

GOAT BREEDERS ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

Illustrated breed book

the

Savanna

MEAT BREED

An illustrated history, breed standard and husbandry guide for Zimbabwean breeders

GBAZ breed book, first edition, 2026

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KEY FACTS

Type	Meat breed, white coat on black skin, lop-eared
Origin	Vaal River farm, northern Cape, 1955 to 1957; society 1993
Mature does	About 60 kg
Mature bucks	100 to 140 kg
100-day kids	About 25 kg (does) to 30 kg (bucks)
Kidding	Year-round breeder; 137 percent kidding rate and 152 percent prolificacy recorded under humid conditions
Best suited to	Bush-encroached and semi-arid grazing; hard browse
Zimbabwe	Small numbers; imports from Namibia; GBAZ standard since 2019; registrar: Zimbabwe Herd Book

CHAPTER 1

Origin and history

The Savanna is a white meat goat with black skin, and it was bred by letting the veld do the selecting. The Boer Goat Journal 2025 traces it to the late 1950s and early 1960s, when breeders set out to make a white meat goat that would be adaptable, fertile and resistant to the hardships of the bush. The founding work was done by the Cilliers family: from 1955 to 1957, on the farm of D S U Cilliers and Sons on the Vaal River in the northern Cape, multicoloured lop-eared indigenous does were mated to a large white buck, and the offspring were run as free-ranging flocks in a harsh environment of extreme temperatures and erratic rainfall, with little care, so that only the hardy, mobile and fertile animals survived to breed.



A Savanna flock on the veld: white coats, black skin and the long neck of a browsing goat.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery



Savanna goats were selected in free-ranging flocks under harsh conditions.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery

The result is a goat whose standard reads like a job description. It must endure heat, intense sun, cold and rain; walk far for feed and water; browse a wide range of vegetation, including hard, unpalatable shrubs; and be sexually active throughout the year. White was chosen for visibility in the bush and black skin for protection from the sun, and the combination, a white coat on fully pigmented skin with black hooves, horns, muzzle and eyelids, became the mark of the breed.

A breeders' society was formed on 21 November 1993, and the Savanna later joined the Boer Goat and Kalahari Red under the collaboration agreement of 2005, so that its standard was taken up with the Boer standard of excellence. The journal describes the Savanna as the white powerhouse of the meat goat industry and notes that the breed, after a period of decline, has enjoyed a surge in numbers with record entries at the 2025 World Show. The breed is now kept in the United States (from 1994), Australia, Canada, Brazil and elsewhere, and a Savanna doe set a South African record of R85,000 at auction.

The FAO lists the Savanna's status as at risk because its population is small compared with the Boer, which makes every registered flock, including those in Zimbabwe, part of its conservation.

CHAPTER 2

Breed standard

The Savanna standard describes a strong, virile, functionally efficient goat that is lively but not wild. Does are medium-sized, refined and feminine; bucks masculine, robust and well muscled. The standard states the breed's purpose plainly: the animal must withstand heat, sun, cold and rain, travel far for feed and water, browse a wide range of vegetation and be sexually active all year. Pigmentation is the point on which the Savanna standard is strictest; any pink skin is a cull defect.



Head study: a fairly long, slightly curved head, black-pigmented eyelids and muzzle, oval pendulous ears.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery

GBAZ applies the standard summarised below at inspection, and inspected animals are registered with the Zimbabwe Herd Book. Where the Savanna standard differs from the Boer standard, notably in the longer neck, the sloping rump, the hooves, the black pigment and the scrotal measurements, the Savanna rule applies.

Summarised from the Savanna standard of excellence maintained by the breed's founding society, as applied by GBAZ at inspections.

General appearance

Strong, virile and functionally efficient; lively but not wild. Does medium-sized, refined and feminine; bucks masculine, robust and well muscled. The animal must endure heat, sun, cold and rain, travel far for feed and water, browse a wide range of vegetation and be sexually active all year.

Head

Fairly long, slightly curved and broad rather than sharp; a wide mouth with well-muscled, mobile lips; correct bite (6 mm protrusion allowed at eight teeth); lively eyes with black-pigmented lids and protective brow ridges; fairly big, oval, pendulous, well-pigmented, mobile ears; dark oval horns growing backwards, reasonably wide at the base, not pressing on the neck.

