisation, funding, target setting, and structures/governance are all embedded elements within a first national strategy.
- The potential for and use of heritage breeds for environmental services, including conservation grazing, with pilot projects being adequately supported and evaluated.
- Appreciation that Ireland has UN obligations (Food and Agriculture Organisation) to rare breed conservation - this internationalisation has to offer Ireland funding opportunities going forward on several direct and significantly indirect fronts.
- Speciality-produced food and craft could be made from rare breed animals. These should be branded and supported to get to a national/international market. This commercial cycle may enable profits to be recycled back into conservation and science.
- Engage with Fáilte Ireland, Bord Bia and related agencies/bodies to create a further appreciation for the potential of native Irish rare and heritage breeds. This includes the greater alignment between the existing rare and heritage breed attractions (including Connemara National Park and Newbridge) and the primary Fáilte Ireland visitor propositions, including the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, and Dublin.
- Training programmes – capacity building, professional mentoring, one-to-one society supports but also supporting the development of greater networking between societies. This may also enable the delivery of one-off national, regional or cross-border pilot programmes. There is a recognised deficit in the day-to-day use of communications technology across most societies, which, if used, could improve efficiency.
- The national representative bodies, the Irish Rare Breeds Society (IRBS) and the Irish Native Rare Breed Society (INRBS) need professional support to enhance their efficiency and strategic focus for their members and the conservation of endangered breeds. The current conflict between both makes this a challenging task.
- Conferences and similar knowledge transfer national events are an essential foundation stone going forward. These should be supported.
- Societies at the grassroots need to be practically helped on an ongoing basis to become more efficient, professional and connected. It would be useful to examine building upon useful documents already in existence through the likes of the Charities Regulator and the PPN network.
- On an ongoing basis, funds and professional guidance need to be made available for genetic resources across all relevant breeds, including fowl.
- More international engagement - more joint-working with external partners.
- Examination of potential corporate sponsorship for specific aspects of the ongoing development of Irish rare breeds. This could happen under the corporate social responsibility community funding support available through the larger/often FDI-type companies.



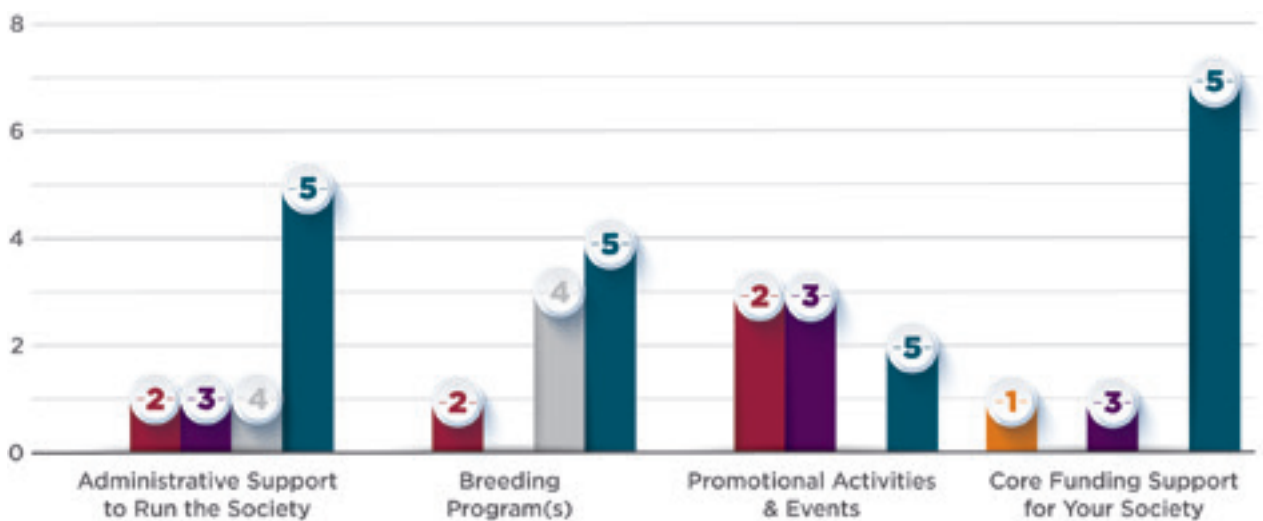
5.1.4 Irish Rare Breed Societies - Sample Online Survey Responses

A sample profile of the online survey results below illustrates some of the key learnings that emerged. These are in no order or priority. All survey feedback received helped inform findings and recommendations later in the study.

1 *If budgets and resources were available, what type of new promotional activity could be undertaken by your society or rare breed societies in Ireland more generally?*

In summary, respondents said they would make better use of digital marketing and align themselves more with existing tourism brands. In addition, they would invest significantly into researching the viability of Irish rare breeds in modern farming in line with best practice. Some respondents referenced funding that could be used to increase Ireland’s profile internationally. Finally, most societies referenced the need for a central training programme for members.

2 *If the Department of Agriculture, Food, and Marine or other state agencies could provide any support to your society, what type of support would be most beneficial to you currently? (1 = no use, 5 = essential.)*



Survey respondents in the table above indicated that more core funding should go directly into the heritage breed societies on the ground. Promotion, communications and even breeding were considered secondary to the need to keep the societies active, capable, and functioning on the ground.

5.2 The International Rare Breed Societies *(see appendix for participant lists)*

The following outlines the input from a variety of international partners. All the consultations were conducted online either through a solo exchange with the two lead consultants or with multiple participants in the session (three international participants were the maximum on any one call). A common questionnaire was employed with each category to record the feedback.

Each session was formally recorded, thus helping build a significant database of inputs/suggestions and advice on the solving of universal problems, many of which are currently being experienced in Ireland.

5.2.1 Issues & Constraints

- Many different EU funds are available; however, organisation and administration failures mean they are not always secured. Even the most mature and long-established European societies complained about the lack of administrative support, which has a knock-on impact on being able to service



members properly. However, it should be acknowledged that all the international participants in this study demonstrated familiarity and self-confidence in being able to creatively access funds. An example is the number of pilot projects or one-off projects funded through the EU (often transnational partnerships with one lead), different central government/local authority functions, or with academia.

- There was no international participant in this study that ran a national society or umbrella body voluntarily.
- There was a marginal reference to corporate sponsorships or private sector relationship building, especially in relation to accessing corporate social responsibility budgets.
- All international participants demonstrated a considerable investment in the science and genetics behind the conservation of rare breeds. Belgium, for example, has an agreement with the regional government that, as a society, they will physically source the genetic sample from the animal while the authority will pay for the processing.
- Young people are not joining these societies - this is a universal problem. The obstacle appears to be on succession/succession planning in rare breed farms where the next generation is gravitating away from the land. No country engaged appeared to be satisfactorily addressing this structural threat.
- Difficulty in keeping salaried administrator/manager-type posts going into the long term. It was regularly stated that for an ambitious and skilled 30-to-40-year-old person working for a society at a national or specific breed level, it was a significant challenge to hold on to them in the medium or long term. Consequently, the profile of managers interviewed tended to fall into three distinct categories: a) working on 3 or 4 days a week on a part-time basis; b) actively retired from a related discipline, e.g. veterinary, and operating voluntarily, thus receiving little more than travel/subsistence payment; and, c) highly skilled and motivated individuals who for lifestyle and ethical reasons are pursuing a career working with rare breed conservation management.
- Sometimes, a quick turnover of staff's or volunteers' institutional memory is often compromised or critically lost. A related issue was the often-quick turnover of the point-person role in the Department of Agriculture, where regularly a new relationship had to be built, and valuable time was invested in building up that person's capacity in relation to all aspects of rare breeds, which was highlighted in the Netherlands.
- There is no dedicated undergraduate or postgraduate course exclusively addressing the needs of the sector. There is no formal accreditation. Undoubtedly across European colleges and universities, rare breed-related modules are taught; however, there is a vacuum concerning formal training (and subsequent networking). An example was drawn with the unified international support for the slow food movement, which has its own dedicated University of Gastronomic Sciences, Piedmont.
- Difficulty in getting farmers interested/receptive to heritage breeds is a continuous problem even in a scenario where there are EU headage payments for many breeds. This often relates to the perceived 'non-conformity' of many rare breeds in relation to mainstream supermarkets or high street food outlets dictated by guaranteed volumes. There is no doubt that the unpredictability of the supply of many breeds being brought to market makes it a risky proposition for wholesalers or traditional food retailers. Consequently, many dedicated micro rare breed producers tend to go straight to market via farmers' markets or explore the cooperative model of distribution. By way of contrast, few, if any, Irish societies are currently exploring or operating in this space; some cattle breeds are the exception, like the Dexter's.
- Invariably dedicated rare breed societies on the ground are driven/maintained by farmers. This is identical to the Irish scenario.



- In the UK, many individual breeders are hobbyists and are seldom involved in protecting/promoting rare breeds beyond their farm gate.
- Few rare breed societies have the resources to do very much more than just 'keep the lights on' and offer some basic support to their more dedicated members. Many smaller European societies may be long-established and have access to a national umbrella body that lobbies for their interests, but their survival, core member issues, administrative challenges, and building and managing sensitive relationships are not dissimilar to the reality in Ireland today. The big difference is that they have tended to be doing it longer, have become naturally better at it, and tend to work more effectively together.
- There was often a practical problem raised, namely getting the genes sample from the farms to the labs in a streamlined manner - Norway flagged this as a sensitive issue where the aim was always to keep all essential stakeholders on board.
- Abattoirs are seldom equipped or willing to handle rare breeds, often those with horns and thick coats.
- A possible disconnection or lost opportunities between endangered Irish native rare breeds and the European Innovation Partnership Project (EIPP) was highlighted. To date, no Irish rare breed has received funding despite applications being made.



Galway Sheep, Newbridge House & Farm

5.2.2 Successful Interventions/Europe - Summary Profile

The following is a cross-section of projects delivered successfully across continental Europe and Scandinavia. There are learnings below for Irish farmers and related partners.

- **ARC FARM PROJECT (GERMANY)** - with over 160 farms, this project has farmers with three or more heritage breeds. This encourages bigger herds and more breeding and has information sharing and networking projects at its core. Farmers must open their farms to interested visitors on an appointment-only basis. The primary benefit to the farmer is accreditation and visibility; however, no direct funding is provided. In Germany, the Society for the Conservation of Old and Endangered Livestock Breeds (GEH) is the driver of the annually updated red list of endangered domestic and livestock breeds (currently more than 90 breeds are on the list). To support this work, it has developed the concept of an 'ark farm' (Archehof in German), which is registered as a protected name. Farms claiming ark farm status are required to meet a list of strict criteria. They must commit to rearing endangered heritage breeds, keep them in appropriate conditions, and integrate them in the farm operation. Coupled with this conservation work, they also need to raise public awareness of endangered breeds. Registered farms are open to visitors with a special emphasis on educational programmes and activities for children.
- **BIO-SECURITY PROJECT** - bio-security information for farmers - involves 380 veterinary institutions in ongoing dialogue with breed societies – EU funding. Support is generally open to all farmers who have heritage breed animals and are willing to collaborate with the individual breeding associations in the maintenance of specific breeds. The following are examples of some of the many results-based approaches to protect animal genetic resources in several European countries, including Ireland (see below).

