

Susannah Garratt. February, 2012.

## **Blue Albion Cattle Native Breed at Risk Management Plan.**

This report was commissioned in order to ascertain whether the Blue Albion cattle breed is a true native breed at risk and therefore eligible for funding through Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme under the HR2 (Native Breeds at Risk Grazing Supplement) payment. Interest in this project has now led, (in agreement with Natural England,) to the RBST offering to commission a full review of the Blue Albion cattle breed for themselves and the Farm Animal Genetic Resources Committee which, it is hoped, will help the breed to be properly recognised and protected and a breed society re-established. It has been recognised that the processing of the volume of data so far collected, (and likely to increase,) is beyond the scope of what was envisaged as part of the original HLS funded management plan.

### **Brief review of evidence collected to date.**

Much data has been collected from farmers who farm Blue Albions and whilst many have not kept the most detailed records, some solid evidence has been found. Currently the pedigree data is in a fairly complex format which is difficult to review and would be best entered straight into a breeding database. However in some herds there are already lines that are 6 generations of registered Blue Albions in the female line and 5 generations in the male line; it may well be that they even go back the required 6 generations, although a detailed review of the information is required to ascertain this. Many of these pedigrees stem from Geoff Henshall's 'Ryleys' herd dispersal in 2000.

In an article written in 1980 by Mr Alan Cheese, a brief history of the Blue Albion is described, including how most of the herds were lost to foot & mouth culls. However it states the survival of the Ryleys herd, established in the early 1920s (see above) and Mr Ian Fawcett's 'Barnacre' herd which began in the 1930s. There is even a receipt and pedigree of a Blue Albion bull for Mr Fawcett bought from Mr Goodwin in 1946; the pedigree goes back to 1935 and Mr Goodwin is registered in the 1920s herd-books.

A detailed report by Stephen Hall in October, 1985 recommended that, as the Blue Albion was accorded the full status as a breed before WWII and that the Ryleys and Barnacres herds have continued to this day, the Blue Albion cattle today can be considered as Blue Albions in the strict sense. He recommended to the RBST that the Blue Albion breed is well worthy of help.

## Current Situation.

Currently, through the BCMS, a survey is being carried out as to how many Blue Albions there are in the country. On 01/10/11 there were 301 registered as Blue Albions and 339 Blue Albion crosses; however the data as to where they all were, could not be given out. The BCMS, in conjunction with Natural England, sent out a letter to all the

A Table showing Blue Albion Cattle Numbers taken from BCMS Cattle Population Report by Breed, Sex & Country on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 to 2012.

YEAR	AREA	PURE BLUE ALBION			BLUE ALBION CROSSES		
		F	M	TOTAL	F	M	TOTAL
2010	ENGLAND	289	59	356	307	67	445
	SCOTLAND	1	1		3	1	
	WALES	5	1		53	14	
2011	ENGLAND	260	48	315	280	49	384
	SCOTLAND	1	0		1	0	
	WALES	4	2		49	5	
2012	ENGLAND	228	50	281	237	28	309
	SCOTLAND	0	0		3	0	
	WALES	2	1		40	1	

relevant people asking for permission to give out data needed in order for all current Blue Albion cattle to be traced and identified. Some new Blue Albion keepers were gained from this who can now be contacted. Unfortunately the letter was worded rather vaguely regarding the farmers' response, resulting in a disappointing number giving permission for their addresses to be given out. It is intended to try once more, working with the BCMS more closely to give clear meaning. Then further analysis can be carried out and many of these Blue Albion cattle could then be registered, either as foundation cows or as Blue Albions according to the data that farmers can give about them (i.e. pedigrees).

## Spatial Distribution Of Current Blue Albion Population.

Of the 301 Blue Albions mentioned above, 252 were Blue Albion females and of the 339 Blue Albion crosses, 301 were Blue Albion cross females. Essentially, there are small numbers in many different herds. The largest herds are summarised in the table below.

