THE BELTED GALLOWAY CATTLE SOCIETY OF THE UK AND EIRE

It doesn't seem like two years have gone by since the last Congress in the UK, time seems to have flown. The society is having a steady time since all the work and excitement of helping, along with the Galloway Cattle and Riggit Galloway Societies, to welcome all the delegates to the UK.

Christina Cormack took up the post of secretary after the Congress and has streamlined the admin and financial functions with great success. Registrations have remained stable at around 850 per year for females and up to and around 100 for bulls. The ability to appendix heifers with white feet and incomplete belts has seen a small number registered, so it will be interesting to track the progress of their offspring markings wise. We all read the recent paper by Mishra et al from the University of Bern on the inheritance of the belt with interest. It is useful to know that there is only one gene involved. The move to computerised pedigrees several years ago has left some holes in our historical herd data base, and a project is ongoing to repair that.

The number of members remains fairly constant at around 500, with new herds being set up at a faster rate than those who give up. It is interesting to see some larger herds appearing of upwards of 100 cows, all providing meat for niche markets. The development of regional groups has provided local meeting points and supported interest in the breed locally. Since 2001, the breed has spread to all corners of our nations, with significant populations in South West Scotland, the North of England, the South West of England, and Northern Ireland and Eire.

Our Society stipulates that bulls must be inspected and DNA'd before registration, and with the nationwide spread it can be tricky getting inspectors to all parts. In order to cut down diversity the Council is planning a series of workshops for inspectors which will prove interesting and enlightening. It is a hard job balancing quality, with a small gene pool and being mindful of the markings as well.

Our main challenge at the moment is the turmoil unleashed by the decision of the UK to leave the EU. As yet there is no blueprint for the way ahead for farming and the environment. The uncertainty is impacting on people's decision on farm plans and investment. The winter of 2017/18 proved to be unusually cold and stormy, after a very wet summer, which left many short of fodder. Even the Belties were challenged, small numbers being forward for our spring sale in May. The males sold well, so hopefully that signals a renewed confidence like the green shoots of the spring pastures.

At a national level work is ongoing to control disease challenges; the most significant and damaging being TB, which has a high incidence in the south west of England and Wales. It certainly takes a toll on folk's ability to buy and sell breeding animals, and sadly, the Worcester sale will not take place this year. Scotland has developed a national plan to eradicate BVD, and many of our herds now monitor and manage Johnnes Disease, IBR and Lepto.

Our society looks after the White Galloways too, and over the last few years there has been mounting concern over the falling numbers. The White Stars research project has meant that we now see the different depths of colour marking as on a continuum, rather than throwing out the so called "over or under marked ones", a policy which was decreasing the numbers even more. Our registration system has now been altered to enable the different depths of marking to be included. It is early days but with some more promotion of the qualities of the White as a beef and grazing animal there is a hope that her fortunes will be improved.

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