Germany: Support measures for animal genetic resources are currently available in 13 of Germany's 16 federal states, providing support for 11 horse breeds, 13 cattle breeds, 18 sheep breeds, four goat breeds, five pig breeds, two chicken breeds and two goose breeds (TGRDEU 2014). Some of these are implemented through results-based Agri-environment payments that pay per head for breeding animals maintained over the five-year contract period. Others are funded through schemes organised by breeder associations (e.g. through the rural development LEADER or cooperation measures).

Italy: Agri-environment schemes in 18 regions supported a total of 130 endangered breeds in 2007-2013, including poultry, cattle, goats, equines, sheep and pigs (see: <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps/fiche/-farm-conservation-rare-and-endangered-local-animals.htm>).

Austria: the Agri-environment scheme in 2007-2013 supported nine cattle breeds, two pig breeds, eight sheep breeds, seven goat breeds, and five horse breeds.

In Ireland, an Agri-environment scheme is available for three types of Irish cattle, three types of pony/horse, and one sheep breed.

- **NORDGEN COUNCIL FOR ANIMAL GENETIC RESOURCES (SCANDINAVIA/MULTI-STATE)** is the joint gene bank and knowledge centre for genetic resources. Its mission is to preserve and promote the sustainable use of genetic research. Organisationally there is one representative from each country with yearly plenary meetings and multiple working group sessions - information sharing/networking is at its core. From an Irish perspective, this is likely a best-in-class cooperative model to learn from; however, it has taken years of patience, joint working, and adequate resources to make it happen and keep it happening. They are keen to engage with suitable Irish partners.
- **CAP PAYMENTS AND RELATED** - there is ongoing scope to pay landowners to keep rare breeds. It needs to be acknowledged in Ireland that a small number of breeds do have headage payments for



newborns. Historically, payments are based on average livestock units of registered animals, with mature breeding cattle and horses counting as one unit and immature cattle, ewes, and lambs as partial units. Payments are made annually for the number of units kept during that year.

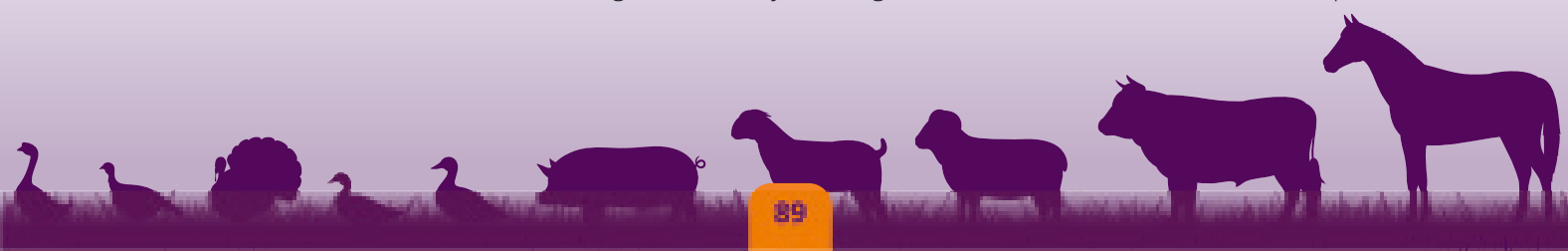
- **MAINSTREAM CULTURAL LINKAGE** - Herdwick sheep (UK) are being made a feature of the Lake District due to their close links to Beatrix Potter and her stories. This is seen to heighten the overall visitor experience.
- **FORMALISED SHEPHERDS TRAINING PROGRAMME (BELGIUM)** - accredited shepherds are then registered and called on by farmers, landowners and agencies when required. Also noteworthy in Belgium are premiums payments for genetic diversity.
- **CULLING MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION (NL)** - through detailed negotiations between the veterinary and farming sectors, endangered breeds are now removed from culling programmes in cases of contagious outbreaks, e.g. avian flu, foot and mouth. Ireland could learn from this multi-party approach for, as one of the consultees commented, 'it is impossible to reverse a cull; the damage is done'.
- **RARE BREED FARMS ACCREDITATION (NL)** - accredited and promoted under one brand, 'rare breed farms'. 90+ farms participate. Embraces public information, educational support, interpretation, and breeding programmes. A regular programme of farm inspection is built into the accreditation process.
- **COMMERCIALISATION (NL AND SCANDINAVIA)** - significant research/pilot implementation work done on embedding greater commercialisation of rare breeds on Dutch farms and in Scandinavia, especially Finland. NordGen has done significant research that is transferable to Ireland in this area.
- **MAPPING PROJECT (NL)** - spatially mapping, not just where rare breeds are in Holland, but getting visitors to tell their stories and upload images. The employment of GPS mapping could be easily applied on a phased basis to auditing, tracking progress, providing the breed societies with valuable information and enhancing the visitor experience as part of a wider online communication planning. In addition, the Centre for Genetic Resources in the Netherlands (CGN) developed three simple infographics for the Dutch animal breeding sector addressing, 'what is inbreeding and why is it a problem?', 'how to deal with inbreeding and the relationship for breeders and owners', and finally, managing inbreeding and relationships in the breed'. A similar approach in Ireland could be valuable for the farmers and societies.
- **SAVE FOUNDATION (INTERNATIONAL/SWITZERLAND)** - for over 20 years, it has promoted the safeguarding of agrobiodiversity within unique human systems throughout Europe. European wide umbrella organisation for NGOs and farmers/breeders brought together through networking activities, delivering cross border projects, and offering specialist support to establish national/regional NGOs such as breed societies. The network currently consists of 25 partner organisations in 16 European countries. They are keen to work with suitable Irish partners.

5.2.3 Summary Learning Transferable to Ireland

- A national plan is always needed for rare breeds at a national level.
- Gene banks should be government or university-run. They should have comprehensive pan-European connections and should regularly be monitored and adhere to the best international practice. All essential stakeholders should oversee its operation.
- There needs to be a formal structured partnership between government, individual societies, umbrella bodies, and related partners. All participants emphasised the need to design and manage a suitably participatory framework, which is adequately supported, expertly led, and action-oriented.



- Many European partners emphasised the need at a national organisation and individual breed society level for a healthy turnover of participants to avoid the structure becoming stale, e.g., rotation every two to three years.
- Enlightened leadership was regularly flagged as essential to success. Belgium has a part-time payment for the chair of the national structure.
- Also, participating scientists from the Department of Agriculture need to be on the board of a nationally representative rare breed society.
- Rare breeds and what constitutes rare breeds need to be decided on at a national level. Note: this is likely something that could be addressed in a future 'Irish National Rare Breeds Strategy'.
- Decide on whether genetics and science or awareness and publicity is the current top priority - this was an ongoing conversation across Europe. The reality is both are of equal importance in a practical sense; however, without the science, we will eventually not have a native rare breed population to promote.
- There needs to be a platform where breed organisations, universities, government officials, and other stakeholders meet once or twice a year, potentially at a fundraiser or conference, to network/ share information and air grievances. This is independent of the formal multi-party structure discussed above.
- Good practice across Europe suggests there should be a national communication plan for rare breeds, including website content and management and a strong social media presence. Many employ communication strategy specialists to oversee design, content, distribution, and analysis.
- Irish rare breeds should collaborate with the Irish Seed Savers (ISS) – this was a recommendation from the SAVE Foundation. It can be argued ISS has secured a considerably higher status over animal genetic resources (AGR) in recent years, largely down in part to excellence in case making. They sustain themselves through the likes of CSP, CE Schemes, and, importantly, rolling financial support by DAFM. Their status is further copper fastened through active participation on the Genetic Resource Advisory Committee, the IEN, and Climate Alliance.
- To date, Irish rare breeds haven't been part of the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI). This is a significant lost opportunity for Irish rare breeds given the success of EIP-AGRI schemes where innovation actors come together (farmers, advisers, researchers, businesses, NGOs, and others) at EU level and national pilot levels and under the rural development programmes (RDPS) umbrella.
- At a global level, it would be good practice to promote the role/practical programmes from a rare breeds' perspective of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), given their global governance role. It oversees, monitors, and evaluates the implementation of the first Global Plan of Action for Genetic Resources. Below the FAO are organisations like Rare Breeds International (RBI), a global NGO concerned with the conservation of animal genetic resources (AnGR). It works in conjunction with FAO and other livestock production organisations. See www.rarebreedsinternational.org and <https://www.fao.org/home/en>.
- In the USA, the Livestock Conservancy is often referred to as a leading NGO in the field of rare breed conservation and practice. Its simple Conservation Priority Criteria segments endangered breeds into the following categories by way of a rudimentary watch list - 'critical', 'threatened', and 'watch'. See <https://livestockconservancy.org>. The UK has the respected Rare Breeds Survival Trust, which directly fed into this study. See <https://www.rbst.org.uk/>.
- Good and consistent branding/messaging is essential to build the bridge between native rare breeds and modern farming, eco-friendly farming, and the future of sustainable food production



in an era of climate change mitigation. This needs to be professionally managed as previously indicated.

- There should be a national platform, organisation and/or resource that facilitates the transfer of knowledge concerning rare breeds. A suitable academic 'home' for this resource appears to be the norm across Europe today.
- The promotion of best practice in conservation grazing should be constantly actioned. The role of local authorities in this regard was accepted as essential. See Newbridge for profile of area-based conservation planning.
- Farmers need to be constantly at the heart of the whole national decision-making process - this is the chief learning from across Europe. Also, essential partners around the table should be the vets, scientists, academics and department/policymakers.
- Funding for the national body should come from the government. This funding should not just be allocated on a year-on-year basis but provide security into the medium term. Funding can come as simple core funding and for special projects, pilots, or distinct rolling aspects such as communications, education, and public messaging.
- Rare breeds should be sold as similarly important to our culture and identity as built heritage.
- Many participants felt that the animals need to demonstrate to the broader public that they have a use - meat, eggs, milk, cheese, wool etc.
- The marriage of conservation grazing and farm parks was often cited as a productive form of relatively simple cooperation, e.g., UK, NL, and Germany.

5.2.4 International Rare Breed Societies - Summary Online Survey Responses

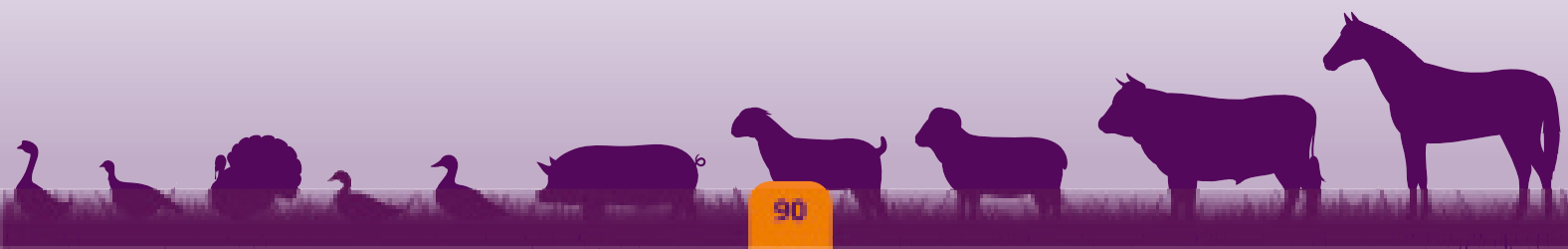
A sample profile of the online survey results below illustrates some of the key learnings that emerged. These are in no order or priority. All survey feedback received helped inform findings and recommendations later in the study.

