

From the
Premier Breeder
of British Registered
Soay Sheep



SOUTHERN OREGON SOAY SHEEP FARMS

Viewpoint

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

Summer Lamb Chores

by Kathie Miller

By July, all of my cute little lambs who, just a few weeks ago, depended on their mothers for food are now increasingly depending on me.

As many of the ewes in my flock age, keeping them fit during lactation becomes more and more of a challenge. A “creep pen”—a clever piece of equipment that allows the lambs to pass through the fence without their mothers being able to follow—has become an essential part of my paddock. The more I can tempt the lambs with hay and concentrates, the less demand they place on their mothers and the faster the ewes begin to recover from lambing.

July also is a busy month as the lambs are now old enough to require “chores”.

They need vaccinations, first worming, permanent scrapie ear tags, and ram lambs need to be castrated. Then, of course, there is the paperwork: registration, scrapie reports and updating my database.

The first chore is vaccinations, which are given at about four weeks of age, when antibodies transferred from the mothers at birth are wearing off. There are two vaccines which are generally used in the US, Covexin-8 and CDT. Every farmer has an opinion about which of the two products is best to use. Based on my research, I choose Covexin-8. Each lamb gets a 2cc injection



APHIS ear tag

subcutaneously at approximately four weeks and a second one 21-28 days later. Abscesses are a very common occurrence with either product, but they seldom cause problems. With second shots, I also give a small dose of worming medicine because of my flock size and physical layout.

By seven or eight weeks, when the second shots are due, the lambs are also large enough for their permanent ear tags and ram lambs are large enough to castrate. (I always try to coordinate castration with second vaccinations so that the lamb will not have to endure an additional tetanus shot.)

Because I participate in the USDA voluntary scrapie program, each lamb receives an APHIS ear tag with my flock number and an individual number to identify each animal permanently. This number can also be used for

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Shaul's creep panel

A slow descent into madness

by Kathie Miller

"KATHIE! He doesn't have any balls!!" It was a odd opening to a phone call.

“Now, hang on a minute, Roy. What do you mean ‘He doesn't have any balls?’” I could feel my face flush with embarrassment. “The ram!” he replied frantically. “He doesn't have any balls!”

This was serious since I had sold Roy a starter flock and his breeding program depended on having a ram. I figured he knew more about the subject than I did, so I didn't question him. “Roy

this is not good. Let me check my records and get back to you.” I was beginning to panic. My records showed “Fletcher” had not been castrated—at least not on paper. Could I have marked the wrong box? If Roy's ram was a wether, whose wether was a ram? I was getting frantic. I checked the vet's record and she listed “Fletch” as a ram too. The vet couldn't be wrong. Could she?

Sheepishly I called my other buyers. “Uh, could you take a peek and confirm that

your rams are rams and get back to me?” All came back with a positive response. I called Roy. “I am at a loss. I will just have to replace him.”

A few months later, I inspected my flock and noticed one of my own ram lambs fit the description of Roy's. I realized he was simply maturing very, very slowly. I called Roy and told him of my discovery. “I know,” he said. “I was too embarrassed to call you back and tell you.” And I thought he knew what he was talking about! 🐏

RESOURCES

Hobby Farms magazine has produced an excellent online [video](#) demonstrating the banding of a lamb. I strongly recommend it.

Ring expanders (about \$7-\$10) and bands are available at most feed stores and on-line at the following: [Pipestone Vet supply](#)

[Premier 1](#)

[Jefferslivestock.com](#) carries **band castrators** (about \$20).

USDA Scrapie Program [fact sheet](#).

Creep panels are available from [Shaul's Manufacturing](#).

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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.

Chores *continued from page 1*

identification when registering with the RBST. There are several USDA scrapie programs and each breeder must determine which one is most suitable. Contact your district [APHIS](#) office to get details and order tags. All animals that leave your farm must have some form of APHIS identification. While they do not have a government scrapie ID program in the UK, they do have individual animal identification regulations. Each animal must have a tag in each ear that identifies it to its place of birth.

Whether you castrate and which animals to neuter should be based on your own management needs and on the conditions of the market. Flocks of wethers are ideal for beginners or for those who want a lovely group of sheep but have no interest in breeding. Most importantly, wethers make good companions for rams. A starter flock of a few ewes and a ram should ALWAYS include a wether or two.



Ring expander and rings

There are three main methods of castration: 1) rubber ring (elastator) where a constrictive rubber band is placed around the neck of the scrotum cutting off the blood supply to the testes which then atrophy and fall off in a few weeks, 2) emasculator in which a Burdizzo castrator is used to crush the spermatic cord bloodlessly, and 3) open or surgical extraction. Which method is the most humane is a hotly debated topic among shepherds, but after investigating all three, I band. In the UK, it is illegal to band (ring) a male lamb after one week of age, and while this is also recommended in the US, it is not the law.

Banding is quick and easy but it is wise to have someone with experience assist you, especially the first time. Be certain that both testicles are below the placement of the band and take great care not to cover the lamb's rudimentary teats. If one testicle is missed, it will be retained



Band castrator

in the body cavity, creating a "short scrotum". These rams produce testosterone but generally are not fertile—all of the hassle, with none of the benefits.

Despite literature to the contrary, it has been my experience that when Soay are banded between the ages of six and eight weeks, the lambs suffer a little discomfort—though some seemingly none at all—but for only minutes. Each lamb is different so you should determine which animals are ready on an individual basis. Published studies on this subject claiming that pain is severe and prolonged are based on large commercial breeds where mature rams can weigh between 250 and 350 pounds, nearly four times the size of our sheep. I suspect that a six- or seven-week-old Soay lamb is about the size of a one-week-old Suffolk.

It is always such a relief when castrating and ear tagging are done. And now, it's on to the paperwork. 🐏

JULY CALENDAR

- Administer second vaccinations.
- Castrate ram lambs as they come of age.
- Worm lambs with second shots.
- Birth Notify (or register) British lambs with RBST. They must be notified the year of their birth (for free) and can be registered later.
- Watch for fly-strike if you are in prone areas. Treat as necessary.
- Remove remaining fleece for comfort in heat and to reduce risk of fly-strike.

TIP OF THE MONTH

Old castration rings can dry out and fail. Use a fresh one every time.