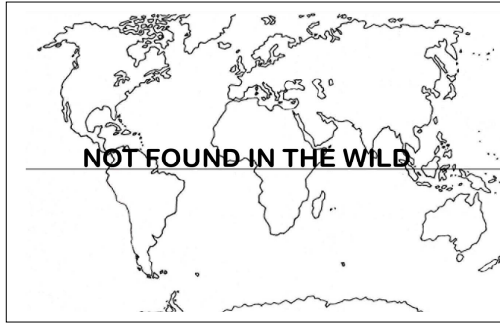


Dorset Sheep



Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Artiodactyla
Family: Bovidae
Genus: *Ovis*
Species: *aries*



Photo courtesy of Lynne Panebianco

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** This is a totally domesticated animal that does not exist in the wild. The Dorset breed was developed in England and was imported to the United States in 1885. (A breed is a group of organisms within a species developed by artificial selection and maintained by controlled reproduction.) It grazes on pastures and hilly grasslands.
- **Exhibit Location:** Domestic Animal Barn

Characteristics

- There are 2 strains of Dorset sheep: horned and polled. Except for the absence of horns in the polled strain, horned and polled Dorsets are identical.
- Weight: males (rams) - 210-250 pounds; females (ewes) - 140-175 pounds
- Dorset sheep have little wool on the face, legs, and belly. Their wool (fleece) is lightweight and is good for hand spinning.
- Their nostrils, lips, and skin are pink. Hoofs are white.
- The horns of the ram are large and angular and spiral downward and forward. The horns of the ewe are smaller and flatter and curve down and forward, but don't spiral.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** not found in the wild; **In Captivity** 10-12 years

Behaviors

- Sheep are followers by nature and will instinctively flock and move together.
- Due to their 4-chambered stomachs, in which microorganisms break down plant fibers so the sheep can absorb the nutrients in their diets, they are called ruminants (cud-chewers). They will lay down in the pasture, field, or barnyard and "chew their cud," helping in the digestive process.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** peanut butter logs, pine trees and branches, scents on branches (peppermint, etc.), broom brushes to rub on, fresh vegetables hung around their yard, furniture rearranged in their yard

Reproduction

- Sheep reach sexual maturity at 5-7 months of age.
- They are capable of breeding all year long.
- The gestation period is about 21 weeks, with twins or triplets common. Most ewes need no help at lambing (giving birth). Lambs are born feet first and delivery takes about 2 hours. Lambs nurse for about 16 weeks.
- Ewes are good mothers and good milkers.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** not applicable (not found in the wild)
- **At the Zoo:** hay, grain, vitamin E

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status** not listed; **CITES Appendix** not listed
- Dorset sheep are a common domesticated breed of sheep.

- Predators: wolves, coyotes, cougars

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- In mid- to late spring, when the weather will be staying consistently warm, the sheep are sheared (wool shaved off). Approximately 8-10 pounds of wool is sheared off. This will then grow back through the year, to be sheared again the following spring.
- Dorset sheep have grown in popularity to become the #1 white-faced breed in the United States.
- The polled strain originated at the North Carolina State University from a mutation that happened in a purebred Dorset flock, with the birth of a ram in November of 1953.

Sources:

- Ensminger, M., & Parker, R. (1986). *Sheep and goat science*. 5th ed. Danville, IL: The Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc.
- Oklahoma State University, (1997). Dorset. Retrieved Feb. 09, 2006, from Department of Animal Science Web site: <http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/sheep/dorset/>.