1 *Is there a national promotional strategy for the rare breeds in your country?*



2 *What are the key messages that are conveyed to the public about rare breeds, and how is that done (old and new media, events, happenings, research gatherings, academic publications)?*

Many respondents say that the main message conveyed to the public is the importance of rare and heritage breeds in tackling the biodiversity and climate crisis. They also mention cultural heritage and how native animals are best adapted to the native landscapes in Ireland. However, some say that very little is being communicated to the public in relation to rare and heritage breeds, which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.



Old Irish Goat, Connemara National Park



6

RECOMMENDATIONS



6 | RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section attempts to distil all the findings from the original research and consultation learnings conducted between May and October 2021 in Ireland and beyond. The output is a variety of tangible recommendations covering the key themes embedded in the brief of this study.

- **Organisational**
- **Strategic**
- **Connemara National Park**
- **Newbridge House & Farm**

Each recommendation below is presented within the same format. The seven recommendations should be viewed as having a degree of urgency in their delivery, i.e. completion within the next 18 months. Some, no doubt, will be more complex (and expensive) than others. However, this study clearly states that if Irish native rare breeds are to be taken seriously and provided with a solid platform to progress, the interventions below represent the minimum requirement based on international good practice.

Organisational

1. **National Rare Breeds Secretariat**

DESCRIPTION: The creation of a permanent administrative facility with a full-time capable general manager to oversee the delivery of a national rare breeds strategy. The role is overseen by a multi-party steering group with administrative, programming, and salary expenses coming from a cocktail of funds. The entity will be embedded in a partner organisation and be funded for an initial three-year period.

INDICATIVE BUDGET: 150k per annum x3 = 450k

OUTPUTS: Manager role servicing all the needs of societies under a work programme identified in a national strategy document; delivery of a PR national campaign; commissioning and distribution of research material; lobbying and case-making on behalf of the sector; fundraising and income generation; building and managing external relationships; international cooperation and representation. Policy formation and political case-making is another important consideration and something rare breeds collectively have been weak on over the last decade. Currently, there is a raft of county-focused biodiversity plans being drafted that will, in turn, help inform the next wave of county development plans - the secretariat should be coordinating suitable responses to these and related regional, national, and EU initiatives.

2. **National Formal Engagement with Rare Breed Societies**

DESCRIPTION: Commission the international SAVE Foundation (or other appropriate body) to undertake the design and delivery of four regional workshops addressing issues and options for the sustainable development of the Irish rare breeds sector in line with best practice learnings. The half-day sessions open to all interested parties would result in a final summary report with embedded practical observations and recommendations. Each session would have a facilitator and keynote speaker from a sister European rare breed society.

INDICATIVE BUDGET: 20k inclusive of all expenses

OUTPUTS: Bespoke regional workshops x4; independent and informed facilitator/keynote speaker(s); objective and informed post-workshop report.

Strategic

3. Irish Rare Breeds - Strategic Plan: 2023-2033

DESCRIPTION: Through a partnership approach, commission a team of likely international specialists to develop a ten-year strategy for native Irish rare breeds. This strategy will shape all future strategic direction, alignment, and programming of the sector while setting out how to enhance efficiency and build the necessary relationships at home and abroad.

INDICATIVE BUDGET: 75k (on-off cost)

OUTPUTS: A strategically smart, practical, actions-orientated, and fully costed roadmap for all essential partners to endorse; the generation of a platform that better flags and coordinates all potential public funding into the sector; a process that is driven by excellence in consultations; upon launch a defining public moment in the future direction of rare breeds survival and appreciation in Ireland.

Connemara National Park

4. Connemara National Park - an Outdoor Living Heritage Experience

DESCRIPTION: Connemara National Park has several key advantages in terms of its positioning as a rare breed location; these can be further developed. The park itself, for example, has been considered home to the internationally recognised Connemara pony. The management of Connemara National Park has a deep understanding of native rare breeds. These skills enable the NPWS to operate and deliver breeding and management schemes of national importance. This focus and capacity are built upon a strong legacy and association of the park and its landscape as a place to breed and protect biodiversity.

There is future operational and financial sustainability in investing and repositioning animals and rare breeds as part of the mainstream attraction of the Connemara National Park in future years.

These opportunities propose Connemara developing itself as an outdoor living experience for Irish heritage breeds led by the Connemara pony. The key concept is outdoor trail-driven discovery points that take the visitor on a recreational and education journey, employing the hook of specific Irish heritage breeds on site. These breeds add to the commerciality, visitor experience, and future sustainability of living heritage centres, as proven at many good living heritage sites internationally seen earlier in this study.

INDICATIVE BUDGET: An action-oriented implementation plan should be developed to achieve these objectives at a one-off cost of 25k. This roadmap will outline the integrated hard and soft initiatives required, including branding, trail development, interpretation and training needed to help fundamentally reposition the park.

OUTPUTS: Connemara National Park sets itself apart as a unique attraction in Ireland, maximising its distinctiveness.

5. Connemara National Park - Fact Sheet

One omission in relation to public communications would be the provision of a modest fact sheet on all the different heritage breeds in the National Park and their status. This multilingual publication (received on arrival or downloadable in advance) should have a simple map, pictorial images of breeds, viewing/photographic points on the journey, and key sites on the proposed walk.



6. Connemara National Park - Development Options

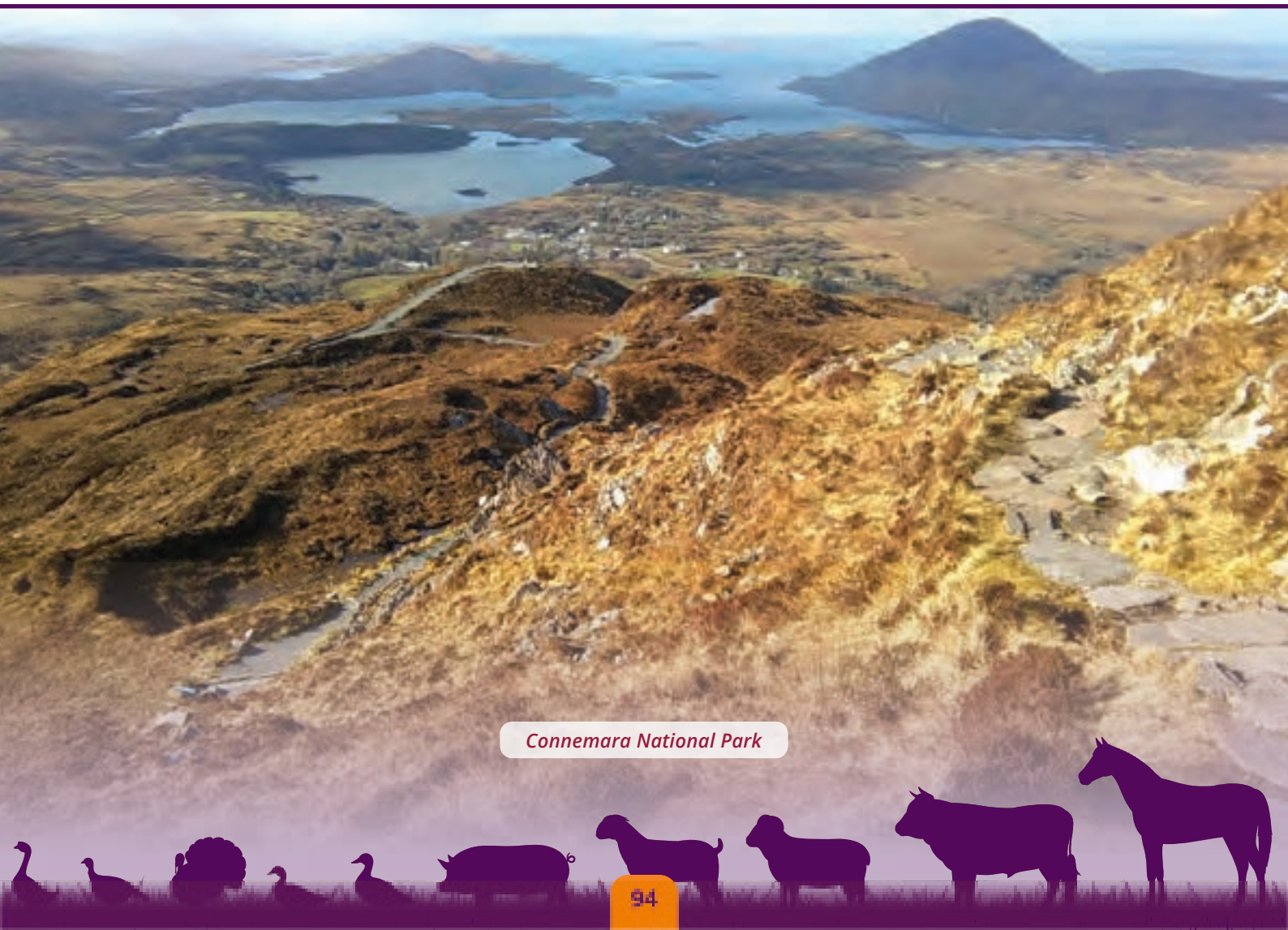
DESCRIPTION: The site visit and subsequent follow-up conversations with Connemara National Park have identified the specific development of new visitor experiences as important to enhance the National Park. Many of these relate to broadening the core offering of walking Diamond Hill. The concept of a Connemara pony heritage looped walk along with a Cladoir sheep uplands trail is being explored. The proposed immersive experience for visitors will promote awareness of the importance of breeds and help protect them in the short term. Embedding the concept of 'citizen science' (e.g., spotting, sampling, recording) into a new all-year-round experience in Connemara is a significant opportunity. A regular programme of year-round rare breeds/traditional farming festivals and events will further enhance the park's heritage breed reputation and appeal.

INDICATIVE BUDGET: A budget of €200k would establish the Connemara pony loop walk, and a further €100k would create the Cladoir sheep uplands trail (inclusive of a suite of suitable educational/promotional material).

OUTPUTS: The additions of these developments X2 at Connemara National Park would introduce a new and welcome visitor experience. There are currently hundreds of thousands of visitors, but rarely do they get an insight into the story of the park's heritage breeds. These additions could be transformational for the park, feeding into a broader Wild Atlantic Way narrative about the authentic, unique, and wild.

7. Connemara National Park - Cladoir Sheep Conservation Project

The initiative is in its infancy and needs support and resources to strengthen its ability to make a real impact on the sustainability of the breed and its association with the park. The Cladoir is fast becoming a significant rare breed 'good news' story that can bring international attention to the park while broadening the visitor experience whilst at the park.



Connemara National Park

Newbridge House & Farm

8. Newbridge House & Farm as an Irish Hub for Native Rare Breeds

DESCRIPTION: Newbridge House & Farm is one of the few locations in Ireland where Irish rare breeds are maintained as part of a living heritage site. It is recommended that rare breeds are recognised fully by Newbridge farm as one of their primary essential elements to their overall strategy.

