



Royal Veterinary College  
University of London

# 40 years of sheep breeding in the UK

Geoff Pollott

Senior Lecturer in Bioinformatics and Genetics

# Survey 2012 Headlines

Decline in purebred ewe numbers continues

Increase in *ad hoc* crossbred ewes

The continuing rise of the Texel as a terminal sire and as part of a crossbred ewe at the expense of the Suffolk

Further imports of new breeds to Britain and the decline of established British breeds

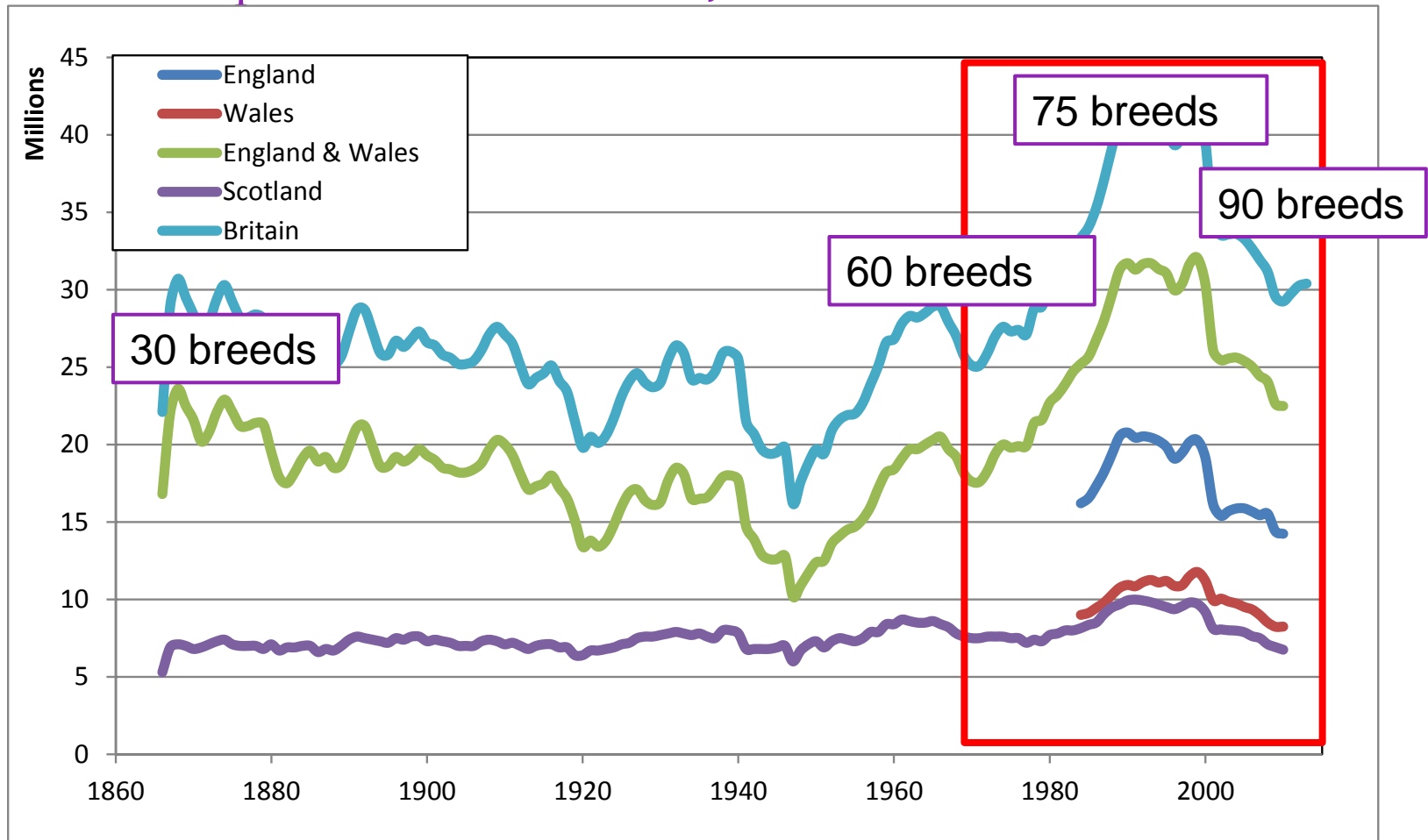