**A table of the largest Blue Albion herds according to the BCMS on 01/10/11 showing how many Blue Albion females and Blue Albion cross females there were.**

Total Blue Albions	Blue Albion Females	Blue Albion Cross Females
57	44	3
31	31	0
31	30	1
33	20	4
28	13	5
66	10	55
15	9	6
42	3	37
20	2	18
34	1	30
14	0	14

The spatial distribution of the Blue Albion herds is wide with some being kept in Cornwall, Devon, Kent, Hampshire, Leicestershire and Wales, though the majority are kept in the mid/north of England in Lancashire, Cumbria, Cheshire and Derbyshire.

As mentioned before, Mr Ian Fawcett's herd originated in the 1930s and this herd is in Lancashire. Mrs Tanya Fox's herd (breed secretary in 1990's) is in the Peak District, Derbyshire. Ms Hazel Friend's herd and Mr Bottomley's are in Cumbria and Mr Ball's herd is in Cheshire. It appears that many of these latter herds and the smaller herds not listed above originate from the Ryleys herd dispersed in 2000 and from the Fawcett's herd. It is also possible that some cattle originated from Mr Messenger's Blue Albion dispersal sale in 1953 in Moreton, Oxfordshire but so far no proof of this has been found.

**Bulls Available for Artificial Insemination.**

There are 5 Blue Albion bulls available through the RBST for AI; 3 being from the Ryleys herd and the other from Barnacres, stored for more than 25 years & one recent addition of the 5 generation Speckles Jake donated in 2011. Already Jake's semen has been sold to 5 different customers.



Speckles Jake: 2011



Speckles Blue Joanna with heifer calf by Sp Jake: 2012

During this research four more people have come forward asking to buy stock and two farmers have pledged £1000 each towards having semen taken from another Albion bull, possibly Speckles Jonas from Alan Hewson, near Melton Mowbray, or a bull out of the Blue Albion show cow from Mr J. Ball, Cheshire (again, a database system would highlight bloodlines and make this decision clearer).

**Blue Albion Bulls Currently Available for AI from RBST.**

(Updated to 05/02/2013.)

Name of bull	DOB	Eartag	AI code	Doses in long term archive	Doses for conservation AI
Barnacre Snowflake	1980	Q3478 620	BA0997	273	139
Ryleys Boy Blue	1980	X5128 1429	BA0998	109	54
Ryleys Blue Note	1979	X5128 1497	BA0999	178	97
Ryleys Blue Mink	1982	X5128 1646	BA0996	72	25
Speckles Jake	2007	UK260124700035	BA0995	90	512

**Database System.**

There are several computer packages available which can be used to create the new herd book for the breed society; this will enable pedigree data to be entered in an efficient and non-repetitive way, ready for the opening of a new herd book in compliance with current regulations:

- Grassroots systems is one possible program, in conjunction with the geneped / Ped eWeb package it can also be used to investigate animal progeny and select the best lineage to maximise the genetic viability of the breed.
- ‘Pedigree Plus’ for breed societies is another system. Pedigree Plus has given a quote of £350 for its programme, adapted for the needs of the Blue Albion Society.

## Brief Blue Albion Breed Society History.

The breed began because it was noted that a 'blue' cow always had a good reputation and was desirable, a fact that still holds today. The origins are believed to be the welsh black, which was a dual purpose breed, crossed with a white dairy shorthorn. They were first called the 'Bakewell Blues', originating in Derbyshire. Later on Friesian cross Shorthorn crosses of blue colouring were also accepted as foundation cows for the herd book but only on inspection.

Mr William J Clark began the first breed society of blue cattle on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1916, called 'Clark's United Breeders'. This was later bought by the Blue Albion Cattle Society on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1921.

Mr Sydney Clarke took over managing the society in 1923 and the breed type was defined clearly, rather than just the colour.