The farm at Newbridge Demesne should adopt the leading position of becoming Ireland's first rare breeds hub. This can apply to the full Newbridge attraction, and a new integrated sustainable farming and food theme could be adopted to drive future strategy. By adopting an integrated theme across the site, the offering to the visitor and the whole visitor experience can follow a logical and attractive theme. Research and consultations for this study have determined that rare breeds are commercial and need to be seen in this light for guaranteed future survival. Newbridge farm has a unique opportunity to turn what they have already created into a commercial and sustainable living heritage rare breed hub nationally, driving the whole rare breed development conversation.

INDICATIVE BUDGET: Initial budget of €150k one-off cost to establish strategy key elements/ interventions.

OUTPUTS: The drafting of an action plan to operationally map out the change required. The creation of the hub would singularly set apart Newbridge farm as a serious player in Irish rare breed protection and promotion. It would become an exemplar to whom international heritage centres would look for inspiration and guidance. On a commercial level, it would gain immediate traction for both domestic and international visitors alike.



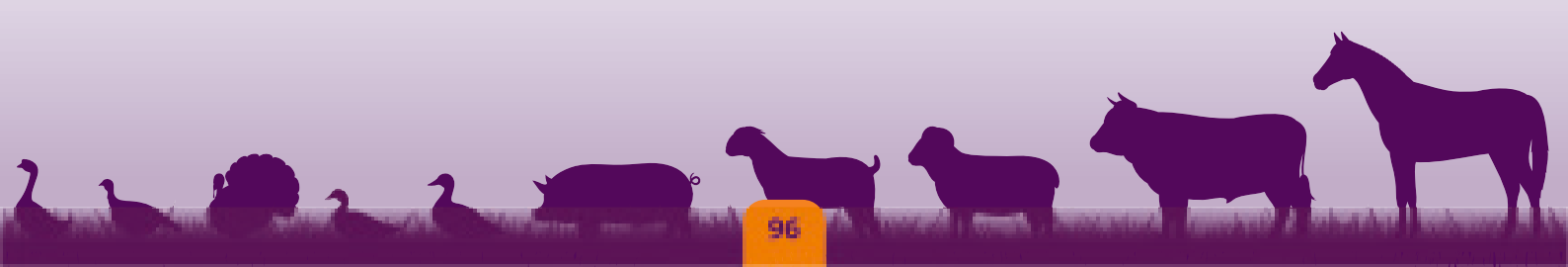
Newbridge House, Newbridge House & Farm

9. Newbridge House & Farm - New Partnerships

DESCRIPTION: It is recommended that as a critical part of the new heritage breeds hub that fresh partnerships are formed in key areas such as science and academia. Newbridge House & Farm should choose a small number of critical partnerships, e.g. third-level institutions or agricultural colleges, to foster the genetic reliability and authenticity of its living heritage rare breed centre. Such a partnership would benefit both parties, with integrity/innovation being added to the mix at Newbridge and a new outdoors living heritage centre added to the college as part of its outreach. Breeders are another key player for Newbridge, ensuring a consistent supply of quality animals to the centre. The farm has already forged excellent relationships with breeders, which can be expanded upon.

INDICATIVE BUDGET: A budget of €20-30k pa for initial administrative and collaboration co-work in establishing the key partnerships above. (This excludes any physical site enhancement work for additional classrooms/lecture theatres or laboratories.)

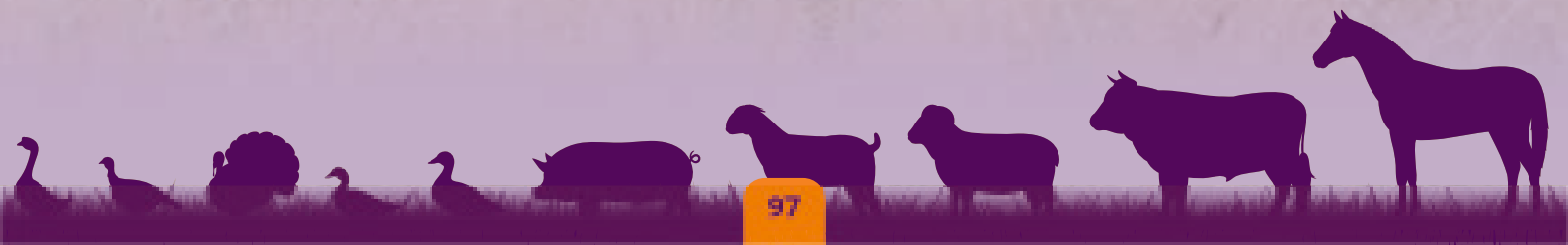
OUTPUTS: The new hub at Newbridge farm would secure the most appropriate partnerships, particularly amongst the scientific and academic world, ensuring it has support and assistance in its work going forward. It is imagined these would be from within the greater Dublin area.



Goat Grazing, Howth



7 CONCLUSION



7 | CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to begin casting some fresh light on creating a sustainable future for endangered native Irish rare breeds. The document is built upon several premises, namely:

- Without immediate action and sustained public investment, we will lose farm breeds unique to Ireland.
- The approach needs to be collaborative, following a realistic vision built upon best international practice.
- Living heritage centres in Ireland (X2) offer practical examples of how to manage and promote native rare breeds to the mainstream; they are rare breeds 'shop windows' of tomorrow.

The foundation stone employed in this study was to talk to as many key partners in Ireland and Europe that were prepared to engage in the process, including representative bodies/societies, international living heritage centres and transnational bodies dedicated to conserving rare breeds. From these emerged significant learnings. Chief among these, in no order of significance, are:

- The farmer on the ground is, and will remain, the powerhouse of breeding and conserving Irish rare breeds.
- Ireland can transfer many generations of knowledge from its international partners. The goodwill towards Ireland is reassuring.
- A capable national secretariat is necessary.
- Science, genetics, and animal welfare lie at the centre of building a sustainable future.
- Rare breeds should strive to have a commercial purpose and not just be passive show breeds.
- Robust, collaborative, capable, and suitably resourced representative societies/organisations are vital drivers of success.
- Policy formation and political case making are weak and must be addressed immediately.
- New innovative partnerships (e.g. corporate, academic, and international) will help sustain native breeds.
- Effective linkage with government and policymakers is of primary importance.
- Adequate data underpins case making.
- Conservation grazing needs to be further examined and built upon by every local authority area in the country. The County and City Management Association (CCMA) is the representative voice of the local government management network and could be a helpful bridge in this regard.
- Competent communications planning is an important tool often overlooked - in today's world, much of best international practice has moved to online platforms. In Ireland, however, there needs to be an acknowledgement and respect for the profile of the farmer and their pace of embracing change.

Confidence will accrue from the continued progress being made in Newbridge House & Farm and Connemara National Park. They remain trailblazers. This study has identified how each can grow and further embed rare breeds at the heart of their offering. In time, they can inspire other like-minded visitor attractions across the island to embrace their vision and good practice. An island-wide network of rare breed-orientated attractions that align with national tourism development policy should be the goal. This increased visibility and support for rare breed farmers and societies will be considerable for the coming generation.

A desired output from this study was the generation of an initial Irish rare breeds watch list. The building blocks of this list were examining accepted models in the UN, UK, and USA. The Irish model presented here secured its data from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. The process of securing reliable and up-to-date breeding numbers illustrates Ireland's need for additional resources in this area. The list is only the beginning of a rolling benchmark of the vulnerability of our most endangered rare breeds.

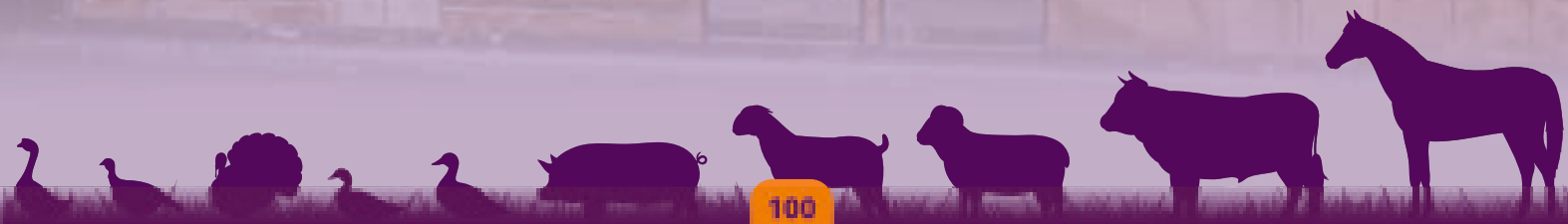
This study is hopefully a document that can inform an ongoing national conversation on how best to conserve and promote our native rare breeds, particularly from the perspective of how others outside of Ireland have been successfully addressing similar challenges for generations.



Irish Draught, Newbridge House & Farm



Appendix 1 ADVISORY NOTE



APPENDIX 1 | ADVISORY NOTE

Introduction

There are identifiable accomplishments that suggest an Irish rare breed renaissance is possible.

The identification and eventual recognition of the Kerry Bog pony may be regarded as something of a turning point for Irish livestock breeds in 2006. It was the first Irish native breed 'discovered' in the 21st century. This historic achievement, and the way it was achieved, presents a road map for others to follow. The most recent breeds to be recognized as native Irish breeds are the Droimeann cow (2019) and the Old Irish Goat (2021). Efforts are also underway to research and recognise various other breeds such as the Cladoir sheep and the Bo Riabhach cow.

Behind this progress is the democratisation of animal genetics capability coupled with active citizenship, which has responded to realise lost or at least generally forgotten cultural heritage. This novel partnership of citizen and scientist, under the patronage of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, is at the centre of a complex, multi-tiered, hierarchical, organisational infrastructure and network related to genetic resources, food security, and land use management, that spans and indeed connects citizens and their livestock across the globe. The uptick in activity presents a unique opportunity in Irish history for a progressive phase in the conservation and utilisation of native breeds in Ireland. The current study represents a valuable embodiment of the new thinking and diverse interest that the Irish native breeds sector is attracting. This emerging potential is young, fragile and under-resourced.

European Context

The study recognises the common interest that exists around native breeds and gives voice to a clear cohort of citizens that value breeds that fit within a social enterprise culture; that is, an enterprise that has a triple bottom line: social, economic and environmental.

Reflecting on the European research element of this study, the researchers referred to the work of EIP-AGRI, which focused on group genetic resources cooperation models and issued a final report in 2015. The objective of this group was to reflect on the current limits of cooperation between the different types of stakeholders and to propose actions on how to promote closer cooperation.

The EIP-AGRI focus group on genetic resources concluded that:

1. The genetic resources of locally adapted breeds are well recognised as important to agriculture because of their unique genetic profile and their potential to provide useful traits to benefit farming systems in the future.
2. These breeds often make use of marginal land that cannot be used for other forms of agriculture. Through their adaptation to harsh environments, such breeds may contribute to food security and generate value from land otherwise unusable for farming. Frequently, these breeds thrive in low-input, extensive farming systems without the need for additional feeding or management.
3. As agricultural land becomes ever more limited and the costs of animal feed, supplements and energy increase, the genetic resources of locally adapted breeds offer an opportunity to achieve sustainable productivity in farming across the EU.
4. The value of these genetic resources must be recognised and protected. The only successful means of sustainable conservation is to identify and/or create markets for the local breeds and their products through the development of new holistic cooperation models.