Yet more new composites

# Background

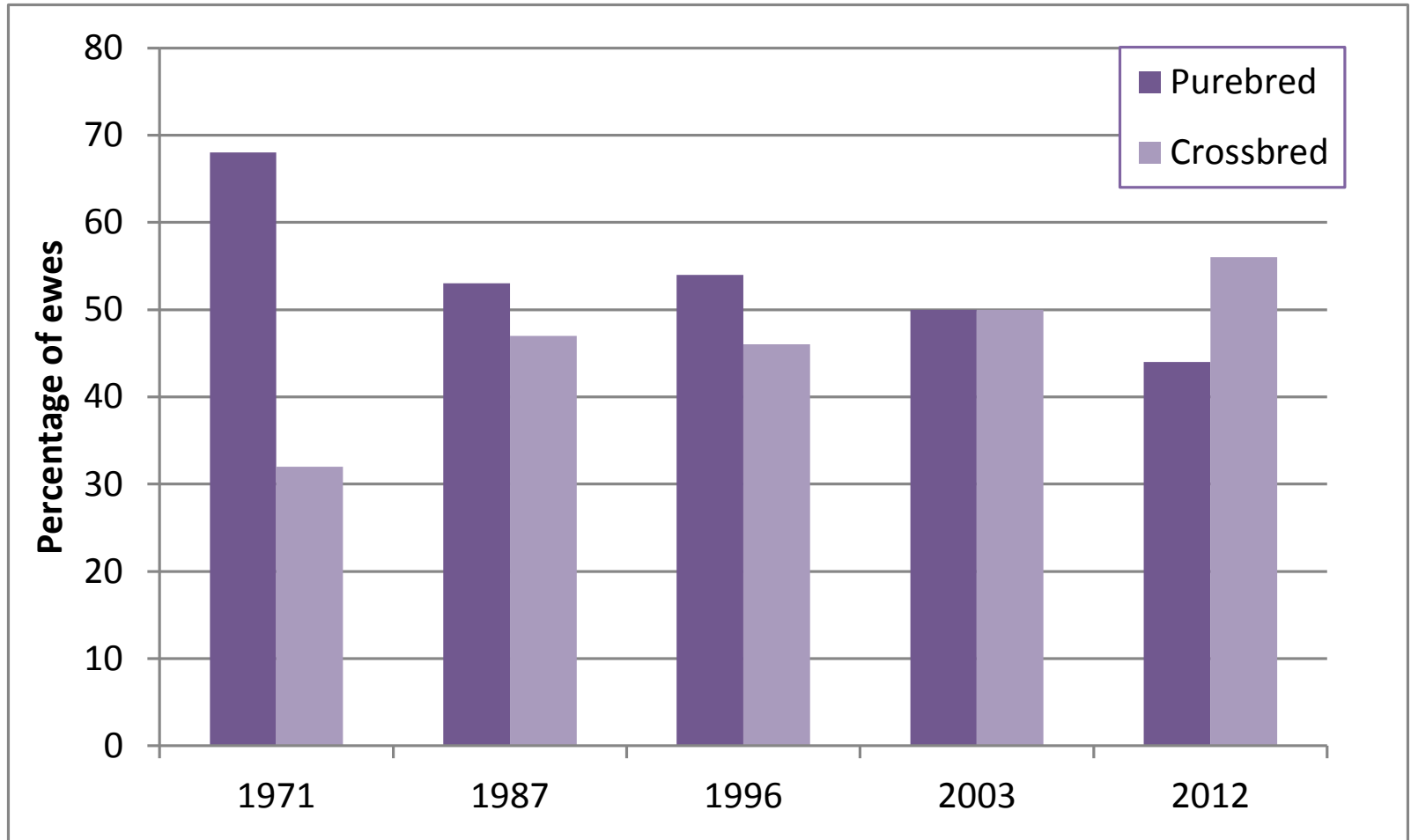
- June and December Census data collected annually (well almost!!!).
- No information on breeds or matings.
- In 1970, the newly formed MLC set up study groups to determine technical direction of each species.
- No comprehensive information was available on sheep breeds in Britain – initiated 1<sup>st</sup> survey at tuppung 1971.
- Subsequent surveys carried out in 1987,1996, 2003 and 2012.

