

The Coburger Fuchs Sheep

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The Coburger Fuchs Sheep is a centuries old long-established country breed of the European uplands. Its ancestors belong to the long-tailed wool-bearing sheep that originate from the steppes of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The Coburger Fuchs Sheep were known under many names such as Golden Fuchs, Eichsfeld Fuchs, Westerwald Fuchs, Red Fuchs, Eifel Fuchs, Ardenais, Solognotes, Rousse Tetes and Welsh Mountain Sheep. These are only a few names of the various varieties, with the names almost always referring to the local breeding areas. At the beginning of the 20th century 60 per cent of the sheep population in the province of Coburg (Bavaria) were chestnut-headed sheep with uniform wool. In the other dispersal areas it was a similar situation.

Owing to the general development of the 1920s and 1930s, the country breeds systematically faded away. Landrace sheep such as the Zaupel or Stone Sheep became almost completely extinct. The Coburger Fuchs Sheep would have suffered the same fate had it not been for the master shepherd and cloth manufacturer Otto Stritzel in the Fichtel Mountains in North-Eastern Bavaria. In order to improve the quality of his tweed, he needed a country-bred, resilient sheep that would thrive in the uplands and would bear suitable wool.

The indigenous farmers told Stritzel about the old, frugal country breed namely the Coburger Fuchs Sheep. This prompted him to start searching in the uplands for the best-looking animals that still bore the characteristics of this old

country breed. He started his breeding with 30 Coburger Fuchs Sheep. For the first few years his animals often still had speckled heads and legs, the shades of brown varied considerably (Golden Fuchs, Red Fuchs, Charcoal Fuchs). The average weight of the ewes came to only 35 kg in 1945. By crossbreeding with rams of the Welsh Mountain breed, Solognote rams and Texel rams, Stritzel was able to raise the average weight to 60 kg.

In 1966 the Coburger Fuchs Sheep was recognised as a country breed by the DLG (Deutsche Landwirtschaftsgesellschaft = German Agricultural Society) and in Bavaria it was registered in the breed registry. In 1984 the "Herdbuchgesellschaft Bayern" (Bavarian Stud Book Society) presented, for the very first time, the Coburger Fuchs Sheep at the show of the German Agricultural Society in Frankfurt am Main. Since then this breed has become part and parcel of major agricultural shows of the German Agricultural Society, be it the shows of the ZLF (Bayerisches Zentral-Landwirtschaftsfest = Bavarian Central Agricultural Festival) in Munich or at the "Internationale Grüne Woche" (International Green Week Agricultural Show) in Berlin. In the early 1980s there were two breed registry societies in Bavaria, with a larger one in Baden-Baden. All of these societies still exist today.

Today, the population of Coburger Fuchs Sheep has grown considerably in the whole of Germany due to the establishment of the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft der deutschen Fuchsschafzüchter e.V." (Association of German



Fig. 1: A typical example of a Coburger Fuchs ram in the flock of. Photo: Keltate



Fig. 2: Two prime examples of Coburger Fuchs ewes.

Photo: *Kettele*

Coburger Fuchs Sheep Breeders) in 1989. There are also breeders and enthusiasts in the neighbouring countries. In 2011 there were 48 breed-registry enterprises in Bavaria comprising 1823 ewes and 88 breeding rams, whilst currently in the whole of Germany, 139 breed-registry enterprises are registered. In spite of this breed's strong distribution, it remains on the red list of endangered livestock breeds in Germany.

The Coburger Fuchs Sheep is a medium-sized, noble sheep with a hornless, narrow head. Its head and legs are without wool and of a golden yellow to reddish brown colour. It bears uniform wool in the CD range (33-36 micron). The fleece of the mature animals displays a distinct lustre with the hue ranging from a bright basic tint to a dark basic tint (golden fleece).

The coloured hair presents itself in reddish-brown tints. These have to be consistent and not too numerous spread out in the fleece. The rams weigh from 60 to 105 kg, depending on age, whilst the ewes should weigh between 60 and 85 kg. Unfortunately, these weights are often exceeded.

The Association of German Coburger Fuchs Sheep Breeders aims at breeding and preserving the Coburger Fuchs Sheep as a resilient, frugal country sheep suited for paddocks and for shepherds, as the breed can cope with the harsh upland

conditions. At the same time, the regional breeds with their specific types of wool have to be conserved.

What is special and beautiful about this breed, is its wool. However, because of its colour and the dark pith hair, the wool is not suitable for processing together with other kinds of wool. For this reason it fetches rather low prices with the wool wholesale buyers.

Out of the members of the association the co-operative by the name of "Das GoldeneVlies" was formed ten years ago. Together, in small enterprises, its members have their wool washed and have high-quality woollen products manufactured, from wristlets to jackets. Social institutions also keep fox sheep, process the wool themselves and produce their own individual products. In this manner blankets and even carpets are produced and distributed in upmarket mail order establishments such as "Manufactum". Of particular beauty is the still rather dark but soft lamb's wool which is very popular with the hobby spinners. In addition, the wool of both the lambs and the mature sheep is eminently suitable for felting.

All products, be they manufactured industrially or with a spinning wheel, are of ageless and prime value.

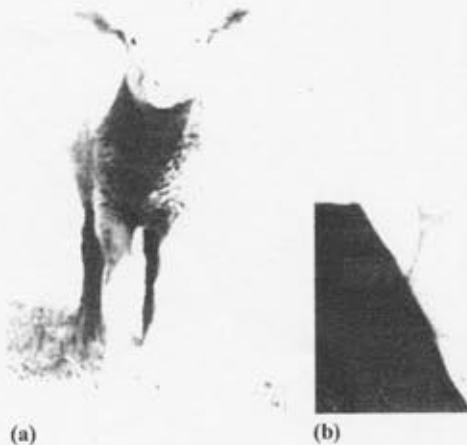


Fig. 3. (a) A Coburger Fuch lamb with its intense tan colour birth coat. **(b)** The fleece of an adult Coburger Fuch sheep will fade to a typical "golden fleece". Photo (a):, Photo (b): Verena Tauber