

The Rhönsheep is back



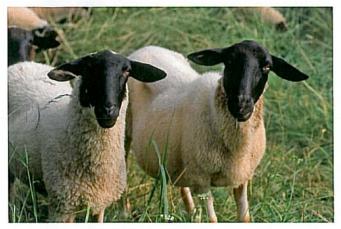




The Rhön in sheep's clothing

It has got a white coat, white tall legs and a slim black head without horns. It belongs to the Rhön like the landscape views and the stony mountains: the Rhönsheep.

It is hard to believe but at the beginning of the 20th century there were more sheep grazing in the pastures of the Rhön than horses, cattle, pigs, and goats altogether. The meat of the Rhönsheep was supposed to be delicious and therefore known even beyond the Rhön. Its special taste was appreciated by the members of the court of Paris as well as by the guests of the noble restaurants of London. The Rhönsheep has gone through an eventful history since then. It disappeared from the Rhön and nearly died out 40 years ago. The stock of the Rhönsheep has been extented enormously in the previous years. Meanwhile there can be found more than 3,000 ewes in the Rhön.



The Rhönsheep: A black head and a white coat.

Hard times for the Rhönsheep

The whole breeding of sheep has decreased severely in the last 120 years not only because of the increase in cattle breeding and the introduction of synthetic fertilisers but also because of the decrease of prices for lambswool and for mutton.

It was difficult to purchase the meat of the Rhönsheep at times when quantity had been more important than quality. The outcome of meat delivered by Rhönsheep was 30 per cent lower than by conventional sheepbreeding. In 1957 this negative development had reached the lowest point. There remained just 300 Rhönsheep throughout the whole Federal Republic of Germany. Only due to the idealistic enthusiasm of some people has this wooly fellow been saved from extinction.

A tough constitution, tender meat and of great value for the ecological system

Nowadays we are pleased with the great demand for the delicious meat in many places of the Rhön. In addition to that, the Rhönsheep plays an important role in the conservation of the agricultural landscape with its rarely occurring animals and plants. The Rhönsheep with its highly resistant constitution is very well adapted to the rough climate of the Rhön. As they can live on very little, the mountain pastures and the infertile grassland offer ideal living conditions for the Rhönsheep. At the same time these habits support the conservation of the landscape and there is no need for expensive measures of conservation. We find rare plants in the pastures of the Rhön like the pasque-flower, the carline thistle, the meadow cowslip, the aquilegia, the globe flower, and the gentian (Fransenenzian). Many rare species of butterflies like the Camberwell Beauty, Streifenbläuling, and Scheckenfalter as well as some species of birds threatened with extinction like the Whitethroat, the Red-backed shrike and the Meadow pipit can also be found in these pastures of the Rhön.

A fabulous comeback

Since 1985 the "Bund Naturschutz" and the Bavarian regional group of the BUND (Foundation for Conservation, Germany) have been looking for the conservation of the Rhönsheep.

Ecologists have bought 33 ha (~ 82 acres) of the valuable narrow meadows on the southern slope of the Rhön and put 39 Rhönsheep grazing in these pastures, conserving this part of the landscape at the same time. A modern species-preserving sheep-fold and afterwards a barn were built in 1988. With the help of many private donations and public funds as well as money of the "Adolf and Hildegard Isler Foundation" of the Bavarian ecologists 1.1 million DM had been collected and were then invested in this project. The flock of sheep looked after by Josef Kolb developed into one of the most successful breeding flock of its species. There are over 400 sheep registered in this sheep-farm. Another Rhönsheep-breeding co-operative in Oberelsbach-Ginolfs counts 1,000 ewes. Two sheep-folds have been built and a direct purchase has been organized. Those Rhönsheep have become essential for the care of the eastern slope of the "Lange Rhön" by now.



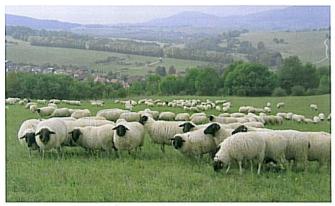
Shepherd Dietmar Weckbach

The BUND also supported the conservation of the Rhönsheep in Hesse actively by buying a flock of 250 sheep which were registered in the North of Hesse in 1997 with the help of the Foundation for Conservation in Hesse and the Mineralbrunnen Förstina Enterprise. When the owner of this flock of sheep died, there was the danger that these animals would be sold to the slaughterhouse sooner or later. The BUND Hesse financed the purchase of this flock of sheep without further ado, and they induced the shepherd Dietmar Weckbach from Ehrenberg-Wüstensachsen to take charge of this flock of sheep.