# The last 40 years in context

## Total sheep numbers in Britain – June census

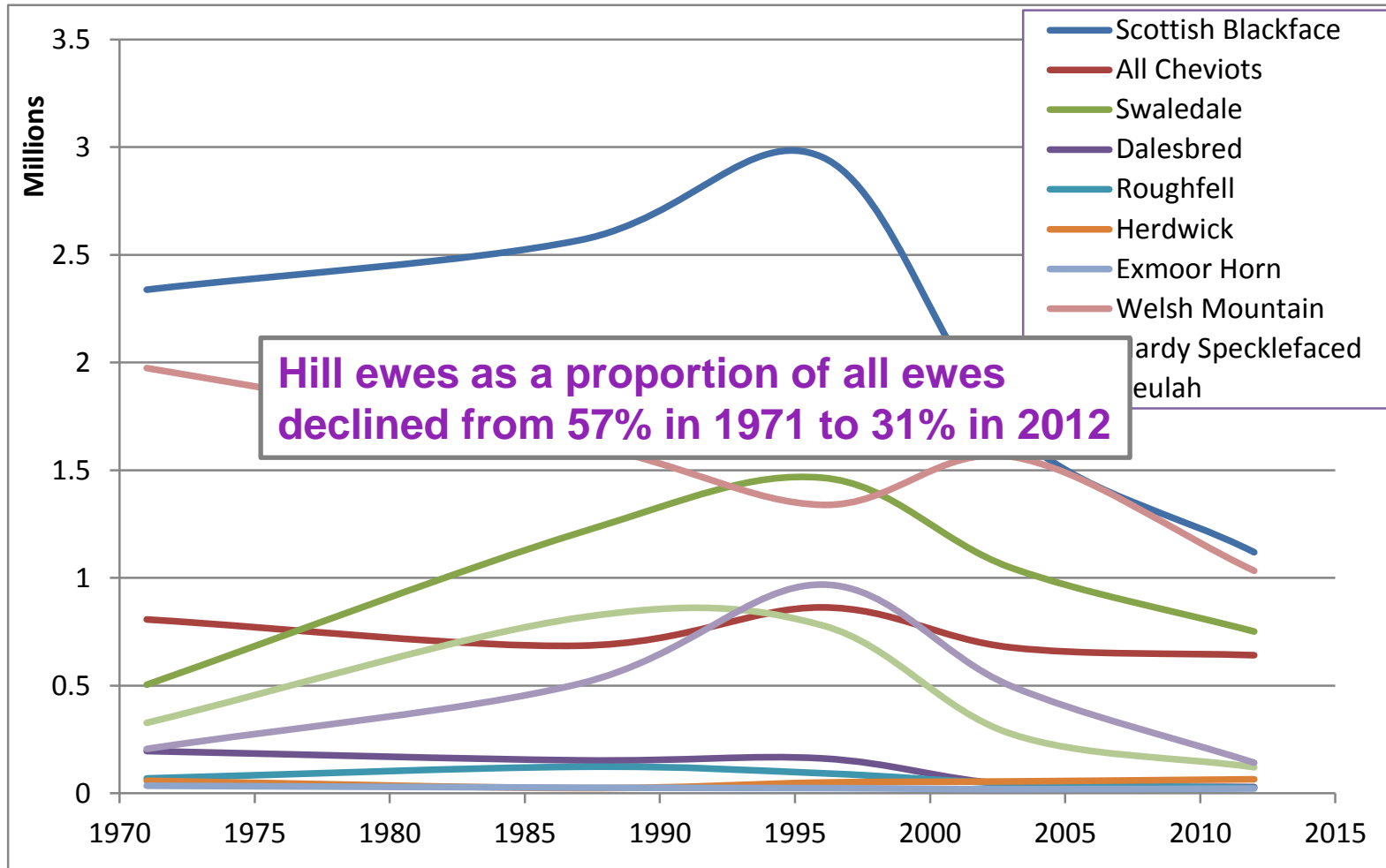


# The rise of the crossbred



Britain - Source: MLC/Defra/EBLEX Sheep Breed Surveys

# Changing hill breed numbers



# Disappearing purebreds?

	1971	1987	1996	2003	2012
Border					
Romney					
Devon C					
Devon a					
Whitefa					
Greyfac					
Hampsh					
Southdo					
Clun Fo					
Dorset H					
Kerryhil					
Llanwer					
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,492</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>273</b>