## Conformation of a Blue Albion Cow, from Herdbook Volume I, 1921.

<b>COW.</b>		<i>Points.</i>
HEAD.—Not too large, wide at the horn, tapering to nose, and lean, with thin ears, well set on, and carried evenly	10	
EYES.—Set wide apart, with mild or gentle expression, denoting docility. . . . .	5	
HORNS.—The horns should grow straight out from the head, then turn evenly forward, outward, and slightly upward, they should be white at the base, not too thick, long, or coarse, and should taper and darken to the point, . . . . .	5	
NECK.—Long, lean, thin, and deep, well let into the shoulders and extending downwards to a good brisket	5	
SHOULDERS.—The shoulders should be fairly strong, rather lean, and well placed, broad at the points, and tapering to the withers, in an upward and backward direction. . . . .	5	
BODY.—Long and deep, with well sprung ribs, showing a good barrel, with straight and even top and bottom outlines and with loose skin . . . . .	25	
QUARTERS.—Long and straight on top, with wide hips and pelvic bones, and good deep thighs, not too heavily fleshed when in milk. . . . .	10	
UDDER.—The udder should be capacious, thin and soft to the touch, showing prominently the milk veins. It should be well let down and carried evenly and perpendicularly below the body, extending well forward in front, and high up behind, with wide escutcheon. The teats should be of medium size well and evenly placed underneath each corner of the udder.	25	
TAIL.—The tail should be set on level, and in a line with the back, it should be rather fine and carried perpendicularly to a point just below and behind the hocks . . . . .	5	
LEGS.—The legs should be fairly strong, having good but fine bone, with good joints and feet, and placed well outside each corner of the body. . . . .	5	
TOTAL..		<u>100</u>
GENERAL APPEARANCE.		
The general appearance of the Cow should be wedge shaped, with active and stylish carriage, combined with docility and feminine characteristics.		

## **Blue Albion Cows; modern and old.**



**Speckles Hyacinth 2: 2012**



**Bradbourne Bella: 1927**

Unfortunately, the original society wanted the blue roan colour to be the breed type but did not understand the genetics and that blue roan is not a colour that breeds 'true'. True bred ones can be blue-roan, white or mainly black with little white.

The breed has a dominant white gene, not often found in cattle breeds, which is definitely 'true breeding'.

**The table below shows the probabilities of colouring when crossing the different albion colours.**

<b>Parent colour</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Parent colour</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>Calf colour (Proportion expected)</b>
BLUE	X	BLUE	=	50% BLUE, 25% BLACK, 25% WHITE
BLUE	X	BLACK	=	50% BLUE, 50% BLACK
BLUE	X	WHITE	=	50% BLUE, 50% WHITE
BLACK	X	BLACK	=	100% BLACK
WHITE	X	WHITE	=	100% WHITE
BLACK	X	WHITE	=	100% BLUE

From 1921 bulls that were white or black were rejected from registering in the herd book and white or black heifers were only allowed to be entered into a 'special register' from 1924; if their progeny were blue then these could be fully registered. If only they had been like the Shorthorn Society which accepts good animals whether they are roan, white or red, numbers and quality could have grown much faster.

In 1922 there were 117 bulls and 162 cows registered but as well as this, 3237 cows were accepted as foundation cows; bearing in mind that an inspection had to be made of these cows at the relatively expensive cost of £1 each, the breed was set to become a major cattle breed of the UK.

## Some examples of Blue Albion Colouring.



**Speckles Maud 2: DARK ROAN**



**Speckles Blue Joanna 2: BLUE ROAN**



**Speckles Blanco: WHITE**



**Sp Black Joanna: BLACK, with calf Sp Jonas: BLUE ROAN**

In 1923/4 there was a serious Foot & Mouth outbreak which wiped out many blue albion herds, coinciding with a national depression which lowered cattle prices drastically. Also dairy breeds like the Friesian and Ayrshire were becoming popular at the expense of the dual purpose breeds like the Shorthorn and the Blue Albion.

In the last herd book at this time, 1934-1937, Volume XI, there were 50 bulls and 120 cows registered. The last AGM of the Blue Albion Cattle Society was in 1940 and it was officially wound up in 1966.

A few farmers continued to breed Blue Albions; stock was kept pure by exchanging bulls.

Mr W H Dennis, Moreton, Oxfordshire.

Herd began in 1920s, he died and his herd was dispersed in 1954.

The catalogue is available and a photo of their registered bull but so far none of the current Albions have been traced back to this herd yet.

Mr A Broad, Farndon, near Malpas, Cheshire.

Herd began in 1930s but in 1967/8 Foot & Mouth wiped out the herd.

