

## THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

## DIY Sheep Care, Part 1

by Kathie Miller

From the  
Premier Breeder  
of British Registered  
Soay Sheep



SOUTHERN OREGON SOAY SHEEP FARMS

## Viewpoint

**When Aphrodite isn't** the first in line for dinner, pushing everyone else out of the way, I know something is up.

When she suddenly wasn't interested in food, I knew I had a problem. I have learned what to watch for in old-timers from my vet (who raises sheep herself), who has taken the time to teach me. I have also learned that having a vet is something I shouldn't take for granted.

Veterinarians who treat large animals are becoming an endangered species. Fewer are moving to rural areas to care for farm and ranch stock, and finding such a vet is increasingly difficult. It should be one of the first things you do once you have decided to keep sheep and it should be done before you need their services. Local fairs and livestock shows are good places to meet breeders who can advise you about the veterinarians in your area. When you do find one, make an initial appointment for your

dog or cat, introduce yourself, and discuss farm call policies. Then, if you have a farm emergency, you will be an established client and more likely to get service.

Because of the vet shortage, shepherds increasingly have to depend on their own rudimentary knowledge of vet procedures to deal with a lot of things. If you can find a breeder (either local, over the phone or via email) who can mentor you in the basics of care, you are way ahead of the game.

Knowing your own animals, their behavior and how they interact with one another, is probably the most important guide for knowing what is going on with your sheep. Spend time in the barn at feeding time and observe. Learn their mannerisms. Soay have very individual personalities and you will quickly learn what is normal and what is not for each one.

If something just doesn't seem right, call your mentor or your vet. As you gain experience, you will learn to recognize particular problems, but be careful about doing your own diagnoses, as many symptoms can mean many different things. Always consult your vet if



Lambs packed tightly, awaiting their shots

there is any question at all.

Whether vets are scarce in your area or you simply want to conserve on farm calls, it's useful to learn a few basic procedures, such as giving vaccinations, taking a temperature, recognizing common ailments, or treating minor injuries. Annual

*See "DIY" page 2*

## The Miracle of St. Ana

by Kathie Miller

St. Ana was my original pick when I went to Canada in the summer of 1998.

She arrived at my farm from Montreal the following October, the first British Soay in the USA. When she was about seven she sustained an injury above her eye. I treated her with antibiotics and the wound healed. However, her eyelid shrank and tightened. Unable to close, the eye began to dry out.

At the vet's suggestion I tried a number of things to soften the skin, hoping the lid would relax and stretch. Nothing worked and the only alternative was to permanently sew the lid shut. So into the hospital St. Ana went.

My first bit of luck was finding a veterinarian who would take on such a project, but I still didn't realize just how lucky I was in finding this one.

During the surgery, St.

Ana expired on the table. The vet was heartsick, but determined. Somehow, she managed to resuscitate "Tana" bringing her back to life; an event I still look back on with awe.

St. Ana went on to live another seven years with her eye sewn shut. She had five more beautiful lambs before she died at 14; a tough, very special little lady who wouldn't have made it past seven were it not for a wonderful veterinarian. 🐏

## RESOURCES

[ValleyVet.com](http://ValleyVet.com) for sharps containers.

[Jeffers Livestock](http://Jeffers Livestock) for syringes with 20ga x 3/4 needles.

### Some useful books:

*Veterinary guide for Animal Owners.* C.E. Spalding, DVM, Jackie Clay ISBN 0875964044 about \$13.00/£3.26.

*The Veterinary Book for Sheep Farmers,* Henderson, David. ISBN 1-903366-30-5 (about \$39/£17.47; used prices vary).

*Raising Sheep the Modern Way,* 4th edition, Paula Simons. ISBN-13: 978-1603424592 about \$12.00. 4th ed. not yet available in the UK.

You can buy books on [Amazon.co.uk](http://Amazon.co.uk) from the US where both UK and US booksellers are listed. Buy from a seller in the country where you are and you can avoid overseas postage. Some sellers will also charge you in \$ instead of £ which saves you credit card conversion charges.

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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.

## DIY *continued from page 1*

shots (jabs) and routine fecal exams (a simple procedure by the vet) are the core of many shepherd's maintenance programs, mine included, and vaccinations are one thing that your vet you can teach you to do yourself.

I vaccinate my rams in winter and the ewes approximately one month before they lamb, but this schedule is simply a matter of my convenience. The only important thing is that vaccinations are done once every twelve months. Which product to use, if any, is probably the most hotly-contested topic in all of sheepdom. The two commonly available in the US are CDT (Clostridium Perfringens Types C & D-Tetanus Toxoid) and Covexin-8 (an 8-way clostridial which confers immunity for five additional clostridial diseases).\*



Set-up for shots

The first year, two doses are required (at a 21-28 day interval) and after that an annual booster will be necessary. These shots are given subcutaneously (sub Q) just under the skin by gently pulling

it away from the body forming a tent, usually in the neck above the shoulder, and inserting the needle into the tent. Twenty gage x 3/4" needles are recommended for this purpose. To avoid the transmission of pathogens from one animal to another I use a new syringe and needle for each animal. For Soay sheep, which are small, administer a 2cc dose. Be careful to dispose of the needles safely. Sharps containers are available from several online

suppliers. Abscesses often occur, so keep an eye on the animals for several days after giving injections. These will normally resorb and seldom need treatment. You can mark the sheep's foreheads with an All-Weather Paintstick Livestock Marker to keep track of who has been treated and who has not. Finally, record the date and make notes of any things that should be watched.

The first day you come in from giving your own shots or successfully handling a problem yourself without calling the vet, is a very satisfying day indeed. And Aphrodite's problem? Her teeth. 🐏



Aphrodite's tooth extraction

\* The most commonly used vaccine in the UK is Heptavac-P Plus (which provides effective pasteurella and clostridial protection).

## MARCH CALENDAR

- ❑ Get ready for lambing. Re-stock supplies: nipples, bottles, ear tags, colostrums (in case of an unexpected bummer lamb), vitamins A & D (Bose if you are low in selenium).
- ❑ Shop for a source of lamb milk replacer. Only get it if you need it.
- ❑ Prepare birthing records.

## TIP OF THE MONTH

Crowd sheep tightly in a small pen when worming or giving shots. They panic less when they can't move and are easier to handle.