Neck and forequarter

Neck well muscled and reasonably long, for browsing; forequarter well muscled and of medium width (narrow or very wide discriminated against); shoulder blades firmly attached; withers slightly higher than the back and rump; straight, well-placed front legs with short, strong cannon bones and strong, springy, slightly sloping pasterns. Older bucks show medium skin folds.

Barrel

Reasonably long and deep with capacity for roughage; a strong, wide eye muscle; well-sprung ribs; not cylindrical or shallow in older animals.

Hindquarter

Wide, with the legs well apart and straight; a rump with a reasonable slope; well muscled; strong hocks with visible tendons, turning neither in nor out; tail straight up, well haired and mobile, with black-pigmented bare skin.

Legs and feet

Legs strong and correctly placed, neither too thin nor too fleshy; hooves strong, hard and black, reasonably big, with the claws close together and not prone to foot rot. Faults: knock knees, bandy legs, cow hocks, post legs, sickle hocks, weak pasterns, hooves pointing in or out.

Skin, pigment and coat

Skin pigment dark grey to black over the whole body; no light spots on elite animals; any pink skin is a cull defect. Coat totally white, short and of kemp type, with a cashmere undercoat in winter; a few black or red hairs are tolerated but selected against.

Sexual organs

Does: a well-formed udder, firmly attached, ideally with two functional teats; double teats are not acceptable; a maximum of three teats per side is allowed where the extra teats are small and blind, and all teats must be separate. Bucks: two large, equal testes in one scrotum, with a split of no more than 2 cm and a circumference of at least 26 cm; one teat per side ideal; a twisted scrotum is a cull defect.

Colour

Totally white coat on black skin, with black hooves, horns, muzzle, eyelids and under-tail skin. White is dominant, so coloured kids occasionally appear and are not registered.

Fertility rule

Does of six teeth and older must be visibly pregnant, scanned pregnant, hold a recent pregnancy certificate or be suckling kids to be shown or auctioned; bucks of two teeth and older are fertility-tested before a national auction.

Disqualifications

Over- or undershot jaw; knock knees, bandy legs, cow hocks, post legs or sickle hocks; legs too thin or too fleshy; weak pasterns; hooves pointing in or out; faulty sexual organs or udders, including a scrotum split over 2 cm or twisted; any structural fault that harms functional efficiency; incomplete or too light pigmentation, including any pink skin.

CHAPTER 3

Arrival and role in Zimbabwe

The Savanna is the least numerous of the three improved meat breeds in Zimbabwe, and quality breeding stock is harder to find than Boer or Kalahari Red. GBAZ drafted a Savanna standard at its first Goat Indaba in 2019, alongside the Boer and Kalahari Red standards, so that the breed could be inspected and registered from the start. A small number of GBAZ member studs keep Savannas, and the breed has been judged in its own class at the Bulawayo Agricultural Show, where the Savanna buck class was won by Eland Zakithi Stud in 2026.



A Savanna buck. Registered sires are in demand because the breed is scarce in Zimbabwe.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery



Acacia savanna: the Savanna goat browses thorn and hard shrub that other stock leave.
Photo: Catherine Merlin, Unsplash

Imports have come from Namibia as well as South Africa. In 2024 the musician Maskiri and his partner were saluted by GBAZ for importing Savanna breeding stock from Namibia, an example that the association's chairperson used to encourage other investors to bring in registered genetics through the proper veterinary channels. Each import must pass veterinary import permits and quarantine, and animals intended for registration should arrive with their foreign registration papers so that the Zimbabwe Herd Book can record their parentage.

The Savanna's role in Zimbabwe is the one its founders designed it for: the hard country. On bush-encroached ranches in Matabeleland, in the mopane and acacia thornveld of the Zambezi Valley and the south-east lowveld, and on communal grazing where the grass is gone by August, a goat that browses hard, unpalatable shrubs and walks far for water earns its keep. Savanna bucks on Matebele does produce white or pied crosses with the dam's tick and heartwater tolerance and the sire's frame, and the breed's strong undercoat in winter is an advantage on the cold highveld of the south.

Because the breed is scarce, Zimbabwean breeders have an opportunity as well as a challenge. Registered Savanna bucks are in demand, the breed's year-round fertility and easy kidding suit extensive systems, and a well-run stud can supply both pure animals and crossing sires. GBAZ encourages Savanna breeders to register their animals so that the breed's numbers in the country can be counted and its genetics conserved.