Mr P Henshall, Alderley Edge, Cheshire.

The Ryleys herd was established by the early 1920s with 37 females entered in the herd book (Volume III) and the bull Derwent Hero (289) was bought for use in his herd. When the Society was reformed in the 1990s, 186 cattle were registered with the 'Ryleys' prefix; he continued to breed Blue Albions until his herd was dispersed in 2000.

Mr J C Fawcett, Garstang, Lancashire.

The Barnacre herd was established in the late 1930s. In 1946, Mr Fawcett bought a pedigree Albion bull from Mr H Goodwin to continue grading up his cattle. This herd survives to this day and is a beef suckler herd; they were crossing with a Hereford, but they now use AI; Speckles Jake; to breed some pure-bred replacements.

**Current Breeders.**

The 'current' breed society was re-formed in 1994 with Mrs Sheila Clarke of Dorset Rare Breeds as Chairman and Mrs Tanya Fox as Secretary. Herd books were published in 1994/5/6 but breeders were not quick to register their calves and although no more herd books have been actually published, Tanya Fox has still noted any births of Blue Albion calves on her computer database. There are records of some Blue Albion registrations from 1989 through to 2012, (i.e. 23 years; only 2 more years required before conditions are met). Unfortunately, the system used by the breed society when it re-formed in 1994 was too complex, it left out breeders who did not register & the pedigree certificates were too 'home-made'.

Most of the current keepers of blue albion cattle currently have descendants from the 'Ryleys' herd dispersal or from the Fawcett's 'Barnacre' herd which has resulted in quite a few small-holders supporting the blue albion breed spread right across the UK but with very few in large herds and very few in dairy herds, most are now in beef suckler herds.

**Some of the Current breeders interested in restoring Blue Albion cattle Society.**

Mr J Ball, Sandbach, Cheshire.

A milking herd of Holstein Friesians with about 5 Blue Albion cows, one of which has been shown very successfully. Uses AI.

Mr C Nankervis, St Ives, Cornwall.

Beef suckler herd in 'hard grazing' conditions, about 20 Albion females. Very enthusiastic to help the breed but has been ill himself. Only uses bulls, no AI.

Mr B Cowell, Helston, Cornwall.

Bought Speckles Jake from AI centre & is so pleased with the calves, he has bought two Albion heifers and wishes to help the breed and have many more.

Ms H Friend, Penrith, Cumbria.

Beef suckler herd; hard to contact but has a very pure herd of about 20 Albions which she wishes to flourish.

Mr Bottomley, Windermere, Cumbria.

'Scoutbeck' beef suckler herd taken over from his sister, Miss Elizabeth Bottomley; about 45 Albions, recently bought a new Blue Albion bull. Have some well kept records but Mr Bottomley is very old.

Mrs T Fox, Buxton, Derbyshire.

Milking herd though now most of the Albions are part-bred.

Mr G Matkin, Ashbourne, Derbyshire.

Milking herd of mainly Holstein Friesians, 8-10 quarter-bred Albions. Kept pure Albions in the past and would like to have about 5 again in his herd.

Mr D Gow, Lifton, Devon.

Bought some Albions from Mr C Nankervis & is very enthused; last year bought a bull calf & in-calf cow suckling a heifer in order to try and start a proper herd. Modern person, keen to join the new Albion Society.

Garratt & Mannerings, Winchester, Hampshire.

Milking herd, took over Mrs D Whittingham's 'Speckles' herd; now at least 7 female generation pedigrees. About 8 pure Albions & 12 cross-breeds. Cows are milk recorded and AI is used. Cross-breeds genuinely yield as well as the Holstein Friesians and have very good health and calving index. Susannah Garratt is willing to be the new Blue Albion Society Secretary.

Mr I Fawcett, Garstang, Lancashire.

Mentioned previously. Large beef suckler herd (used to milk); Natural England are trying to establish if the bred is eligible for Higher Level Stewardship 'Native Breeds at Risk Grazing Supplement.' About 35 Albion females.

Mr G Whittaker, Preston, Lancashire.

Has three Albion cows; enthusiastic to keep Blue Albions going.