5. Inter-multidisciplinary approaches involving economic, social, cultural, and nutritional aspects, tourism, and genetic resources, are needed to enlarge crops and breeds used in agriculture. Activities can be linked to the territory and should be driven by a business model.
6. The group suggested the promotion of activities (for example, a regional European programme) that could develop the capacities of young people to become successful agriculture entrepreneurs. These should target local communities and farmers of small- and medium-sized farms. The programme should be made attractive by proposing a new concept of agriculture in which genetic diversity, environment/nature, local identity (geographic indications) and economic opportunities play a central role. Such programmes should better integrate farmers into the eco-agri-food systems to produce healthier and nutritious food.

The EIP-AGRI focus group recommends that the first essential step would be to build a working group comprising all stakeholders and organisations involved in breeding, conservation, and utilisation:

1. Ideally, each group will be run by a 'champion' of an individual breed or closely aligned group of breeds. This champion would normally be a breeder/farmer. It is important that decisions related to a breed are agreed upon by the people working in the immediate area and making a living from the breed. Also, ultimately, breeders are the best representatives to explain fully to the market why customers should be interested in their products.
2. However, breeders already have full-time jobs, and it is important that these initiatives are provided with additional support. This ideally involves employees who are paid to contribute to the technical needs for the development of the breed. A common understanding from the technical and scientific members of the working group is needed, and an agreement to involve some of the staff's time in the development of the breed.
3. As mentioned above, the first task is to identify and connect all stakeholders. This can be difficult due to a range of issues, including lack of time on the part of farmers/breeders, their disinterest in teamwork and the likelihood that the stakeholders are spread over a wide geographical area, making meetings difficult and costly to organise. This necessitates a funding requirement to kick off the initiative as well as the involvement of outsiders who have a good knowledge and expertise on how to start and handle such a collective organisation.
4. It is also important that local breeds are used in the environment to which they are adapted. Often, 'fashionable' exogenous breeds, such as Highland cattle or Hebridean sheep, are preferred over the use of better adapted local breeds of a region.

The EIP-AGRI focus group notes that the EU Rural Development Programme (EU) No. 1305/2013 – Article 35 on cooperation could support activities related to conservation and sustainable use of GR via the European Innovative Partnership model. Note: some practical recommendations from this model are built into the executive summary of the study.

Many Irish rare breed populations are anecdotally in decline or of unknown conservation status within the context of a malaise of organisational and political challenges that are common across Europe. The lack of visibility of native animal genetic resources within the EU Rural Development Programme priorities has resulted in an absence of programmes of scale in Ireland that could have made a significant impact on the conservation of native breeds and wider biodiversity. The current round of European Innovation Partnerships in Ireland, which, while delivering welcome innovation and advancement of biodiversity, generally, by the omission of native breeds, serves to illuminate this point. What is perhaps being lost in the drive to rightly preserve farmers, habitats and ecosystems are that indigenous animal genetic resources provide essential means to produce food and other services within those natural systems, providing vital functional diversity within biodiversity.



Man and biosphere rely on genetic resources to produce food and achieve important functional diversity, e.g. pollination, draft power, habitat management, and carbon sequestration, within biodiversity. Often native genetic resources are missed in this formula, with a notable absence in CAP and EIP as applied in Ireland to date.

Irish Context

Native breeds fit well into the emerging narrative of the new CAP Strategic Plan, which is structured around the achievement of three general objectives, as set out in EU legislation, namely:

1. To foster a smart, competitive, resilient and diversified agricultural sector ensuring long term food security;
2. To support and strengthen environmental protection, including biodiversity and climate action, and to contribute to achieving the environmental- and climate-related objectives of the Union, including its commitments under the Paris Agreement;
3. to strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas.

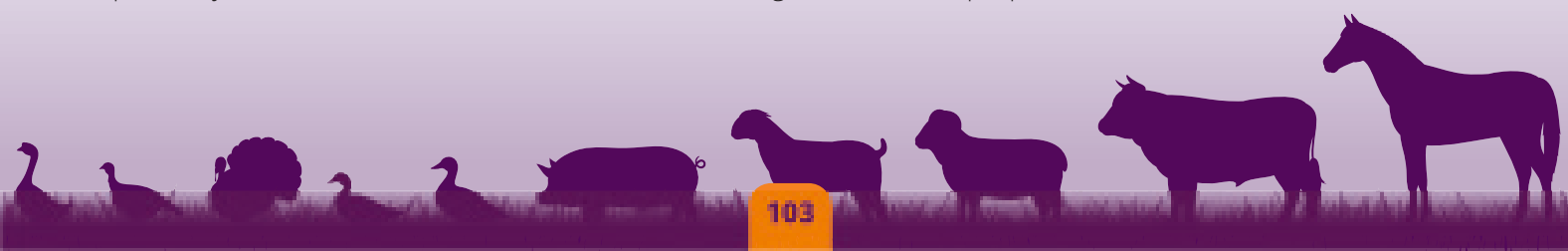
This study's central focus or message relates to the organisational capacity or infrastructure on the one hand and the indigenous breed centred, commercial food, sport and environmental research that is needed to help the established and emerging societies move forward to the next level of activity and achievement. In this context, the conservation and utility of native livestock breeds is a multifaceted activity that spans several enterprise sectors and has stakeholders across several government departments, civic institutions, academia, and society. In examining the study findings, it becomes clear that societies face a complex suite of activities to manage, along with membership across Ireland, and an even more intricate hierarchy of regulatory and stakeholder expectations. This also includes a growing public demand for higher and more ethical standards.

Despite some recent achievements of the sector, the study reveals that there is a palpable sense that the sector needs to make something of a collective breakthrough. When looking at the national landscape of government decision-making entities, there is a notable absence of representation relating to the rare breeds. There is no rare breed NGO representation on the Genetic Resource Advisory Committee, CAP Consultation Committee or the Irish Environmental Network. Very few societies are members of the Public Participation Network. Native breed societies in Ireland feel critically underrepresented in the national civic decision-making infrastructure that directs state priorities and resources.

Coupled with this lack of input is the additional challenge that rare breeds of livestock, due to their multifaceted food, enterprise, sporting, craft and cultural credentials, span the interests of practically all government departments. For example:

1. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
2. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
3. Department of Rural and Community Development
4. Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment
5. Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
6. Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
7. Department of the Taoiseach (as the Office of Public Works reside in the Department)

The broad, multifaceted nature of native breeds stakeholders, their lack of representation in official channels, as discussed above, and their low populations leave native breeds and their partners disparate and feeling politically invisible. It is often stated the commercial agenda has a disproportionate effect as native breeds do



not enjoy legal protection in Ireland, or European oversight, that safeguards the likes of the curlew or corncrake. The recent resources, visibility, and the EU support to focus on the hen harrier is a case in point compared to the absence of joined-up thinking and basic support for many of the smaller to medium-sized Irish rare breeds. Societies are now beginning to talk about parity of esteem.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has international responsibility, significant capacity and resources at its disposal to enhance the population diversity and expand ownership of native breeds. The toolbox of likely measures fits broadly under the CAP into five areas:

- European Innovation Partnerships,
- Knowledge transfer programmes,
- Research funding,
- The GLAS scheme, and
- The Genetic Resources Grant Aid Scheme.

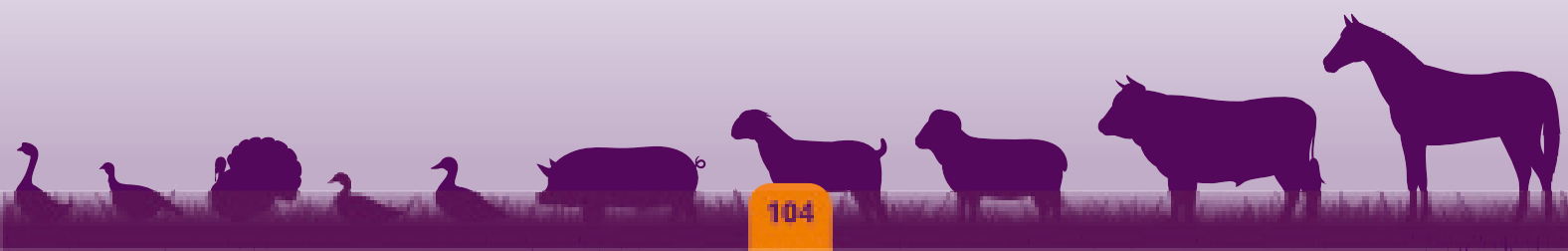
The geographical distribution of rare breed societies is a strength and could link societies into a considerable network of local authority, veterinary, heritage and biodiversity resources through the PPN network and the Local Development Company network across Ireland. Integration into the community development network, typified by Tidy Towns groups, could assist societies in accessing relevant training on social media and governance, support via CE/RSS/TUS scheme participants and other supports. The cross-border, all-island nature of many of the societies offers scope for transnational co-working and funding. This opportunity is slowly being recognised both domestically and further afield.

An Organisational Structure/Network

An organisational structure/network for native breeds promoting international best practice related to breed conservation and utility and respecting the autonomy of the societies under a distributed leadership model needs to be devised. This should be anchored on the needs of the societies. A distributed leadership model translates broadly into an environment that is conducive to the development of the breed society as an organisation and executing its research needs. This is coupled with a programme of work that also includes public information, an annual calendar of scheduled facilitated learning events, conferences, field trips and social gatherings rotating through each province and each yearly quarter.

The organisational structure could bring together all the listed government departments and their relevant subsidiary agencies. For example, in no order of priority:

- The OPW
- Coillte
- Heritage Council
- Sheep Ireland
- Irish Cattle Breeders Federation
- Teagasc
- Failte Ireland
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Bord Bia
- Pobál
- National Rural Network



- Agri Aware
- National Organic Training
- Local authorities and development/LEADER companies or landscape partnerships
- Academia
- Private sector
- Societies
- Umbrella Groups, e.g. Horse Society Ireland
- Royal Dublin Society
- Dublin Zoo
- Other potential stakeholders

This would be like the approach adopted by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine in forming the CAP Consultative Committee, relating to the CAP Strategic Plan. This is a non-exhaustive list; an inclusive approach is paramount.

Edgar Parnell, a proponent of the cooperative model, suggests that transformative change can be delivered in two steps: *'create the vision and implement the vision'*. Here, Parnell echoes the finding of the study and the importance of strategy, not just to direct but also to harness resources. The vision element can be broken down into four nested parts: **VISION**, addressing 'why' and 'what'; **STRATEGY**, 'what' and 'where'; **TACTICS**, 'where' and 'how'; and **ACTIONS**, 'how' and 'when'.

