

Pleas to save Bilberry goats



The famed Bilberry goats of Waterford.

THE Bilberry Goat Heritage Trust is pleading with the people of Waterford to help save the famous Bilberry goats.

As reported in The Munster Express in June, concerns have been expressed over alleged attempts to privatise the Bilberry Goat Herd.

The famous goats, which live on Bilberry Hill overlooking the city, have been looked after by the Bilberry Goat Heritage Trust for many years.

A local businessman, who has purchased the land on which the goats traditionally grazed, now claims to be the lawful owner of the herd.

Stating that he was first registered as the official herd keeper with the Department of Agriculture in 2005, the businessman says he aims to protect the herd in order to create a viable community project with the potential to create local employment.

However, the Trust, which is against the possession of the herd for commercial use, claims that the herd now faces extinction.

"This ancient herd has been living on the habitat in Bilberry, which overlooks Waterford City, for over 400 years. They are the living heritage of the people of Waterford," a statement released by the Trust said.

"Representations have been made to the Department of Agriculture officials regarding animal welfare and neglect of same over many months," claimed the Trust.

"We were asked to give the Department of Agriculture every opportunity to mediate a solution to the current situation and we complied with these requests fully."

The Trust claims that the majority of the Bilberry herd has been taken from the rock, amongst them the strongest genetic line and the healthiest nannies and pucks.

"This is very worrying as due to long periods where the herd were not left on the rock over the summer, they will be suffering from poor nutrition facing into the winter. The goats need Bilberry Hill for its unique herb and mineral composition," said the Trust.

According to the Trust, the prime Bilberry Goat nannies were taken from Bilberry on Monday September 22nd.

"If the nannies are not returned immediately, the herd will become extinct," stated the Trust, which also claims they have been informed that the goats are being offered for sale in Kilkenny. An Garda Síochána have also been informed.

"We are pleading for their safe return to Bilberry immediately!" the statement read.

The Trust added: "There were also a mix of hybrids and Comeragh goats on the hill. We are not sure if those have also been moved due to access restrictions imposed on the herd."

The Bilberry herd almost vanished in 2000 due to a number of factors including poaching, theft and neglect.

Since the Bilberry Goat Heritage Trust began its work, the herd has increased from seven animals to 150.

The goats, from the Landrace breed, are said to be descendants of animals which arrived in Waterford in the 1700s – possibly

on board trading ships or with the Huguenots who were fleeing France.

Their location contains unique minerals which helps sustain the herd.

The Trust has described the current situation as a "crisis" and is asking members of the public to visit www.SaveTheBilberryGoats.com or the 'Save The Bilberry Goats' Facebook page for further information.

"This is a serious situation for the Bilberry Goat Herd. The Trust asks for help from the people of Waterford for the return of the goats to their natural habitat in Bilberry," the statement concluded.

For further information, call 086-3540361.