

From the  
Premier Breeder  
of British Registered  
Soay Sheep



SOUTHERN OREGON SOAY SHEEP FARMS

# Viewpoint

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

## Soay Lambing 101

by Kathie Miller

**The famous story of an English Soay keeper bragging that the only piece of equipment she needed for lambing was a pair of binoculars isn't too much of an exaggeration.**

In a decade of breeding British Soay, only two of our ewes have required assistance with birth. One, Aphrodite, was just too old and fat to expel the lamb herself. Soay are easy lambers, excellent mothers and community animals; the older ewes seem to share their knowledge with the younger. But sometimes there are complications, and having a mentor you can phone in the middle of the night can be comforting and save the life of a lamb.

Gestation for Soay sheep is 142 to 152 days, with 148-150 the average, so you can calculate an approximate

date for lambing to begin and be prepared.

A normal delivery takes about five hours from start to finish, but much of that may go unnoticed. The ewe will start to seem uneasy—get up and down, switch her tail, possibly paw the ground, rub against things—and you will notice her begin to strain.



Applying a mini-tag

The actual delivery of a single lamb should take less than an hour after the water has broken. However, multiple births or first time mothers may take longer. The lamb is generally expelled forefeet first followed by the head. Once they appear, final delivery happens quickly. It is very unusual to have birth-



lesha and Mom

ing problems, but it is useful to familiarize yourself with the lambing process so you can recognize a problem if you have it. Books such as *A Manual*

*of Lambing Techniques* (ISBN 1-86126-574-3) or websites like [Sheep@Purdue University](mailto:Sheep@PurdueUniversity) have excellent descriptions of malpresentations. If a situation arises that you or your mentor can't handle, call your vet immediately. Time can be critical here.

The afterbirth is passed within a couple of hours after parturition. If it does not, do NOT pull on it. If it does not pass within 24 hours you will probably need to intercede with hormone injections (call your vet). If the placenta is dragging in the dirt, do not cut it. Tie it up in a bow so that it is hanging well off the ground but has its full weight pulling it

See "Lambing" page 2

## Mini and Mighty

by Kathie Miller

**About six years ago a small package arrived from my friend Christine in the UK.**

"I have used these for nearly twenty years" the accompanying note read. They were tiny Dalton ear tags made by the same company as tags early Soay researchers used on St. Kilda in the 1960s. We use "mini-tags" a two-piece tag about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch long. I wasn't sure I could bolster the courage to try them on my babies, so I

wasted about a dozen practicing on a sheet of paper. I quickly overcame my fear and they became the most important tool in my lambing kit; their application is the first thing I do when I find a newborn.

While Christine originally intended them as baby ID, most have remained in place for as long as 16 years. They will stay in when others get pulled out and provide backup identification when other tags have been lost.

Dalton has gone to a laser

printing technique which makes numbers on small tags barely visible. They will use their older "hot foil" method (black ink) and will number both top and bottom tags if you request it. There is an additional charge, but it is money well spent. Tags in different colors can be useful. You can use a different one each year, as they do on St. Kilda, distinguish British from American Soay in a flock, or segregate your planned meat animals from breeding stock, etc. 🐑

## MY LAMBING KIT

A utility tote tray  
 Digital scale and lamb sling (from [Premier 1](#))  
 ½" x 20 ga. Needles  
 1cc syringes  
 Ear tagger and ear tags  
 Bottle A & D  
 Bottle BoSe  
 Small scissors  
 7% Iodine  
 Pencil  
 Birthing record  
 Paper towels  
 Rubber gloves  
 Reading glasses

[Dalton mini-tags](#) for lambs. Presently, mini-tags (research tags used for rabbits) are not in their online catalog. You will need to phone or [e-mail](#) to request them as well as "hot foil" printing and printing on both sides. Phone (from the States) 011 44 1491 419 000 Phone (in the UK) Lo-call 0800 838 882

Remember, prices are in £. To convert to \$ visit [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) (credit cards charge conversion fees).

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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.

## Lambing *continued from page 1*

down. This may produce enough pressure to get it to release without further assistance. As a precaution in this situation, I start the ewe on a course of penicillin. I have only had this happen with very young ewes and to no ill effect to their later lambing career. It has been suggested that inadequate selenium may be one cause.

Once the lamb is dry (letting the ewe clean off the sac is critical to their bonding) it is my turn. I have a special pair of "lambing jeans" that are so stained nothing can ruin them further. When I catch the lamb I sit down on the ground close to the ewe and let her sniff me and her baby so that she can see exactly what I am doing. Being quiet, patient and gentle are important here. If she is comfortable the lamb will be less stressed. Some mothers are naturally very mellow while others border on being neurotic.

My first step is to identify

the lamb using a Dalton mini ear tag, right ear for females, left for males. (Although I buck tradition, here—my husband was left handed and I am right so this makes an easy way for me to remember which is which.) If the umbilical cord stump is so long that it touches the ground, I snip it to one or two inches and then dip it up to the belly in a vial of 7% iodine to reduce the possibility of infection. I then weigh the lamb, record its



Foula, LGD extraordinaire



Introductions

details and give two shots: 0.25cc of Vitamin A & D and a 0.25cc of BoSe (because of my selenium problems and at the recommendation of my vet). I use a 1cc syringe and ½" x 20ga needle for this; with the shorter needle I am less apt to push the needle in too far.

Then the baby goes back to mom.

It is not uncommon for a first time mother to reject her lamb. The presence of older ewes can be helpful, but

when this happens, lock the two in a very small pen ["jug"] so that the ewe cannot get away from the baby. If she absolutely refuses to let the lamb suckle or tries to harm it, you will be forced to step in. It is critical the lamb get colostrum within a few hours of birth. If all attempts fail you will have to start it on a bottle (colostrum first, milk replacer later).

Because livestock-guarding dogs (LGD) live with my sheep I do not worry about predators. But where LGDs are not used, lambs will need to be protected from foxes, badgers (in the UK) or neighbors' dogs by locking them in a stable for a few weeks with their mothers.

Aphrodite has had her last lamb and is retired now. I suspect she will be a bit wistful when the others lambs start to arrive, but probably she will mostly be relieved. She had a lot of babies in her career. 🐶

## MAY CALENDAR

- ❑ Process lambs as they are born; record birth details.
- ❑ Have "jug" (small pen) ready in case you need it.
- ❑ Watch lambs for coccidiosis.
- ❑ Watch ewes for sudden weight loss during lactation, especially at about three weeks post partum. Supplement if necessary.
- ❑ Enjoy.

## TIP OF THE MONTH

Lambs LOVE a mound, rocks or logs to climb and play on.

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