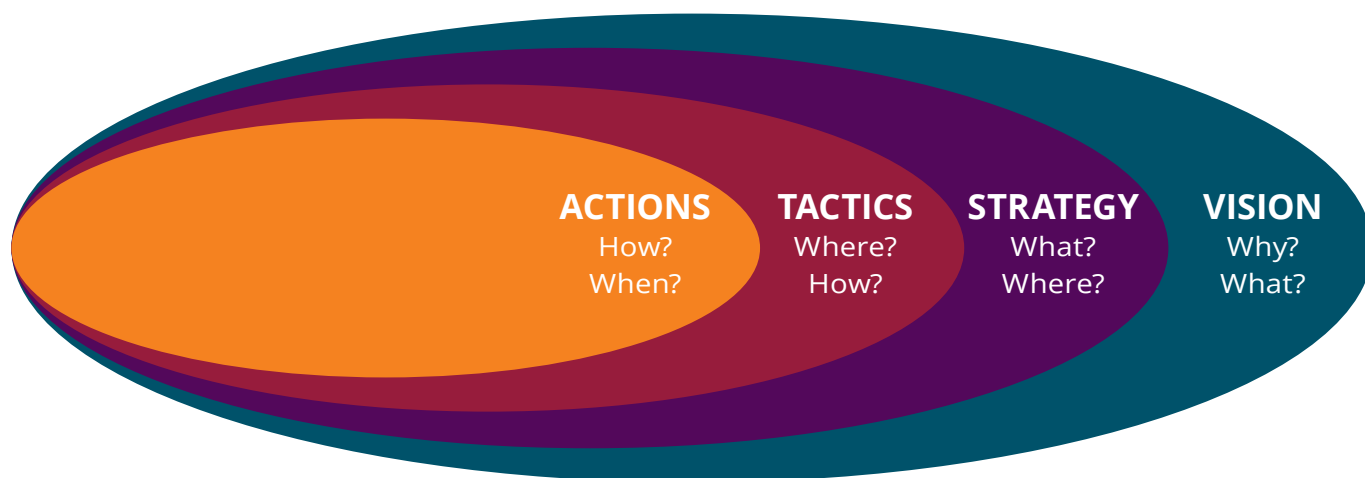
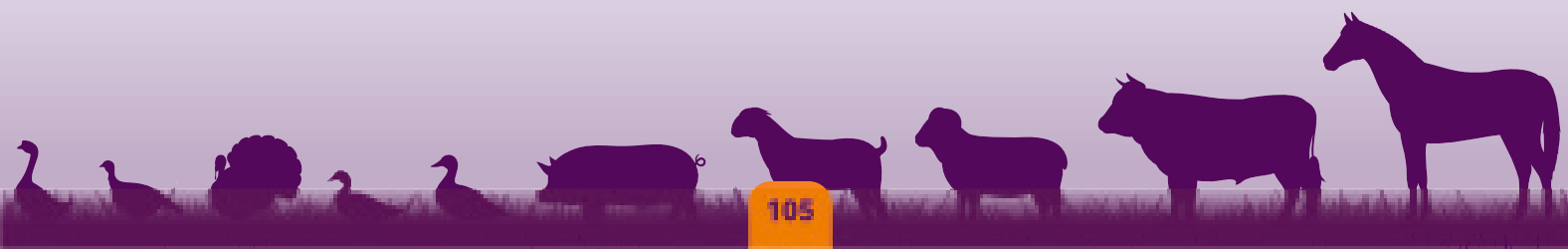


Figure 1, source: Four phases of a change model I (Steinitz, 2012, p.50)

Given the internationally acknowledged importance of native breeds in climate mitigation, a future Irish national rare breeds strategy could adopt some of the principles outlined in 'The People's Transition: Community-led Development for Climate Justice: Building capacity, valuing local knowledge, fostering trust, reducing inequality and increasing capabilities' and the politically aware, three-phased 'capabilities approach' proposed by McCabe in delivering change (McCabe et al., 2020, pp.81-84).

Research Indigenous Breeds

In all cases of rare breeds, there is some level of competition between breeds as to their selection for use on the farm. A dairy farmer will select a dairy breed, and a beef farmer will select a beef breed as he/she calculates the



most suitable in the circumstances. This is the case in nearly all livestock enterprises. The breed of animal has a job to do and should be able to do it. These decisions are usually based on some form of numerical measurement. These may be in weights, the volume of produce, etc. These are then turned into expected financial returns. Thus, the farmer knows what level of output to expect. With the rare breeds, these defined output levels are absent due to their exclusion from all research in the country. The only information available is provided by the breed society, which can only provide anecdotal evidence on expected performance. All breed societies will tell a very good story, so the farmer will opt for the breeds with hard data on them or, what is considered a safe option, what everyone else has.

How much milk will a cow of a given breed produce in a given farming system versus a standard breed of cow, and what factors affect the outcome? This is a very reasonable question to ask, but the question cannot be answered accurately. The same situation applies to the beef aspect and similarly to sheep, goats and poultry. The equines fit into a different class, but one underlying fact remains: they must be able to do their job.

What are the factors affecting the farmer's decisions in relation to:

- Getting the particular rare breed in the first place?
- The reason for keeping them?
- The issues affecting stock levels versus another non-rare breed on the farm?
- The reason the farmer stopped keeping rare breeds on the farm?

In summary, what is the product being sold, and how will the customer receive it?

Generally, farmers expect a return on their investment and in the case of rare breeds, they are unable to evaluate rare breeds from this perspective. Trying to solve this problem from a political/structural perspective only will have limited success.

The conventional breeds have millions of euros spent each year on research and advisory service to allow farmers to make the most from them. Rare breeds may offer different options for the future, especially with the restrictions that are coming into play due to nitrates and carbon regulation. Still, without any hard data, it will be next to impossible to step into this niche.

There is evidence that some native breeds of cows produce milk at an efficiency of 85 to 90% of Holstein cows, without adjusting for weight gain or health benefits. This fits in with the basic biology of animals and should be of no great surprise to any scientist. This warrants proper investigation. The natural or biological efficiency of converting food (i.e. grass into milk, meat or eggs etc.) by rare breeds needs to be measured against other breeds. The most popular and profitable cattle breed in the country is the Holstein/Friesian. Most cattle are not registered with the society, and bulls entering AI stations are only registered for that express purpose. It appears that the breed is led by the farm system, not the society, which is well structured and financed; it is also part of the largest breed society in the world. Is there something to learn here? Hard data is the best marketing tool, especially if provided by a reliable source like a university or Teagasc.

This brings us to the lack of research into the economic and other environmental benefits of native breeds and the need for a well-designed research and knowledge transfer programme with demonstration farms. This could level the playing field and provide a platform for rare breeds to be viewed and considered by farmers.

NOTE: In the absence of research-based economic and environmental functionality driven incentivisation of indigenous breeds, the GLAS scheme acts as a basic safety net. This safety net needs to be strengthened by:

1. Doubling of the GLAS budget for native breeds.



2. The abolishment of the 10 LU cap and entrant eligibility.
3. Built-in capacity for Ireland’s obscure native breeds, or those of ‘unknown’ status as per FAO, as a specific measure to meet the precautionary principle of the Convention of Biological Diversity.

NOTE: Ireland’s obscure breeds are Old Irish poultry, the Bó Riabhach, Bó Finne, Cladoir sheep, Roscommon sheep, the Old Irish goat, and the Bilberry goat.

The current scheme configuration acts as a deterrent to younger entrant farmers and prevents the establishment of viable farms of scale utilising native breeds. There is a significant decline in native breed populations and the loss of flagship enterprises of scale. The number of annual birth registers is declining steeply.

Conclusion

The science of genetic evaluation of breeds has shifted significantly in the last decade and, through international collaboration, allows us to map the entire genome of breeds. This means that the distinctiveness of the native breeds can be researched, proven, and managed genetically, to an extent not possible up to now. From an organisation perspective, modern technologies and communications systems coupled with traditional skills allow us to manage resources in remote and challenging locations in a better way than previously. In a post-Covid world, communication over distance has become instant and inexpensive.

To get a set of measurable actions for the sustainability of Irish rare breeds, this study has recommended that a strategy roadmap is now urgently required. This output should be collaborative in design, innovative in solutions and ultimately transformational for all.

The proposed changes are required to secure and sustain Irish native breeds and thereby meet the EU Biodiversity Plan 2030 objective ‘to reverse the decline of genetic diversity’. The proposed investment could advance Objective A of the CAP Strategic Plan ‘to support viable farm income and resilience across the Union to enhance food security’. The proposed changes will also leave Ireland with some additional capacity in GLAS to meet the upcoming draft European Genetic Resources Strategy: <https://bit.ly/3uLbFFV>.

8 Short Term Recommendations

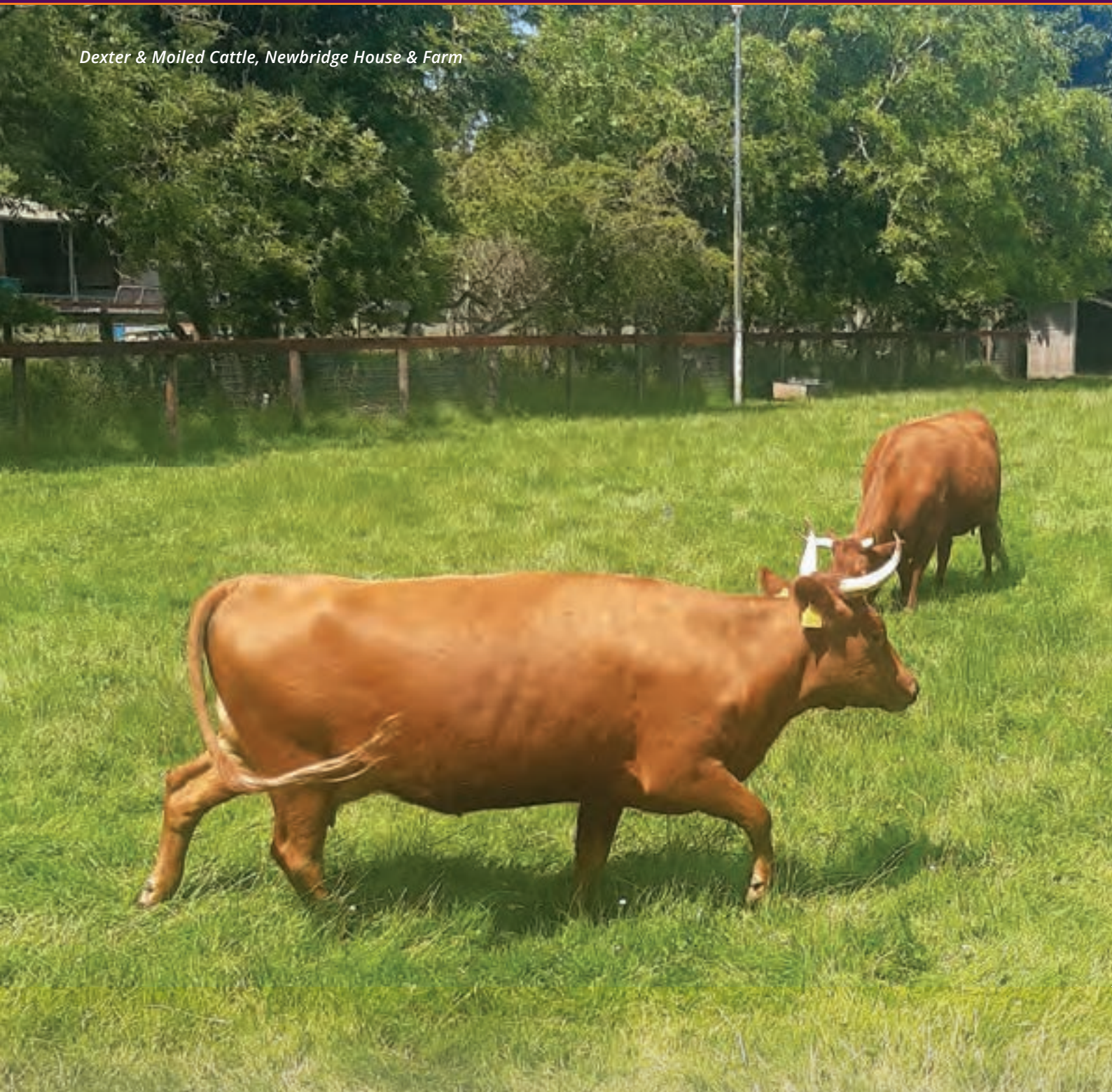
CATEGORY	NAME	DESCRIPTION
Ref.1: Organisational	National rare breeds secretariat.	The creation of a permanent administrative facility with a full-time capable general manager to oversee the delivery of a national rare breeds strategy. The outputs from this unit can be varied, but all focused on providing essential support and professionalising the efforts being made on the ground and through the societies.
Ref.2: Organisational	National formal engagement with rare breed societies.	Commission the international SAVE Foundation (or other appropriate body) to undertake the design and delivery of four regional workshops addressing issues and options for the sustainable development of the Irish rare breeds sector in line with best practice learnings.



