



SOUTHERN OREGON
SOAY SHEEP FARMS
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Viewpoint

FROM THE PREMIER BREEDER OF BRITISH REGISTERED SOAY SHEEP

Soay artificial insemination project by Kathie Miller

“Should we tell her?” Martin asked his wife as the three of us stood in a pen at The Black Sheep Gathering in 2010.

Martin had a mischievous grin on his face. “Tell me *what?*” I pleaded. He paused for a long time, dragging out my agony. Finally, he blurted out “Your semen was delivered to our farm yesterday!”

Martin Dally has been in the artificial insemination business for a long time, and has supported Christine’s and my effort to get semen from Wales to Oregon since we first started talking about it in 2001. Martin is our import broker, shipping the tank from Innovis (UK collection center) and weaving it through the permits, regulations, and all the red tape that doing anything with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) entails. Getting

semen from the UK the first time had been a dream come true, but getting it a second time was more than we could have imagined. I could not wait to call Christine in Wales.

Because of previous problems with scheduling, Christine—with the aid of Claire Barber of the RBST—began lobbying Innovis in the spring of 2009 to schedule her rams for that autumn, the

normal breeding season for Soay, not February as before. She got an appointment for mid-November.

A project like this is not for the faint of heart or the impatient. There are many complications and many potential road-

blocks along the way. There had been several attempts to collect the semen. Twice they had failed because the rams went to the center too late in the breeding season and the semen was no longer viable enough to survive freezing and thawing. Once, a ram refused to “jump”, which meant it was another year before we could try again. Then there is

the paperwork and the things you could never plan for. One year all exports were halted because of a foot and mouth disease outbreak, and in the summer of 2007 blue tongue erupted just three weeks after our first tank had made it safely here. Had it shipped a month later, it would have been tied up in the UK indefinitely.

One of the complicating

factors is that semen cannot be imported into the USA unless it has been obtained from a country that has a national scrapie program (which the UK does).

Further, it must be collected following very strict guidelines, one of which is that the rams must be housed and collected from in a barn that conforms to USDA requirements. In 2007, rams “Norris” and “Mustard” had gone for RBST collection and then were moved to the specially prepared export barn for us. This time it was the other way

around: Martin had his own rams in and export preparations had already begun when “Ash” and “Quentin” arrived.

The flock that I had started with had originated with Ann Knowles of West Sussex, England, in January 1990. (We later imported it to the US.) At that time, Ann had already



Semen collection at Innovis



Semen tank



Gaerllwyd Quentin

April Calendar

- ❑ Take a fecal sample for analysis a month before lambing, and worm accordingly. Do NOT use Valbazen to worm pregnant ewes.
- ❑ Clean up the barn and put down fresh hay for ewes.
- ❑ Vaccinate ewes a month before lambing.
- ❑ Check barnyard for hazards: water buckets hung too low, spots where lambs can crawl under fences and get caught or separated from their mothers.

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Resources

Planning ahead for the next lambing season is important, especially for larger flocks.

It is helpful to keep a record of the length of the gestation periods for your ewes.

Because I knew the moment of conception, I could calculate the exact length of gestation for each of the ewes.

The following table shows the gestation periods for the 32 AI lambs born on my farm:

- 147 days — 7
- 148 days — 9
- 149 days — 6
- 150 days — 4
- 151 days — 6

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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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Insemination *continued from page one*

exported six RBST registered Soay, two rams and four ewes, to Phoenix Life Sciences in Montreal, Canada.

Because of a BSE crisis that had gripped the UK during the spring of 1990, a planned second shipment had had to be cancelled. All exports of ruminants were now prohibited, a ban which, to my knowledge, is still in effect.



Sandle Ash

Therefore, there was no way to expand the Phoenix flock beyond the six original sheep. Semen was the only option. While there had been talk of attempting that in the early 1990s, it wasn't until our first round in 2007 that it became a reality.

The six sheep that Ann had sent were an impressive representation of the sheep as they are found on St. Kilda, but all were mouflon pattern and none were self-colored (solid black, brown or tan with no pattern). A polled ewe had been part of the original flock,



Prepping ewe for insemination

her into the US. While not a common trait on the mainland of the UK—and as of yet not seen here—polling is an important characteristic on St. Kilda. These were genetics that many of Christine's rams carried and, for this second round, she carefully selected two more boys for who were most likely to add polling and self-coloring to my flock in the US. As a bonus, I would also have lambs sired by a member of the oldest Soay flock in the Combined Flock Book. Christine and I carefully evaluated all my ewes' pedigrees for the best candidates to produce what I wanted.

This was my third time doing AI (once frozen, the semen lasts forever) and, as I had done the previous two times, I had also picked ewes that ranged in age between two- and five-years and that had lambed naturally at least once before. As it turned out, lambing rates between the older and younger ewes was about the same.

Martin also used two straws of semen (two doses)

but the farmer in Canada had bred her very little, and the one polled lamb born there died before we could bring

with half of the ewes and one with the other half, but this didn't seem to make a difference either, which greatly surprised both of us. The final count of 15 lambs (12 ewes and three rams) was an almost even split between "Ash" and "Quentin". Of the 13 we had inseminated, ten had taken. Thankfully, there were no triplets as there had been my first time around.

It will be a while before we know if any of the ewes are polled, but it does look like one lamb may be self-colored.

In July 2010, Christine and I visited the Knowles, and Ann in particular was thrilled with our news of the latest semen arrival. It was a topic that interested her greatly and she had a lot of questions. I think we all felt that we had completed the mission she had begun 20 years earlier.

As it turns out, Soay sheep do quite well with artificial insemination and, after this procedure, I now have 32 with Welsh fathers running around my pastures.

For the complete story on the AI project, visit <http://www.soayfarms.com/soaysheep-artificial-insemination.html>.



Ash's daughter, 2011



Martin inseminating ewe, 2008

Tip of the Month

Get your camera ready. It's picture month.