

Hebridean Sheep Society Annual General Meeting 2019

Chairman`s Report

Trustees met at the three scheduled meetings of the Board of Trustees. Work focused on managing the business of the Society and annual running of events, shows and sales. Matters of governance were discussed at each of the meetings.

A ten-year vision for the breed was agreed:

*‘In ten years’ time, the current breed description will not have any significant changes and the national flock will show all the diversity that the breed description allows for. The advantages of the **Hardy Economical Black Sheep** will be better understood and niche markets for Hebridean sheep products will be better exploited. Demand for Hebridean sheep will be buoyant.’*

This enabled Trustees to prioritise further work and development. In particular, the hardiness of the breed was identified as a field for future investigation. This is to ensure that the breed as a whole does not lose any of the thriftiness forged over hundreds of years of existence on the Hebridean islands, and latterly in the grand parklands of Victorian and Edwardian stately homes. A Hebridean Hardiness Evaluation Project (Heb-HEP) has been established and a working group formed under the guidance of Dr Pen Rashbass will be reporting to the Board.

Editions of our newsletter the Blackboard, have been circulated to our membership; a membership that has continued to grow during the year. Another excellent edition of our annual magazine, the Black Sheep, was published and I should like to thank all of the contributors and Helen Brewis for yet again editing it and the 2019 edition of our Handbook.

The Black Book documenting the in-year pedigree registrations of Hebridean sheep was also produced and circulated by our Registration Secretary, Vicky Mason, who unfailingly sees this accurate compendium through to publication every year.

Our website remains current, attractive, informative and readily navigable. This is just a public expectation of any charitable organisation these days. I am happy to say that our website management runs smoothly and this is largely due to the attentive expertise of Pen Rashbass, who is to be thanked for maintaining its immediacy in such a diligent way.

The Trustees believe that the high quality meat from Hebridean shearlings in particular, has a place as high value gourmet food. More members have joined the HSS Authentic Hogget Scheme that allows the use of the Society`s brand and quality guarantee. Largely due to the efforts of Jack Cuthbert, promoting Hebridean hogget to high end restaurants has been particularly successful in Scotland. This has been much publicised on social media.

The Board also prioritised getting Hebrideans into printed media and met with good success having large illustrated articles in The Scots, Country Smallholding and Ark magazines. Hebrideans were also featured on the BBC television programme Countryfile.

The advent of 2019 saw us enter the 25th Anniversary year of the Hebridean Sheep Society. I was Chairman 25 years ago when we left the direct support of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. However, this is nothing compared to the 25 years of continuous service as Committee and Board members given by Vicky Mason, Rita Peace and Eric Medway. Such continuity has contributed much to the success of our breed society and of our breed. Indeed, both Vicky and Eric can trace their continuous involvement back

to the very first meeting of the Hebridean Sheep Support Group on 10th September 1987 which is surely to be applauded.

Our 25th year was celebrated in a happy party atmosphere at both the Royal Highland and Great Yorkshire Shows, the largest agricultural shows in Scotland and England respectively. Thanks to all those who helped organise these and for the wonderful cake that was enjoyed by many ... even passersby!

The show season has again been a busy one and remains our best 'shop window'. Many members and Trustees get involved talking directly to visitors and answering the many questions about the qualities of the Hardy Economical Black Sheep. The stand at the Great Yorkshire Show remains our best location for this engagement and therefore represents good value expenditure. I should like to thank Darren Cassie and Jonathan James for the work they do in getting our banners and promotional materials to shows the length and breadth of Britain. I should also like to thank the many judges that we have who have undertaken duties this year.

Two well attended and successful membership events took place. The Winter Gathering held at Darren Cassie's farm in Leicestershire and the Summer Symposium held at Emily Gascoigne's farm in Dorset. At both there was an emphasis on different aspects of practical hands-on management of sheep. This was in response to members asking for more practical management skills to be explained. I should like to thank both Darren and Emily for generously giving their time, effort and experience ... and not forgetting their farms and their sheep, to ensure that their events were a resounding success.

25 years on and the Hebridean Sheep Society is in great shape with a diverse and widespread national flock, growing membership and support, and a committed Board of Trustees. Our accounts are also in good order and show a healthy balance sheet taking us forward for another year and ensuring that the modest contingency is held in reserve for any unforeseen emergency such as a national biosecurity threat. I should like to thank Rita Peace and Vicky Mason for the efficient management and consolidation of our accounts and to Graham Robbins for once again validating these.

The year ahead will see more work on the promotion of the many positive attributes of Hebridean sheep.

Trustees, Co-optees and Officers do a first class job ensuring that your Society continues to work for the benefit of Hebridean sheep and their breeders. I should like to conclude by giving them special thanks.

David Braithwaite,

Chairman