

Press release: 29th June 2006

The Marsh Awards recognises rare breed conservation

Between 1900 and 1973 over 20 breeds of British farm animals became extinct, their genetic diversity lost forever. Now there are more than 70 breeds among six species at risk.

The Marsh Awards, in partnership with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST), has announced two winners of this year's Award for Conservation in Genetic Bio-Diversity.

The practical award goes to The Portland Sheep Breeders' Group, for their outstanding performance in the conservation, pure breeding, promotion and marketing of Portland Sheep and their products.

The technical award goes to Mike Roper of Defra - the UK National Co-ordinator for Farm Animal Genetic Resources (FAnGR), for the significant impact his work and lobbying efforts in the UK and abroad have had on effecting favorable government policy on conservation and the sustainable use of farm animal genetic resources.

Robert Terry, Executive Director of the RBST comments: "I warmly congratulate both winners for this much deserved recognition. Mike Roper has worked tirelessly to ensure that FAnGR issues remain firmly on the government agenda, ensuring effective communication between government and NGOs. Mike's contribution has been invaluable to securing the future of genetic bio diversity on our farms.

"The Portland Sheep Breeders' Group has been working since 1994 to conserve and promote the Portland breed and its produce, and since then the results of their efforts have been remarkable. The numbers of Portland sheep have greatly improved, resulting in the breed moving from the 'critical' to the 'at risk' register, and the awareness of and demand for the produce of this rare breed has significantly increased. There's still work to be done to secure the future of the breed, but the commitment shown by the Portland Breeders Group to improve the situation for this breed is an inspiration to others – long may it continue."

Brian Marsh OBE and Chairman of the Marsh Awards comments: "Both winners thoroughly deserve this award and the external, independent recognition it offers. We have a responsibility to protect the genetic bio-diversity of the UK for future generations. Not only is it central to sustaining the contribution of farming to the UK economy, but it would be a disgrace to lose

forever the unique produce these rare breeds offer. These native breeds are integral to our British heritage – having helped to shape our agricultural landscape for more than 1000 years.

“I understand the Portland sheep in particular produces quality fleeces and horn, and flavourful bronze meat. The next challenge is cheese-making I believe, and I heartily look forward to sampling some in the near future!”

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The Awards will be presented at **Tatton Park, Knutsford, on 15th July 2006.**

If you would be interested in attending or require more information, please contact SJ Douglas at Spotlight Communications on 07909546104 or sj@spotlightcomms.co.uk, or Paula Mayfield, RBST on 024 7669 8764 or paula@rbst.org.uk.

Notes to editors:

The Marsh Award for Conservation in Genetic Bio-Diversity is one in a programme of 20 awards presented by the Marsh Christian Trust in the fields of science, ecology, conservation, heritage, literature and volunteering. The Awards recognise individuals and organisations who devote their lives to improving the world in which we live, and the world we're leaving our children. The programme is managed in association with key partners including the National Trust, the Royal Entomological Society, the RSPB, and the Royal Zoological Society, to name but a few. These partners recommend a short-list of worthy award winners, and the final decision lies with the Marsh Christian Trust trustees, ensuring complete independence and giving real value to the winners in terms of the recognition earned.

The Rare Breeds Survival Trust is a charity established in 1973. It works to conserve more than 70 breeds of native farm livestock. The charity is funded entirely by membership subscriptions, donations and legacies.