

From the
Premier Breeder
of British Registered
Soay Sheep



SOUTHERN OREGON SOAY SHEEP FARMS

Viewpoint

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

Bottle Feeding Soay Lambs

by Kathie Miller

Early intervention can be essential to avoid certain developmental problems.

There are many reasons for “bottle babies” or “bummers”. The most obvious is orphanhood, but it is not uncommon for a ewe to reject a twin or for a young ewe to reject her first lamb. Sometimes a ewe simply cannot produce enough milk to feed multiples. And sometimes the farmer just wants an especially tame animal, which bottle-fed lambs become.*

During the final few days of pregnancy, colostrum (containing high levels of nutrients and antibodies important to the lamb’s health) begins to accumulate in the ewe’s udder. The most important thing a lamb will do in its entire life is get an adequate amount of this “first milk” within its first 24

hours. After that, the antibodies can no longer cross the intestinal wall to enter directly into the blood stream. Colostrum also contains nutrients that fuel heat production and prevent hy-



or frozen (thawed in a warm water bath, not microwave) from another ewe (or goat) or a powdered form which is available through catalogs. Every effort should be made to provide 10 percent of the lamb’s body weight in colostrum within the first 24 hours, and the sooner it is started after parturition the better. After 24 hours the window has closed and it will need to be switched to a lamb milk replacer.

pothermia which, along with starvation, accounts for most newborn deaths.

If the orphan has not received colostrum from its mother it will need it from an outside source, ideally fresh

This season I had the good fortune to have two sets of twins. One ewe was very small and simply could not supply enough milk to support both lambs, so I began

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My First Bottle Baby

by Kathie Miller

A tiny, screaming voice called me to the barn. A newborn had fallen into a hole behind the hay manger and she wanted the world to know she was there.

Maya was dry now but had not been cleaned by her mother—important to the bonding of a ewe and her lamb—and so was rejected, a common occurrence among sheep. Maya became my first bottle baby. I had no idea what to do and frantically called my friend Val for help: “Get some

colostrum down it and feed it every two hours.”

About four days later, I called Val back and said “It’s either me or this lamb. Two-hour feedings, 24 hours a day for four days! One of us is not going to survive.”

“Well not at night, you silly” she said. “Every two hours during the day. It needs to sleep at night!” Such was my introduction to bummer lambs.



Maya survived my initial fumbling care and grew up to be a very special pet, our farm ambassador. She and I learned together and today I am a better—and less sleep deprived—shepherd because of our shared experience. 🐏

OUR LAMB FORMULA

2 ½ C warm water
1 ¼ C powdered *Land O Lakes Ultra Fresh Lamb Milk Replacer*

Whisk until thoroughly mixed. Pour ¾ cup into bottle, then add 1/8 tsp. *Deliver with Dialine*

Screw on teat, shake well. (Pritchard Teats screw on to any water or soda bottle). Refrigerate between servings and reheat as needed in warm water bath. Serve at body temperature

RESOURCES & SUPPLIES

► Online sources of lambing supplies:

www.jefferslivestock.com
www.pipevet.com

► Timetable for bottle feeding a Soay lamb at windriversoaysheep.com/wind_river_bottle_baby.html.

► *A Manual of Lambing Techniques*, Agnes C. Winter & Cicely W. Hill ISBN 1 86126 574 3

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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.

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to feed the smaller female as the larger ram was getting all he needed. I did not want the ewe lamb to reject her mother for my formula, so I waited until I had seen her nurse to offer her the bottle. She was fed every two hours for the first few days. I used about ¼ cup of formula per feeding which was gradually increased as the lamb grew. As a supplement to its mother's milk this seemed adequate, but as the sole source of calories more would be required. I have found that portions and timetables are best dictated by each lamb itself, according to its size and growth rate.

In the wild, Soay lambs will suckle as many as 45 times their day of birth but by the end of their first week that drops to 13. Trying to duplicate nature, I feed more often with smaller amounts the first few days, and then gradually begin to cut back. After the first week, I slowly reduce the feedings from

every two hours to three times a day. Eventually that will drop to none, according to the lamb's development, but it will not be weaned completely for two and a half to three months. While lambs may pick at hay after the first couple of days, their digestive systems are not adequately developed to completely process forage until they are about six weeks old. Therefore, it is critical that they not be weaned too early.



Arched back

Too little milk can cause a distinctive arch in the back, shivering from the cold and excessive crying. Such a lamb may need to be supplemented with a bottle. Digestive disorders are the



Normal back

babies is diarrhea, which has a number of causes, but is often due to too much or too rich a formula given in too short a time. When I begin to see scours I reduce the amount of each feeding. I discovered that by mixing the milk replacer with a little more water than suggested on the label (2 ½ cups instead of 2) and by adding a small amount of *Deliver with Dialine* (a granular supplement for young calves), about 1/8 tsp to ¾ cup formula) I was able to control the problem.

Coccidiosis can also be trouble for young bottle fed lambs. If the stool is very runny and green in color, a fecal count (generally taken by the vet) can diagnose the problem. It is easily treated, but can be serious if it is left unattended. 🐾

*A note of caution: ram lambs raised on a bottle often become very tame and as a result can become a threat as an adult. These lambs should be castrated.

MAY CALENDAR

- ❑ If lambs are pulling down ewe's weight, supplement ewe. If weight loss is extreme, wean lambs to bottle.
- ❑ Give lambs first vaccination (Covexin-8 or CDT) at 4 to 5 weeks. Second shot will follow 21 to 28 days later.
- ❑ Ensure water troughs are safe for lambs. Use short, steep tubs and put cinder blocks in them to provide footing if a lamb does fall in. Lambs *can* get into tall troughs and drown.

TIP OF THE MONTH

Trim sheep hooves in winter or spring when the ground is wet and hooves are soft.