Mr A Hewson, Melton Mowbray, Leics.

Milking herd with Red Polls; have about 5 cows, bought the bull, Speckles Jonas, out of a very milky Blue Albion; want to increase their Albion numbers.

Mr J Stevens, Thame, Oxon.

A neighbour to 'Albion Farm,' Oxon, where he loved to see Mr Dennis's Blue Albions; has been trying to breed Blue Albions by using AI on Friesian cows; has about 4 cross-bred cows. Very enthusiastic to help & has pledged money.

Mr R Williams, Sontley, Wrexham.

Has three Albion cows; enthusiastic to keep Blue Albions going.

More names and further details are recorded in the attached spread-sheet.

## **Summary.**

The history of the Blue Albion breed goes back to 1916 and, although, at times, in danger of extinction from two outbreaks of Foot & Mouth, a war and a national depression, they have continued to be bred right to the current day. The geographical spread of the current numbers is wide and Blue Albions are found in small herds of mainly beef sucklers. Owners of these Blue Albion cattle are concerned about the breed's survival and most people who have been contacted are interested in supporting a new Blue Albion Society. If records are entered on a special breed database, it will help trace back generations and identify best lineage to maximise genetic viability, including selection of a new bull for artificial insemination.

Grass beef or dairy farmers of the future owe a great debt to the dedicated breeders and stockmen in the past who faithfully conserved the old types of cattle breeds. We should honour that debt by carrying these functional genetics forward, most breed societies are doing this now but the Blue Albion Society needs to move forward now before it is too late.



Recommendations to Natural England, the UK Farm Genetic Resources Committee, the RBST and the Breed Society concerning the future successful management of the Blue Albion breed of cattle:

- 1) It would be advisable to drop the 'Blue' and rename the breed 'Albion' cattle. A new Albion breed society would then accept all the colour variants for pedigree registrations.
- 2) Further work should be undertaken to properly interpret the records and evidence that has been gathered so far. This is essential so that the breed history can be interpreted from the individual farm records which have been gathered.
- 3) Breed database software should be purchased to start the new herd book. This is essential to ensure that the records and information gathered so far can be accessed and interpreted effectively.
- 4) An 'Albion' cattle breed society should be set up, with assistance from the RBST, in compliance with the relevant current regulations. The new Albion Breed Society should draw upon the interest in the breed, from current Blue Albion owners and breeders, generated by this research. These individuals will form the back-bone of the society.
- 5) It is essential that when the new herd book and breed society is set up that it is done at the lowest possible cost to the current owners of Blue Albion cattle, in-order to encourage maximum participation in the society and Albion breeding (i.e. registration of existing animals and issue of pedigree certificates where appropriate should be free of charge).
- 6) Once the records and information gathered has been interpreted, the Albion cattle breed should be added to the UK breeds at risk register; or if the breed is not yet eligible then the Albion Breed Society should be advised by the RBST as to what steps are necessary to ensure recognition in the future.

## Catalogue of Information.

Below is a list of sources used to find Blue Albion cattle breed information. (The full details of sources and information obtained are recorded in the accompanying spread-sheet).

- BCMS list of Blue Albions and Blue Albion crosses, with date of births and sex;  
(As mentioned before, this may be extended to give out addresses & ear-tag numbers so data can be cross-checked.)
- Names of breeders and herds, with lists of animals and ear-tags.
- Report by Stephen J Hall to the Liaison Committee of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust; 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1985.
- Staffordshire County Museum Information Sheet on Blue Albion Cattle by Alan Cheese; May, 1980.
- Ryleys Herd Dispersal Catalogue, 2000.
- W H Dennis, Albion Farm, Dispersal Catalogue, 1953.
- Blue Albion Breed Colour article.
- Photographs.
- Herd books from the 1920s; Volumes I, II, III and IV.
- Herd books from 1994/5/6.
- Blue Albion Cattle Society ledger book. (1920-1940)
- Letters from and to Blue Albion breeders.
- Previous secretary's registrations.
- Previous secretary's minutes.
- Enquiries from prospective owners/breeders.
- Receipts with bull pedigrees.
- Newspaper/magazine articles.
- Market reports.