Dietmar Weckbach has been responsible for this flock since then, and he has been able to extend its size to 500 maternal sheep till today. Allthough the number of Rhönsheep decreased after 1990, nowadays many flocks of the Rhönsheep have been put grazing in the pastures of the Thuringian Rhön to support the conservation of the infertile grassland there. At the moment there are 20 sheep-breeders with over 1,300 ewes in the Thuringian Rhön.

The flock of the Rhönsheep of the agricultural farms in Kaltensundheim is a treat for the eyes. Hipp Enterprises is exclusively using the meat of the organically raised Rhönsheep to produce its baby food.

There are also many hobby sheep-breeders in the Rhön who have devoted themselves to the conservation of the Rhönsheep.



The heard at Kaltensundheim

Original Rhönsheep: Meat that tastes fantastic!

As mentioned before, the delicious taste of the meat of the Rhönsheep had already been popular to the nobility of Europe centuries ago.

Since the Rhön has been honoured as a certified nature reserve by the UNESCO, many restaurants offer several dishes made of the meat of the Rhönsheep. The shepherds work together with the local butchers, so the sheep can be slaughtered without stress. For that reason the place of origin, the processing, and the trading of the Rhönsheep can be reconstructed at any time. A fact that costumers appreciate in times of meat and food scandals.

People are able to buy meat, salami and sausages and even brawn of the Rhönsheep from local traders and retail shops. These just mentioned products are not just delicious food, but they help to conserve the Rhön as a habitat for animals and plants. The meat of the Rhönsheep does not only taste fantastic, but the breeding of the sheep conserves the landscape.



The shepherds of the Rhön are only able to survive by the purchasing of the meat of the Rhönsheep. And you can help them.

It is very easy: Just tuck into the delicious meat. Enjoy the great variety of meals and try your hand at cooking some of the lovely recipes. Good luck!

Pay attention to the original!

Meanwhile terms like "Rhöner Schaf", "Rhöner Lamm", "Rhönlamm", or "Lammfleisch" are to be found on the menus of many restaurants. Do not get confused with that: only the term "Rhönschaf" stands for the original.



Fascination Rhönsheep

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A recipe...

"Rhöner lamb sweet and sour served in a hot pan"

The "Rhöner Lammfleischtiegel" is not a traditional dish like roast of lamb, lamb chop or loin. This recipe is a good example for the fact that excellent meals cannot only be made of the high-grade pieces of the lamb but also of other pieces of the Rhönsheep. To be precise, it is a lovely and tasty recipe.

Ingredients:

600 g meat of the shoulder, cut in dices of 2 cm

150 g onion, chopped 1 tbspn tomato purée 50 g wholewheat flour

150 g stripes of root vegetables (e. g. carrots, celery, leek)

2 apples chopped

Cooking fat, salt, pepper, rosemary, thyme, honey, cider for seasoning.

Ingredients for cider-honey marinade

1 | cider (self-made)

120 g honey

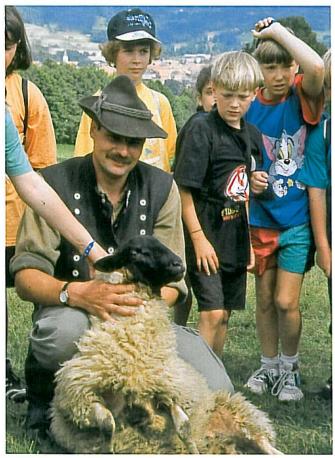
2 tbspns apple vinegar

1 tspn salt

1 fresh branch or one tspn of thyme leaves

Preparation:

Put all ingredients for the marinade in a pot and heat it until it is boiling. Let it cool down and add the meat to the marinade and after 1 to 3 days it will be soaked well. Separate the marinade from the meat with a sieve, heat the fat and fry the meat and the diced onions. Add some of the marinade and the tomato purée and brown it lightly and add the flour. Now fill in the rest of the marinade. Cook it until it is done. For further information:



Excursions to the shepherds of the Rhön are very popular.



For further information:

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