CATEGORY	NAME	DESCRIPTION
Ref.3: Strategic	Irish rare breeds – strategic plan: 2022-2032.	Through a partnership approach, commission a team of likely international specialists to develop a ten-year strategy for native Irish rare breeds.
Ref.4: Strategic	<p>Creation of an ‘Irish Centre for Genetic Conservation and Research’ - coordinated research and knowledge transfer programmes centred on indigenous breeds addressing their economic and environmental benefits and providing functional diversity within the biodiversity sphere.</p> <p>Establish a centre for rare breeds research and conservation in a commercial setting in conjunction with link hubs like Newbridge, Connemara and satellite farms. This would put rare breeds on a more equal footing with other commercial breeds.</p>	<p>Through a distributed leadership model centred on breed/societies, partnered with local authorities, agencies and academia, with a network of real-world demonstration projects, partner with the best talent in academia and agencies in Ireland and abroad to deliver on genetic conservation and farming methods in an environmental and commercial setting.</p> <p>Establish a knowledge transfer programme with all the partners based on a two-way flow of information.</p>
Ref.5: Newbridge House & Farm	<p>Newbridge House & Farm as an Irish hub for native rare breeds.</p> <p>Newbridge House & Farm should partner with a new ‘Irish Centre for Genetic Conservation and Research’ (see above #4) to form a network of information exchange, genetic research, and practical conservation.</p>	Partnered with a central hub for rare breeds, Newbridge to become a model outreach centre and ‘shop window’ for rare breeds as well as a critical source for rare breed genetics.
Ref.6: Newbridge House & Farm	Newbridge House & Farm - new partnerships.	The attraction should cultivate a small number of critical partnerships, e.g. third-level institutions or agricultural colleges, to foster the genetic reliability and authenticity of its living heritage rare breed centre in line with best international practice.
Ref.7: Connemara National Park	Connemara National Park – an outdoor living heritage experience.	Connemara continues to develop as an outdoor living heritage experience on the Wild Atlantic Way for Irish rare breeds led by the Connemara pony.
Ref.8: Connemara National Park	Connemara National Park - new development options.	The practical and managed integration of native rare breeds into a visitor's interaction with the Irish landscape will help protect and promote the breeds while helping to deliver unique memories for tomorrow's tourists.



Dexter & Moiled Cattle, Newbridge House & Farm



Appendix 2 WATCH LIST



APPENDIX 2 | WATCH LIST



Introduction

The aim of this public infographic is to provide a simple snapshot of the known breeding numbers of Irish native breeds. The relevant breed societies and DAFM have to be credited for providing this information, which informs the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

In looking at the data set as a whole, it clearly reflects the vulnerable state of most Irish rare breeds today. The 20 breeds selected for this watch list include the recognised indigenous breeds and reflect the views of interviewees in relation to obscure breeds: those that are held still to exist, even if not by officialdom. Including them in the list is an honest expression of the spirit of the Precautionary Principle of the Convention of Biological Diversity. The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, Precautionary Principle stated, 'if there is a threat of significant loss of biological diversity, lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to avoid or minimise such a threat'. The list also includes some 'locally adapted breeds' or what is often referred to as 'traditional breeds'. While, for example, the Cladoir sheep presents as an anomaly (as per FAO, it is 'extinct'), there are vigorous efforts underway to conserve its genetic signature in Ireland, while the Bilberry goat presents as an enigma with no status or data. In framing this first Irish watch list, it needs to be acknowledged that there are several 'unknowns' that time will address, coupled with essential data that has not been collected or analysed.



Commentary

Population is a key indicator, but it does not tell the whole story, as teased out in the FAO, Categorisation of Risk Status. In summary, trends and threats need to be considered. Crossbreeding is recognised globally as the greatest threat to indigenous breeds, often by well-intentioned, approved aims to improve the breed. Genetic bottlenecking can occur, for example, by breeding to a single colour pattern or purpose. While on the surface, populations may appear healthy, breeds can be indiscernibly crossbred out of existence, whilst others are genetically bottlenecked. These well-documented paths to extinction will not present in uninterrogated population data.


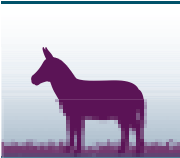
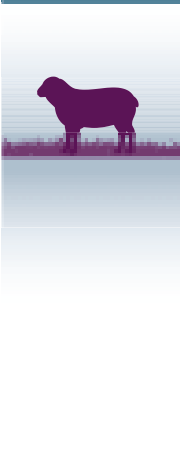



This watchlist, the first of its kind in Ireland, will be further expanded to provide greater clarity on those breeds that remain on the brink of extinction. Whether the so-called traditional breeds should be included is a matter for stakeholders to decide. Going forward, it is suggested that the list include or be mirrored by an extinction list, which details the last known records, images, geographic distribution, function and any cultural significances attached to these lost breeds. Our past failures must be in clear sight if we are to succeed in effectively conserving native Irish breeds.

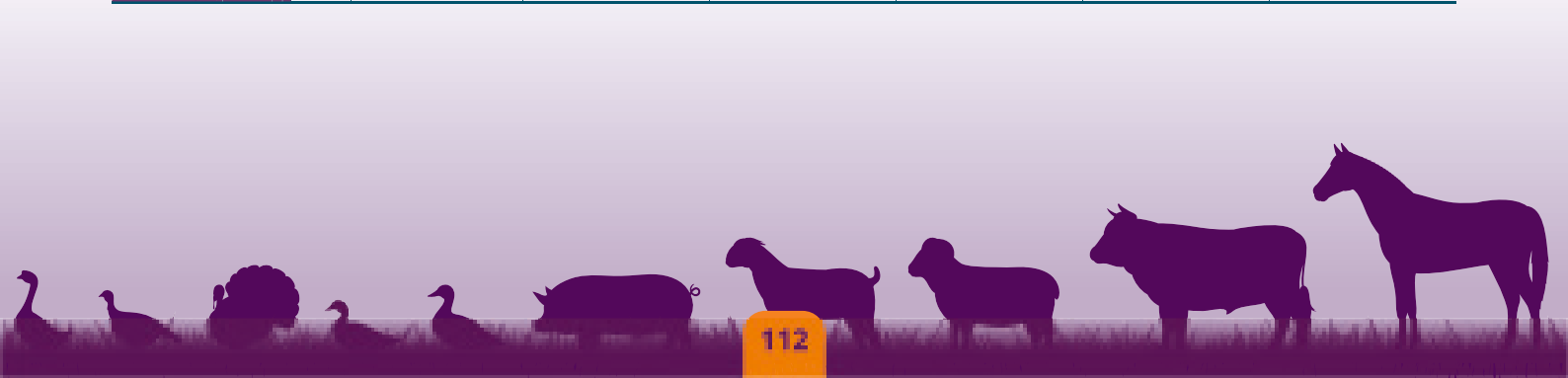


Table 1 - A Non-Exhaustive List of Irish Breeds Worthy of Research/Conservation

LIVESTOCK BREED TYPE	#	BREED	NATIVE STATUS	FAO CATEGORY	FAO LOCAL RISK	DETAILED LOCAL RISK STATUS	TRANS-BOUNDARY RISK STATUS
	1	Dexter	Recognised	Native	At Risk	Critical	Not At Risk
	2	Droimeann	Recognised	Native	At Risk	Critical	At Risk
	3	Irish Moiled	Recognised	Native	At Risk	Critical	-
	4	Kerry	Recognised	Native	At Risk	Critical	At Risk
	5	Bó Riabhach	No Status	-	Not Listed	-	-
	6	Bó Finne	No Status	-	Not Listed	-	-
	7	Tory Cow	No Status	-	Not Listed	-	-
	8	Kerry Bog Pony	Recognised	Native	At Risk	Endangered	-
	9	Connemara	Recognised	Native	At Risk	Vulnerable	Not At Risk
	10	Irish Draft	Recognised	Native	At Risk	Endangered	At Risk

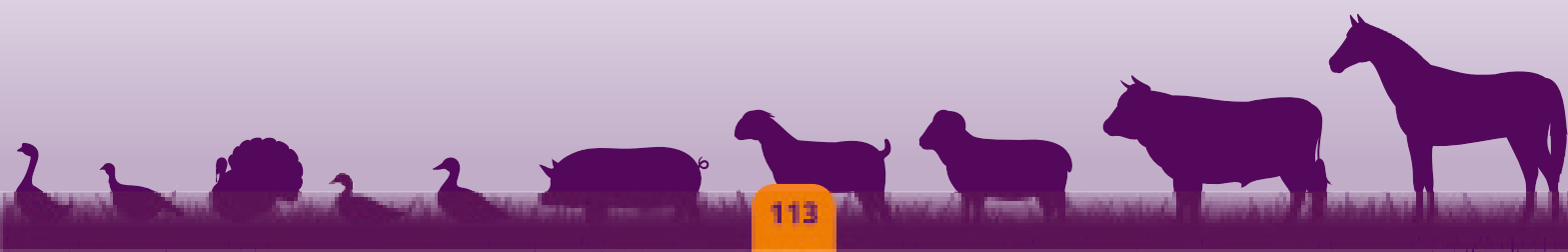




LIVESTOCK BREED TYPE	#	BREED	NATIVE STATUS	FAO CATEGORY	FAO LOCAL RISK	DETAILED LOCAL RISK STATUS	TRANS-BOUNDARY RISK STATUS
	11	Irish Pony	No Status	Locally Adapted	At Risk	-	-
	12	Irish Cob	No Status	Locally Adapted	Unknown	-	-
	13	Irish Donkey	No status	Locally Adapted	Unknown	-	-
	14	Galway	Recognised	Native	At Risk	Endangered	At Risk
	15	Roscommon	No Status	-	Not Listed	-	-
	16	Cladoir	No Status	Native	Extinct	-	-
	17	Old Irish	Recognised	-	At Risk	Critical	-
	18	Bilberry	No Status	-	Not Listed	-	-
	19	Irish Greyhound	No Status	-	Unknown	-	-
	20	Irish Fowl	No Status	-	Unknown	-	-