The results presented at SBRT 2013 were preliminary results from the survey. A full report will be available in due course.

# Overall breed changes in 40 years

Year	UK	Imported	Newly imported	Lost imported	Compo sites	New comp osites	Lost compo sites	Total
1971	~50	1			1			~52
1987	58	1	8	0	1	5	0	73
1996	58	7	6	2	4	0	2	75
2003	58	13	10	0	4	3	0	88
2012	59	18	5	5	5	3	2	90
			30			12		



# The era of the imported breed?

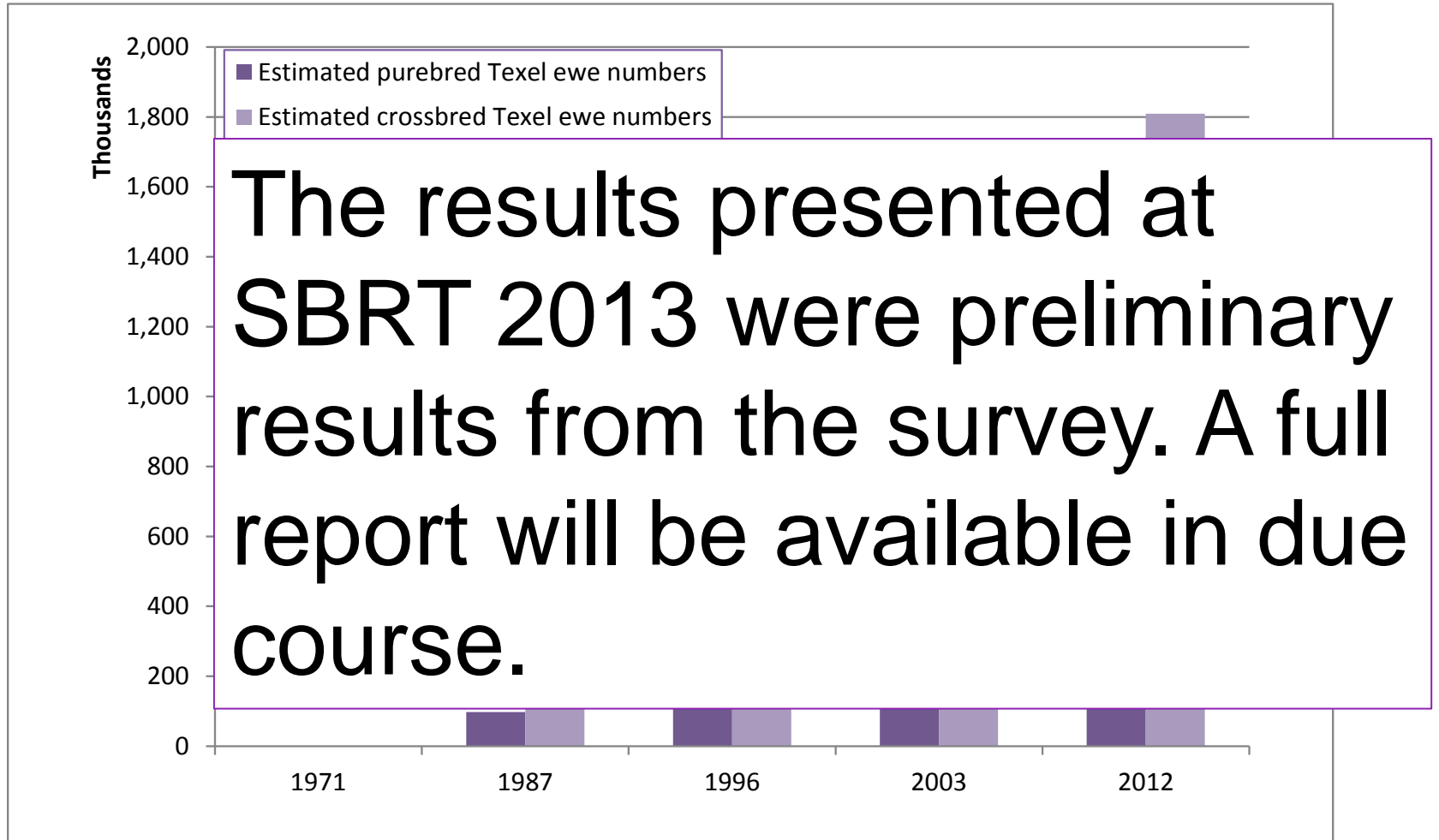
30 breeds imported over 40 years

- 5 not found in 2012

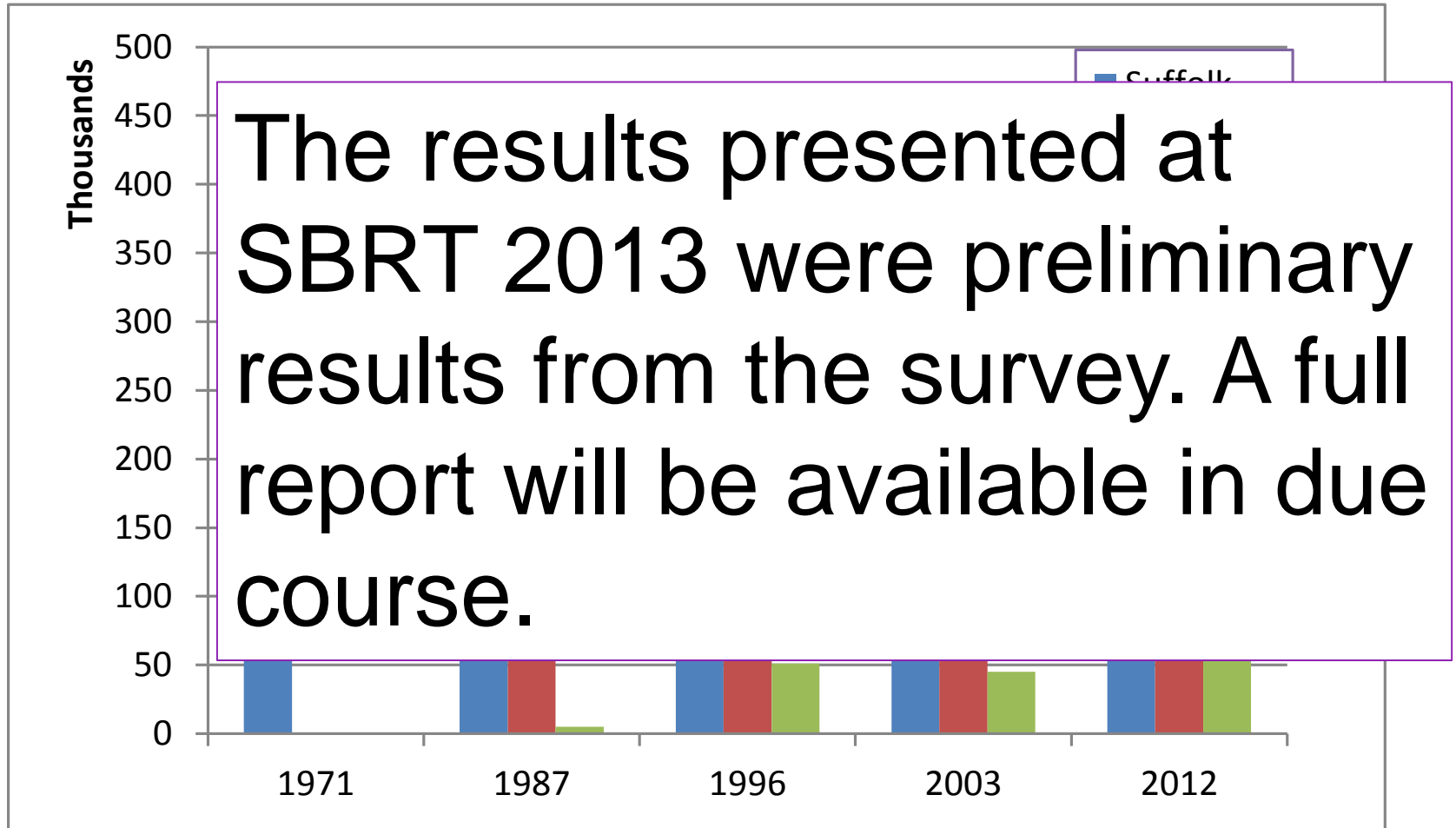
~ 545,000 ewes of imported breeds found in 2012