Milestones for the Savanna in Zimbabwe

Year	Event
2019	GBAZ drafts its Savanna breed standard at the first Goat Indaba
2024	Savanna breeding stock imported from Namibia by private investors; GBAZ encourages registered imports
2025	Eleven GBAZ breeders inspected by a South African society inspector; Savanna animals eligible for Herd Book registration

Year	Event
2026	Savanna buck class judged at the Bulawayo Agricultural Show

CHAPTER 4

Performance and production

The Savanna is a medium to large goat with a long, deep body. Published mature weights are about 60 kg for does and 100 to 140 kg for bucks, with the breed literature giving a range of 60 to 140 kg overall; North American registries quote wither heights of 48 to 64 cm, lower than the figures for South African studs, where the animals are described as medium to large. Kids at 100 days weigh about 30 kg for bucks and 25 kg for does in stud flocks, and the journal credits the breed with fast growth, good feed conversion and high-quality carcasses from natural grazing.



Savanna does and kids. Does kid on the veld and rear twins without assistance.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery

Reproduction is the breed's strength. The standard requires year-round sexual activity, and the journal reports excellent fertility with many does producing twins or triplets. A Malaysian comparison of Savanna and Kalahari Red does under the same management recorded for the Savanna a conception rate of 92.4 percent, a fertility rate of 89.9 percent, a kidding rate of 137 percent and a prolificacy of 152.3 percent, with pre-weaning kid mortality of 17.5 percent in a humid tropical climate; litter size at birth and at weaning was slightly higher for the Savanna than for the Kalahari Red, though the differences were not significant. Under dry conditions mortality is much lower, and in South African stud flocks kidding rates in the same 150 to 200 percent band as the Boer are reported.

Does kid easily on the veld and defend their kids, and the breed is noted for a long productive life. The carcass is lean and balanced; the white coat and dark skin produce a good hide; and the winter cashmere-type undercoat is shed in spring.

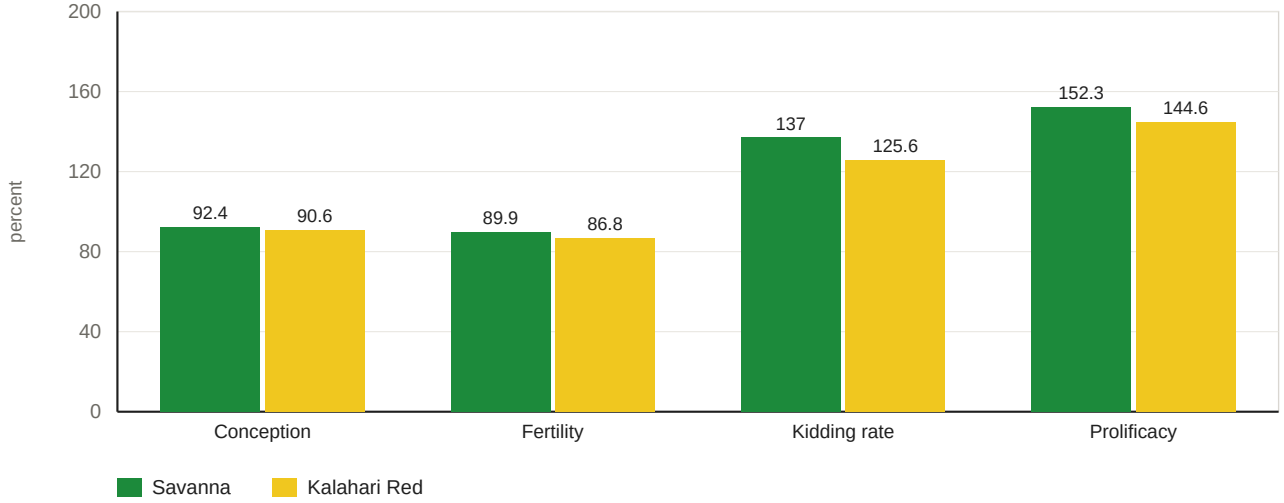
Body size and weight (sources: breed society literature; Goat Journal; Boer Goat Journal 2025)

Measure	Does	Bucks	Note
Mature live weight	about 60 kg	100 to 140 kg	Range 60 to 140 kg in the literature
Height at withers	48 to 64 cm (registries abroad)	medium to large	South African studs larger
Birth weight	3 to 4 kg	3 to 4 kg	Twins lighter than singles
100-day weaning weight	about 25 kg	about 30 kg	Stud flocks
Growth from the veld	good	good	Balanced, lean carcass

