

NEWS RELEASE

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New Sheep at Hengistbury Head

In 2015, a small flock of Shetland sheep were introduced to the Double Dykes on Hengistbury Head. Experts in clearing scrub, the Shetlands soon set about reducing the bramble, gorse and holm oak that had taken hold of this Iron Age fortification. Early in 2019, the shapes of the slopes were becoming apparent and it was clear the Shetlands had done their job well, but they were going further – this hillside breed had started to create their own ledges by digging into the fortification.

To prevent further damage to the ancient monument, we decided to return the Shetlands to their farmer, in Ringwood, and research and introduce a breed of sheep that will keep, what is now, a nice grassland habitat, in great condition.

The 6 Cotswold Sheep were selected as they are a native breed, well known for their meadow management skills and good temperament. Collected from Gloucestershire during October, they have remained at a secret location on Hengistbury until being released onto Double Dykes in November.

The Cotswold breed are largely responsible for shaping the area of the country that they share their name with. Farms, interspersed with market towns, thrived on the good quality wool produced from this breed, and the wealth that created such incredible architecture, not least of all the churches, came from these little woolly wonders.

It is hoped that the Cotswolds will build on the work of the Shetlands, in creating a valuable habitat for insects and birds within the Double Dykes. The wildlife that uses the adjacent Barn Field, should be able to expand in this and a sure sign of improvements in years to come, would be the presence of nesting Skylarks within the Double Dykes.

They are a fairly friendly and confident flock, and although you cannot access the Double Dykes, visitors (and well-behaved dogs) should be able to glimpse them through the fence.