

From the
Premier Breeder
of British Registered
Soay Sheep



SOUTHERN OREGON SOAY SHEEP FARMS

Viewpoint

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

Soay Fleece Management

by Christine Williams

This time of the year is always a big worry in the UK. We have a problem with "fly-strike".

The often repeated myth that Soay do not suffer from fly-strike (wool maggots in the US) is just that: a myth. The sheep on St. Kilda do not suffer from it because the flies that cause it don't seem to exist there. They do, however, in other parts of the UK. We have a species of blowfly that lays its eggs in the fleece of sheep and cause Soay a great deal of trouble. By reputation, the fly is attracted to soiled fleece, but my experience is that is not always the case. They will get under the loose fleece

of the back or sides of the sheep in addition to the expected area of soiled fleece at the sheep's rear. Any blood, even a cut from a bramble, will attract the

flies. Hot humid weather is the greatest time of risk, when within 24 hours a sheep can have thousands of maggots. Within a second 24 hours, they will have eaten into the flesh and the animal will be beyond saving. It is a horrid death!

I bred very few Soay this year due to the financial downturn and was consequently faced with a large flock of non-breeding ewes whose fleece was not shedding, because shedding is related to the reproductive hormones. I do have a "Shepherd's Mate" device with a head restraint. I can restrain the sheep in a standing position to take their fleece off (I also use it



Shepherd's Mate

for foot trimming). This piece of equipment is very useful with the bigger sheep and rams, but many of the Soay ewes are rather small

for the Shepherd's Mate and some panic when placed in it. Most of my ewes have great trust in me, as they are handled frequently from the moment they are born, and this year I thought I would attempt to take their fleece off without putting them into the head restraint. I had forty-three ewes to check in one group so it was going to be a challenge.

About 15 ewes were run into the barn at a time. I had one small pen in the corner with my equipment easily accessible. I use "dagging shears" (handheld sheep shears in the US) which are smaller and more suited to a lady's hand and, as I am left-

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Crovect brings maggots to wool's surface

Sheep in the Mist

by Kathie Miller

While Christine struggles with fly-strike in wet Wales, I am dealing with a very different problem—HEAT.

Temperatures here can reach 108°F in July. On days like this, I don't feel guilty about doing what I can to make the sheep comfortable. But what? Those that had not shed their wool had been shorn. They couldn't strip down any further, and fans all over the barnyard just didn't seem practical.

On one of these blistering days I stumbled upon what I

thought could be a solution at the feed store. The fellows on the loading dock had strung misting nozzles across the roofline to keep themselves cool. Pet misting systems had just come on the market and I suspect the store was its own first customer. I was the second. I bought a kit with 40 feet of poly tubing and raced home.

When it was assembled, I strung it on the fence about four feet off the ground with the nozzles facing down. I wasn't sure if my efforts would be appreciated or if this would be just a waste,

but I figured my dogs might like it.

They never got a chance to find out. Each sheep staked out a mister for itself and spent the entire day there. Not only did it keep them cool, it kept the flies away. By nightfall, they were covered in fog. Truth be told, they didn't all love it, but enough did to make it one of my clever ideas. ☺



Aaahhhh...

RESOURCES

Good [diagram](#) of insecticide application for maggot control.

[Info](#) on parasitic diseases in sheep including wool maggots/fly-strike.

Handheld sheep clippers (dagging shears—both right- and left-handed) are available at most feed stores and online at www.farmrite.co.uk and at [Jeffers](#) (US)

[Shepherd's Mate](#) Portable Head Gate (UK)

The Shauls make a two-piece headrest. For information, contact them at (530) 695-8185 or online [Shaul's Manufacturing](#).

Vetrazine and Crovect are available in Agricultural Merchants and online (UK).

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All advice in this newsletter has been used successfully on our farm. It is important to remember that every animal and situation is different. Before you try any of our suggestions, we urge you to consult your veterinarian.

Fleece *continued from page 1*

handed, I have left-handed shears. I also had the wormer and foot trimming shears and antibiotic spray (which you do not have in America) within reach. Some shearing (yearling) ewes had shed most of their wool, more than the older non-breeders who are more likely to hang onto their fleece. The sheep were run into the pen one at a time to be checked, spare fleece taken off, foot trimmed if needed, and wormed.



Fleece bends over from its weight

The sheep with a lot of fleece were approached gently with me chatting to them all the time. I carefully cut a line to separate the fleece along the spine from neck to tail. Without exception, the fleece is tightest along the neck area. I take great care not to clip the skin in any way. Once anything like that happens the trust of the sheep is gone completely. Then I trimmed down one side of the sheep. Once the

top area is separated, the fleece bends over by its own weight and the separation between the old and the new fleece is easily seen. I never pull it away as the skin will be also pulled and very easily clipped. The hind leg area is a very sensitive part so trimming here is very slow and careful again. As I progressed, I could feel each sheep relax as the fleece was removed. They were so glad to get rid of it and the

ones waiting and watching were realising what the procedure was. One side done, the sheep was turned around to face the opposite direction and the second half of the fleece was removed. Some ewes became so relaxed that they laid down, which was not very helpful. Most of the belly fleece comes away easily by hand, but a few had to be trimmed here also.

Once the group had been through the small pen and I

was certain they had no maggots, they were all treated with

Vetrazine (which is pink), a preventative fly repellent which lasts for about eight weeks depending on the weather. When I know there are maggots, or seriously suspect it, I use Crovect (a blue coloured pour-on) which kills the larvae and any emerging eggs. It will also kill other external parasites such as lice, but it is a more dangerous product and must be used with great care on lambs. Both are available at farm stores (in the UK). I sighed with relief when this big group had been through the barn. 🐏

Note: Neither Crovect nor Vetrazine are available in the US and insecticide recommendations (in the form of sprays, foams or dusts) vary from state to state; what is legal in one may not be in another. Check with your veterinarian or extension agent to find out which product is used in your area.



Dagging shears

AUGUST CALENDAR

- ❑ Evaluate hay needs and acquire a source for the coming year.
- ❑ Wean ram lambs at 3 or 3 1/2 months; they can be fertile by 4 months.
- ❑ Begin delivery of lambs. To reduce stress, especially if they are traveling long distances, wean a few weeks before they leave. Give Probios (paste) to sheep as they are loaded to help with digestive stress of travel and new food.
- ❑ Check fecals with the vet and worm sheep and lambs if necessary. Worm a week before they travel to reduce stress.

TIP OF THE MONTH

Disposable fly traps for the barn really do work well.