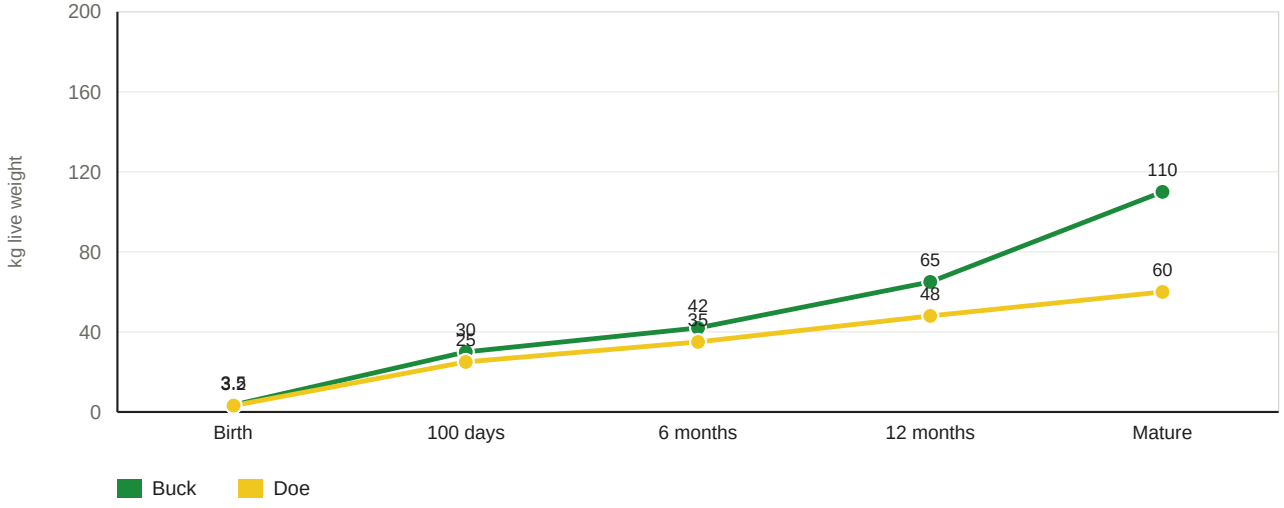
Reproduction of Savanna does compared with Kalahari Red under the same management (Malaysian study; differences not significant)

Trait	Savanna	Kalahari Red
Conception rate	92.4 percent	90.6 percent
Fertility rate	89.9 percent	86.8 percent
Kidding rate	137.0 percent	125.6 percent
Prolificacy	152.3 percent	144.6 percent
Pre-weaning kid mortality (humid climate)	17.5 percent	19.7 percent

Reproductive rates of Savanna and Kalahari Red does under the same management (Malaysian study)



Indicative growth of Savanna kids under stud management



CHAPTER 5

Adaptation and husbandry in Zimbabwean conditions

No improved meat breed asks less of the land than the Savanna. It was selected under heat, intense sun, cold and rain with minimal care, it tolerates ticks, worms and drought better than the Boer, and it browses hard, unpalatable shrubs that other goats leave, which makes it useful for bush control as well as meat. The journal notes that the breed's short hair and strong pigmentation make it particularly resilient against external parasites. Its black skin resists sunburn; its white coat reflects heat and makes the goats easy to see in dense bush; and the winter undercoat protects it on the cold southern highveld.



Savanna goats in dry country. The breed tolerates heat, cold, ticks and drought.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery



Strong black hooves with the claws close together are a point of the standard.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery

In Zimbabwe the breed suits the extensive systems of Matabeleland, the lowveld and the Zambezi Valley, and it copes with the mopane and acacia thornveld where grass is scarce by August. Supplementary feeding is still worthwhile in a stud flock, because a 60 kg doe rearing twins needs protein in the dry season to wean kids at 25 kg, but the breed will maintain itself and breed on veld that would leave a Boer doe thin. Water within walking distance is the main requirement.

