



JACOB SHEEP

ARTIODACTYLA
Family: Bovidae
Genus: Ovis
Species: aries



Range: worldwide in association with people, more in the temperate northern hemisphere; seldom in tropical or humid areas

Habitat: grazing/browsing regions up to 14,000 feet

Niche: terrestrial, diurnal herbivore

Wild diet: pastured: grasses, leaves, shoots and twigs

Zoo diet: alfalfa, oats and omelene

Life Span: (Wild)

(Captivity) 10-20 yrs

Sexual dimorphism: M 20-30% larger/ F has much smaller horns

Location in SF Zoo: CZ Barnyard

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The most distinctive feature is the set of 4 horns. Two which are strong upright spirals and two that curves downward. Females bear 4 horns small weak horns that appear distorted and tend to drop off. Fleece marking is also unusual - dark brown or blackish patches on creamy white; in some individuals the dark color may predominate. Skin under the wool differs; pink under the white, black under the darker wool. Narrow muzzles are white with dark rims, free of fleece, as are the legs.

Toes 3 and 4 form characteristic ovid hooves. Stomach is four chambered, enabling to swallow coarse vegetation and digest it in leisure. Upper lip is cleft to accommodate close grazing.

Note the upper front teeth are lacking and lowers project slightly forward. Narrow jaw set with strong cheek teeth. These are crowned with crescentic ridges of enamel.

Weight:	100-200 lbs
HBL:	3-4 ft
TL:	very short

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Jacob Sheep are a very ancient breed that probably originated in Syria some 3000 years ago. Pictorial evidence traces the breed's movement through North Africa, Sicily, Spain, and on to England. Jacob sheep were imported into the U.S. for game parks and zoos around the turn of the century. Additional imports from Britain in the 1950s and 60s enhanced the genetic pool, at the time the breed was dwindling. Active preservation efforts saved what was left of the breed and established a healthy genetic pool, which assures the breed's survival.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Mature Jacobs do not appear to be noisy; lambs bleat and are recognized by mother, partly by sound, but also by sight and smell. This breed is as gregarious as other ovids, living in both small and large groups. All activity is carried out within the flock, whether grazing, browsing or moving on. When disturbed, all members cluster together, then run as a unit, with an older animal acting as leader.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

In temperate zones, mating occurs most often in autumn. Dominant rams drive off rivals to control a "harem" of ewes. Jacob rams have been bred with Suffolk and Dorset Horn females to avoid lambing problems. This practice results in smaller newborn with narrower heads, facilitating easier birthing for young ewes while allowing them to provide milk for multiple calves. Both pure breed and crosses are slow to mature.

Estrous: seasonally polyestrous	
Gestation: 143-153 days	Sexual Maturity: F 3 yrs / M 7 yrs
# of Mammary: 2 pr	Weaning Age: 6 weeks
# of Young: 1-3	Weight at birth: 3.5 lbs is average

MISCELLANEOUS

The Bovidae family, in particular the Caprinae sub family, is thought to date to the Miocene (20 mya) based on fossilized core fragments. Domestication possibly started some 10 thousand years ago in the Mediterranean region being used for meat, hides and milk. The origins of the Jacob breed are obscure, to say the least. They are a British breed, and all the animals in the United States have been brought here in the 1950s. Prior to the twentieth century they were referred to as Piebald sheep; the name Jacob comes from the Old Testament story of the dealings between Jacob and his father-in-law. This Biblical story of Jacob's is thought to be the earliest record of selective breeding. In spite of some of the more fanciful tales, it appears that their black and white coloring may have originated with Moorish sheep brought from Spain or Africa and their four-horned characteristics from Norse sheep from Scandinavia and the northern Scottish islands. Some believe the shipwrecks accompanying the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 introduced the breed to the Hebrides. The British Wool Marketing Board has been active in promoting the fleece because of its natural, undyed look, popular with modern spinners

Sources:

Last Revision: 09/93

Grzimek 1990 / Nowak, ed. 1991 / Sanderson 1972

Present Revision: 10/07

<http://www.jacobsheep.com/jacobs.htm>

<http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/sheep/jacob/index.htm>