~ 20% of all non-hill ewes

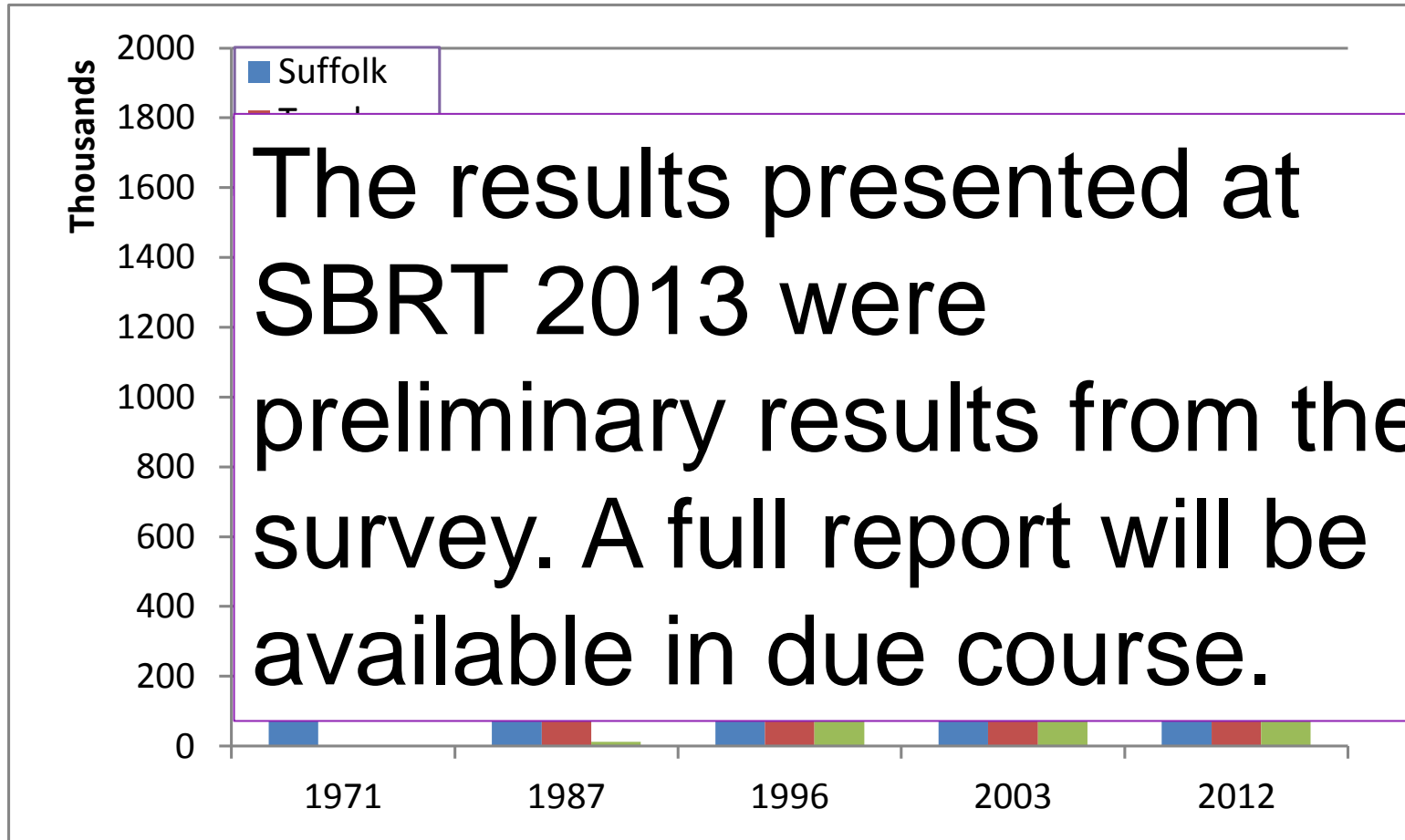
# The rise of the Texel ewe



# Terminal sire purebred ewe numbers



# Terminal sire crossbred ewe numbers

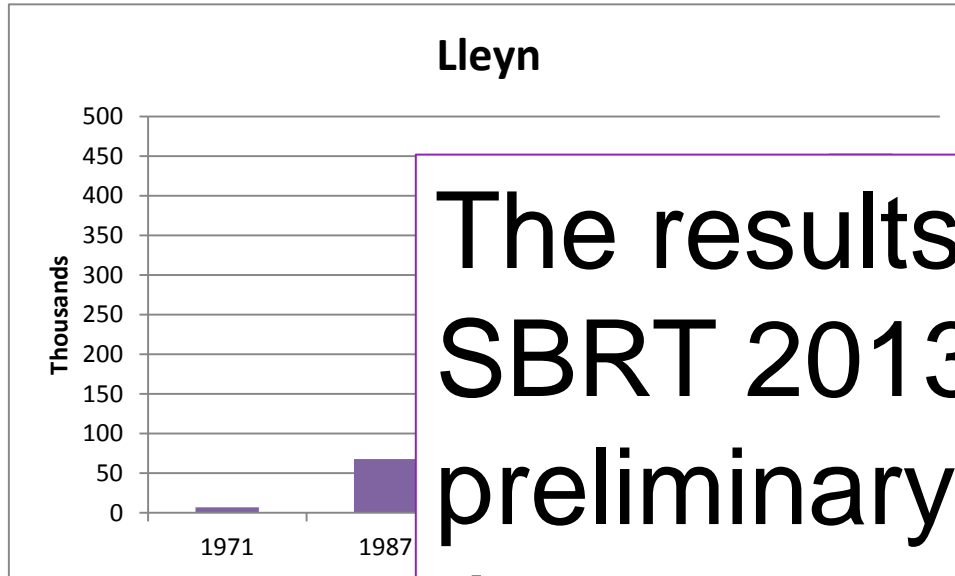


# Changes in regular crossbred ewe types (000)

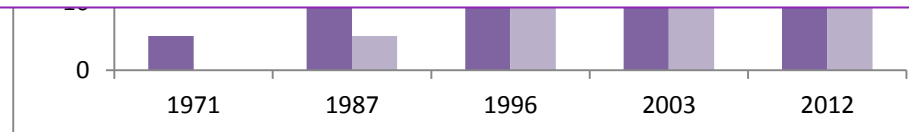
	1971	1987	1996	2003	2012
North Country Mule	211	2,222	2,222	4,215	2,224
Welsh Mule					
Scots Mule					
Greyface					
Welsh Halfbred					
Scottish Halfbred					
Masham					
Suffolk x Mule/HB					
Texel x Mule/HB					
Suffolk x Hill					
Texel x Hill					
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,529</b>	<b>6,284</b>	<b>6,291</b>	<b>4,831</b>	<b>4,538</b>

The results presented at SBRT 2013 were preliminary results from the survey. A full report will be available in due course.

# A move towards more efficient sheep?



The results presented at SBRT 2013 were preliminary results from the survey. A full report will be available in due course.



# Composites – many a dashed dream?

12 composites introduced in 40 years

- 4 disappeared

Meatli

Easyc

The results presented at SBRT 2013 were preliminary results from the survey. A full report will be available in due course.

# Conclusions and discussion points

Stratified crossbreeding structure still found

Balance shifting towards crossbreds

Many 'irregular' crossbreds

New breeds and composites still appearing

Breeds with real traits to offer find a place