Health care follows the standard routine for improved goats, with less pressure than the Boer faces: strategic dipping or pour-on treatment through the rains, FAMACHA-guided deworming rather than blanket dosing, clostridial vaccination and a heartwater plan where bont ticks occur. Hooves are strong and black and rarely need trimming more than twice a year. The breed's temperament is calm and manageable, and does are protective mothers, so kidding on the veld in a predator-proof camp is usual.

Because the Savanna breeds all year, breeders must decide whether to run the buck with the does continuously, which gives three kiddings in two years but spreads work and risk across the seasons, or to mate in April and May for spring kidding. For a stud that must present pregnant does at shows and auctions, controlled mating with records of service dates is the better choice.

Where the Savanna fits in Zimbabwe

System	Suitability	Why
Extensive ranching in Natural Regions IV and V	Very good	Hard browse, long walking, drought and tick tolerance
Bush-encroached grazing	Very good	Browses unpalatable shrubs and helps control bush
Communal flocks in the south and west	Good as a sire	Savanna buck on Matebele does gives hardy, heavier crosses
Wetter highveld of the north-east	Fair	Heartwater and parasite pressure; manage like a Boer flock

CHAPTER 6

Breeding and selection

The Savanna was made by natural selection, and the breed's societies ask breeders to keep selecting under veld conditions rather than in the feedlot. Reproduction comes first: does that kid every year, rear twins and wean them heavy; bucks that are fertile all year with a scrotal circumference of at least 26 cm. Production comes second, measured as 100-day weight and post-weaning gain from the veld. Conformation to the standard comes third, with particular attention to the black pigment, which must be complete; a single pink patch is a cull defect, and breeders select against the few coloured kids that white's dominance occasionally lets through.



Savanna bucks are selected for year-round fertility and a scrotal circumference of at least 26 cm.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery



Young Savanna stock. White is dominant, so first crosses on coloured does are mostly white.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery

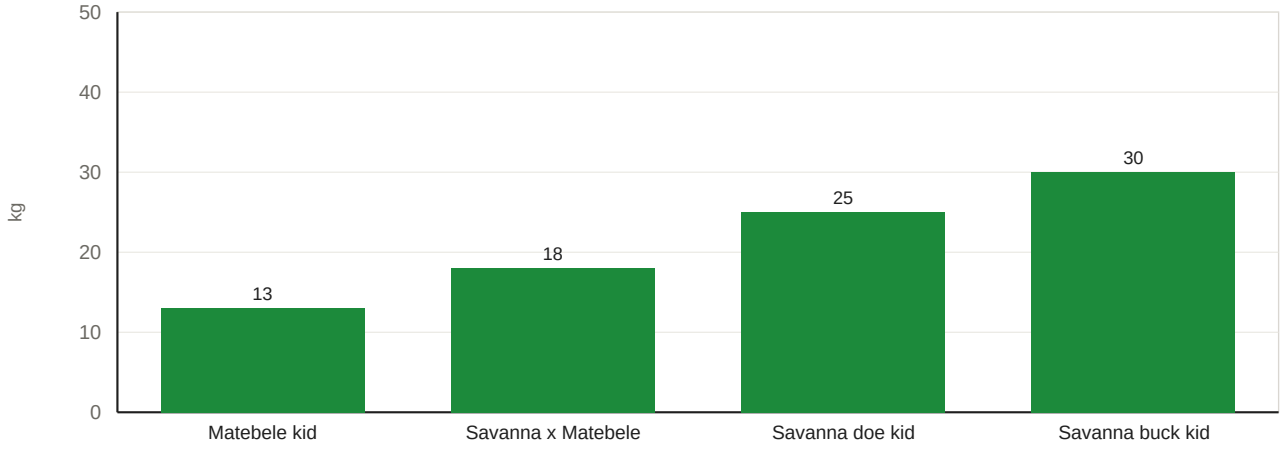
On indigenous does the Savanna is a valuable crossing sire. A Savanna buck on a Matebele doe produces a white or pied first cross that weans heavier and grows larger than the pure indigenous kid while keeping the dam's tick and heartwater tolerance and mothering. White's dominance makes the crosses easy to identify in a mixed flock. The same cautions apply as for the Boer: mate small Mashona does to young, lighter bucks to avoid kidding difficulty, and do not grade a commercial flock beyond three-quarters without providing stud-level feeding and health care.

Because the breed is scarce in Zimbabwe, inbreeding is the particular risk of a small Savanna stud. Breeders should keep full parentage records, exchange or buy in bucks from unrelated lines, and consider the use of imported semen where the Herd Book's rules allow it. GBAZ can help breeders find unrelated registered stock.

