

Most of Iceland's domesticated animals have been here since settlement of the country. That is since before the year 900.

The Icelandic hens



They are an old breed of chicken, having been present on the island since the settlement of Iceland. However, despite this isolation, the breed has barely survived in a pure form in the 21st century, largely due to the importation of commercial strains of chickens in the 1950s.

The few thousand Icelandic chickens in existence today are the result of conservation efforts in the 1970s. It is also possible to find Icelandic hens in other countries.

The Icelandic Sheepdog



The Icelandic sheepdog very much resembles dogs found in graves in Denmark and Sweden from about 8000 before Christ.

The Icelandic Sheepdog is a breed of dogs which were brought to Iceland by the Vikings. Later, dogs were taken from Iceland to the British Isles and became the basis for Border Collies and Corgis. In the Shetland Islands, it was crossed with the Norwegian Buhund and became the Shetland Sheep dog. The Icelandic sheepdog is often described as a large dog in the body of a small dog.

The Icelandic Cow



The Icelandic cow is an old breed, rather small but comes in all sorts of colors, they are for example brown, white and black and often those colors are mixed together. The first cows came with the settlers.

The summer in Iceland is very short so the cows have to be in the barns from the beginning of October to the beginning of June, so they are housed in about 8 months per year. The pasture is mostly timothy and other kinds of grass. Often cabbage, ryegrass, barley or oats are grown to prolong the growing season. Then the cows can eat it in September when the grass has stopped growing. The cows here are very healthy and they are full of milk until they are about age of 9.

95% of the cows are born without horns. Most of the Icelandic cows have naturally no horns, but some of them or only 3-5% is with the genetics for growing horns.

The Icelandic Horse



The Icelandic horse is a breed of horse that has lived in Iceland since the Viking-settlers came to Iceland. There is only one breed of horses in Iceland. Their tail is called “tagl” and their hair is called “fax”. Some horses have a white stripe on their face, and that is called “blesa”. The Icelandic horse is considered pretty rare and special because since they were moved to Iceland, the breed has stayed pure. They have never been blended with other breeds of horses.

Unlike other breeds, the Icelandic horse can live by eating nothing but grass. The Icelandic horse has several ways to walk or run. The slowest horse walk is called “fet”. They have two ‘medium-fast’ ways that we call “tölt” and “brökk”. The Icelandic horse can also spring, and that is what we call “skeið” og “stökk”. The Icelandic horse is the only horse breed that can use “skeið”

They are considered small (about 1.20m to 1.45m, roughly 800 pounds) but very strong, especially for their size. They can carry one-third of their weight, but have to be about four-years-old before they can carry a full-sized adult male human. There are about 75,000 Icelandic horses in Iceland.

The Icelandic sheep



Like other Icelandic animals, the Icelandic sheep was brought to Iceland by the Viking settlers, in the ninth and the tenth century. The Icelandic sheep is one of the North European short-tailed types, they have a short tail called “dindill”. They are medium sized and the ewes (female sheep) can weigh up to 70 kilos and the rams (male sheep) can weigh up to 100 kilos so sheep are rather heavy animals. They are fine boned with an open face, legs and udders and they have horns. Their body is covered with warm and thick wool. The Icelandic sheep mostly eat grass but they also like bread, salt and such. Sheep can live for 12 – 14 years.

The Icelandic goat



The Icelandic goat is domesticated and known as the settlement goat. It was brought to the country with the settlers and has been isolated on the island for 1,100 years.

In Iceland there are only around 646 animals left and as such it is categorized as being at a great risk of extinction because there are fewer than 1,000 animals left. Yet it is a vast

improvement from the year 1965 when there were only 165 animals left.

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