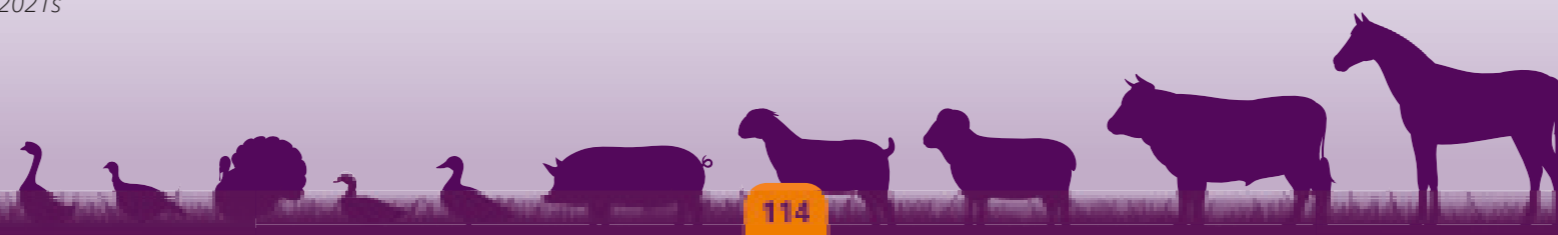
Categorisation of Risk Status according to the FAO Secondary Guidelines for the Development of National Farm Animal Genetic Resources Management Plans (FAO, 1998, pp.32-33)



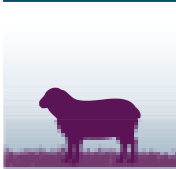




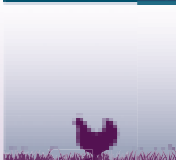
- **EXTINCT** - A breed is categorised as extinct if it is no longer possible to easily recreate the breed population. This situation becomes absolute when neither breeding males (semen) nor breeding females (oocytes) nor embryos remain. In reality, extinction may be realised well before the loss of the last animal, gamete or embryo.
- **CRITICAL** - A breed is categorised as critical if the total number of breeding females is less than 100 or the total number of breeding males is less than or equal to 5, or the overall population size is close to but slightly above 100 and decreasing, and the percentage of females being bred pure is below 80%.
- **CRITICAL MAINTAINED** - As for critical, but for which active conservation programmes are in place or populations are maintained by commercial companies or research institutes.
- **ENDANGERED** - A breed is categorised as endangered if the total number of breeding females is between 100 and 1000, or the total number of breeding males is less than or equal to 20 and greater than 5, or the overall population size is close to but slightly below 100 and increasing, and the percentage of females being bred pure is above 80%, or the overall population size is close to but slightly below 1000 and decreasing, and the percentage of females being bred pure is below 80%.
- **ENDANGERED MAINTAINED** - As for Endangered, but for which active conservation programmes are in place or populations are maintained by commercial companies or research institutes.
- **NOT AT RISK** - A breed is categorised as not at risk if the total number of breeding females and males are greater than 1000 and 20, respectively, or if the population size approaches 1000 and the percentage of females being bred pure is close to 100%, and the overall population size is increasing.
- **UNKNOWN** - Self-explanatory, but also a call to action: find out! If categorisation of a particular breed is borderline, further consideration should be given to factors such as:
 - Degree of crossbreeding in the population.
 - Reproductive rate and generation interval of the population.
 - Special peculiarities and characteristics of the production system.
 - Historic and current rates of decline in population numbers.
 - Geographic isolation of the population or its concentration in one or a few locations that would place it at risk as a result of climatic, economic or political changes or disease outbreak.



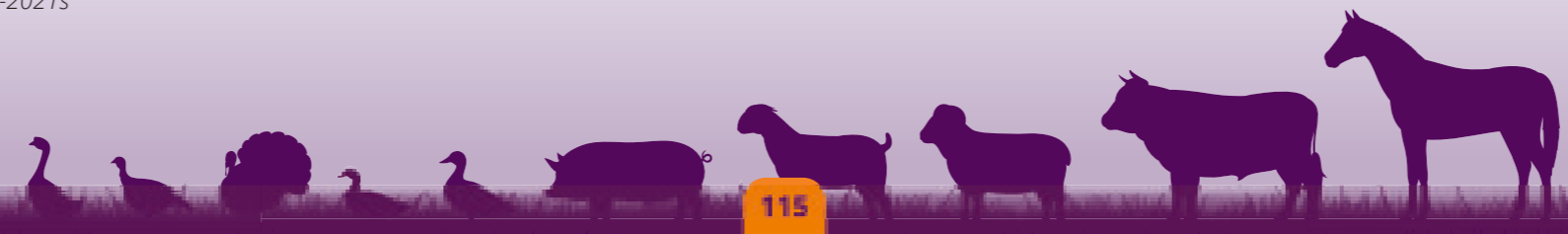
LIVESTOCK BREED TYPE	#	SPECIES	BREED	YEAR	POPULATION		TREND	POPULATION # BASED ON	BREEDING MALE	BREEDING FEMALE	FEMALES REGISTERED IN HERD BOOKS	FEMALES BRED PURE	HERDS	HERDS SIZE	AI USED	MALE IN AI	IN SITU CONSERVATION PROGRAMMES IN PLACE	LAST UPDATE	GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATION	
					MIN.	MAX.														
	1	Cattle	Dexter	2020	500	600	Increasing	Breed Census	20	275	193	-	32	16	No	0	No	09-Aug 2021	International	
	2	Cattle	Droim Fionn	2019	450	550	Stable	Breed Census	20	275	193	193	32	16	No	0	Yes	04-Aug 2020	Local	
	3	Cattle	Irish Moiled	2012	518	550	-	Breed Census	18	199	199	-	38		Yes	3	-	16-May 2014	-	
	4	Cattle	Kerry	2016	500	800	Decreasing	Breed Census	42	291	-	-	87	8	Yes	13	Yes	06-Nov 2017	International	
	5	Cattle	Bó Riabhach	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	6	Cattle	Bó Finne	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	7	Cattle	Tory Cow	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	8	Horse	Irish Draught	2016	4000	5000	Stable	Breed Census	158	1273	-	-	865	2	Yes	16	Yes	15-Jan 2018	International	
	9	Horse	Kerry Bog Pony	2016	800	900	Increasing	Breed Census	45	630	-	-	255		No		Yes	03-Jan 2018	Local	
	10	Horse	Connemara Pony	2012	7000	10000	Decreasing	Breed Census	570	4338	-	-		6	Yes		Yes	21-Jun 2016	International	

Source: <https://www.fao.org/dad-is/dataexport/en/> visited 08-Nov-2021s



LIVESTOCK BREED TYPE	#	SPECIES	BREED	YEAR	POPULATION		TREND	POPULATION # BASED ON	BREEDING MALE	BREEDING FEMALE	FEMALES REGISTERED IN HERD BOOKS	FEMALES BRED PURE	HERDS	HERDS SIZE	AI USED	MALE IN AI	IN SITU CONSERVATION PROGRAMMES IN PLACE	LAST UPDATE	GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATION
					MIN.	MAX.													
	11	Horse	Irish Pony	2012	1000	1500	Stable	Breed Census	25	100	-	-			No		No	20-May 2014	Local
	12	Horse	Irish Cob	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	13	Ass	Donkey	2008	1000	1300	Unknown	Breed Census	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11-Jul 2008	Local
	14	Sheep	Galway	2016	900	1000	Decreasing	-	68	622	-	-			No			06-Nov 2017	Regional
	15	Sheep	Roscommon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	16	Sheep	Cladoir	1965	0	0	Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28-Feb 2006	Local
	17	Goat	Old Irish	2017	25	30	-	-	8	12	12	-			No	-	-	06-Mar 2018	Local
	18	Goat	Bilberry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	19	Pig	Irish Greyhound	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	20	Chicken	Irish Fowl	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

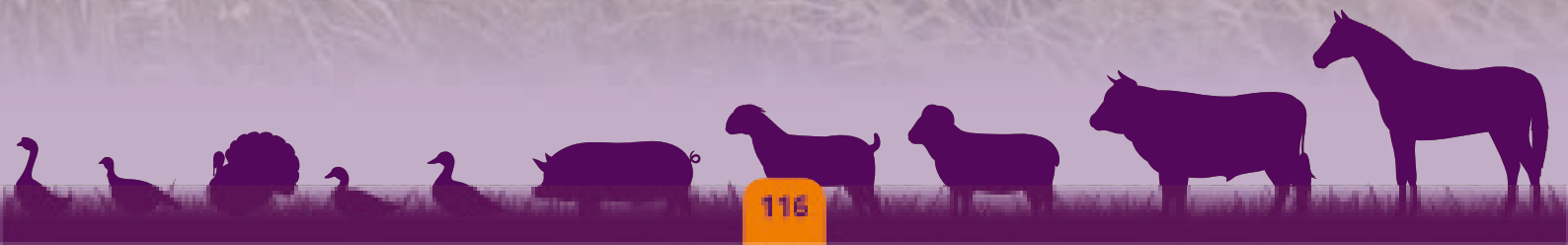
Source: <https://www.fao.org/dad-is/dataexport/en/> visited 08-Nov-2021s



Droimean Cow, Newbridge House & Farm



Appendix 3 LIST OF CONSULTEES



APPENDIX 3 | LIST OF CONSULTEES

International Rare Breed Associations

- **Germany** - G-E-H Antje Feldmann
- **Norway & Scandinavia** - **Nordic Genetic Resource Canter** - Mervi Honkatukia
- **UK** - **Rare Breeds Survival Trust** - Christopher Price, CEO
- **Netherlands** - **Stichting Zeldzame Huisdierrassen** - Geert Boink and Nonja Remijn
- **Belgium** - **Support Centre for Living Heritage** - Stef Van den Burgh
- **The SAVE Foundation (Swiss-based)** - Waltroud Kugler
- **Denmark** - **Danske Arkegårde** - Susanne Hovmand-Simonsen
- **Portugal** - **FERA** - Rui Dantas

Irish Rare Breed Societies

- **Connemara Pony Society** - Carol O'Connor, Martin Coyne
- **Kerry Bog Pony Society** - Mary McGrath, Patricia Young
- **Kerry Cattle Society** - Raymond Hillard
- **Roscommon Sheep** - Noel Kiernan
- **Bo Riabhach Society** - Martin O'Halloran
- **Irish Draught Horse Breeders Association** - Helen Kelly
- **Old Irish Goat Society** - Sean Carolan, Cheryl and Padraic Brown
- **Cladoir Sheep** - Martin Coyne, William Cormacan
- **Bo Fianna Cattle Society** - Martin O'Halloran
- **Poultry** - Sean Hyland

International Living Heritage Centres

- **Temple Newsam House and Home Farm, Leeds City Council** - David Brandley, Farm Manager
- **Lost Gardens of Heligan, Cornwall, UK** - Pip Coard, Farm Manager
- **Almond Valley, UK** - Craig Holmes, Farm Manager
- **Tannaghmore Farm Park, Northern Ireland** - Richard Mc Kittrick, Farm Manager
- **Merrist Wood College, UK** - Luke Gates, Teacher/Farm manager
- **De Kooi, Rotterdam, NL** - Ingrid Elderson, Zookeeper/Director
- **Schaapskooi Schijndel, NL** - Mark Philipsen

**Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall**
Fingal County
Council



Fingal County Council,
County Hall, Main Street, Swords,
Co. Dublin, K67 X8Y2

Tel: (01) 890 5000