Selection priorities for a Savanna stud flock

Priority	Trait group	What to measure
1	Reproduction	Kids weaned per doe per year; year-round fertility; ease of kidding; mothering
2	Production	100-day weaning weight and post-weaning gain from the veld
3	Conformation	Breed standard: complete black pigment, long neck, strong black hooves, sloping rump, functional efficiency
4	Genetic diversity	Full parentage records; unrelated sires; registered imports

Indicative 100-day weights: pure Matebele kid, Savanna cross and pure Savanna stud kid (ranges from the sources in this book)



CHAPTER 7

Shows, judging and registration

Savannas are judged in their own classes under the same show and auction conventions as the Boer and Kalahari Red: inspection of every animal before sale, a minimum of ten months and 40 kg at auction, pregnancy or suckling kids required of does of six teeth and older, veterinary fertility testing of bucks before a national auction, and suspension for any manipulation. The judge pays particular attention to pigment on the eyelids, muzzle, under the tail and on the hooves, to the length and muscling of the neck, to the slope of the rump and to the scrotum, where a split of more than 2 cm or a twist is a cull defect (Boer Goat Journal 2025).



A Savanna presented for judging.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery

In Zimbabwe the Savanna buck and doe classes at the Bulawayo Agricultural Show and the GBAZ Goat Indaba are the breed's showcase, and the breed is offered at GBAZ auctions. Judges are accredited through the South African society's courses until Zimbabwe has its own panel.

Registration follows the GBAZ path. The breeder joins as a stud breeder member and applies for a stud prefix; a GBAZ inspection classes the animals as stud, flock or cull and records the inspected stock, with a GBAZ Livestock Record Certificate for each; and the stud breeder registers the pedigree with the Zimbabwe Herd Book, the statutory registrar, which issues the registration certificate. Imported animals are registered on the strength of their foreign papers. GBAZ does not issue pedigree certificates itself.

From farm to Herd Book: the registration path in Zimbabwe

Step	Who	What happens
1	Breeder and GBAZ	Stud breeder membership; stud prefix; tags and birth notifications
2	GBAZ inspector	Animals classed stud, flock or cull against the standard; Livestock Record Certificate issued
3	Zimbabwe Herd Book	Pedigree registered; registration certificate issued by the statutory registrar

CHAPTER 8

Timeline

Key dates in the history of the breed and its establishment in Zimbabwe.



Savanna goats.
Boer Goat Breeders' Society gallery

1955 to 1957	On the Cilliers farm on the Vaal River, multicoloured lop-eared does are mated to a large white buck and the offspring run under harsh, low-care conditions.
1960s to 1980s	The white, black-skinned type is fixed by natural and breeder selection in free-ranging flocks.
21 November 1993	Savanna breeders' society formed.
1994	First Savanna exports to the United States; later to Australia and Canada by embryo.
2005	Collaboration agreement with the Boer Goat and Kalahari Red societies; the Savanna standard joins the standard of excellence.
2019	GBAZ drafts its Savanna breed standard at the first Goat Indaba.
2024	Savanna breeding stock imported into Zimbabwe from Namibia by private investors.
2025	Record Savanna entries at the World Show; GBAZ breeders inspected and eligible for Herd Book registration.
2026	Savanna buck class judged at the Bulawayo Agricultural Show.

CHAPTER 9

Sources

This book was written from the sources below. Figures are quoted with their origin; where sources disagree the range is given. The breed's origin is stated as history; the standard applied in Zimbabwe is the GBAZ standard, and registration is by the Zimbabwe Herd Book.

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CONTACT

The Goat Breeders Association of Zimbabwe

GBAZ sets breed standards, inspects animals, trains breeders and judges, and supports registration of inspected animals with the Zimbabwe Herd Book, the statutory registrar of pedigree livestock. Questions about this book, breed standards, inspections or membership may be sent to the office.

Goat Breeders Association of Zimbabwe

WhatsApp	+263 77 196 7856
E-mail	zhb-sec@lit.co.zw
Website	gbaz.co.zw/breeds/savanna

Register your animals: GBAZ members apply for inspection through the website or the office; inspected animals receive a GBAZ Livestock Record Certificate and may be registered with the Zimbabwe Herd Book, which issues the registration certificate.