



SOUTHERN OREGON
SOAY SHEEP FARMS
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Viewpoint

FROM THE PREMIER BREEDER OF BRITISH REGISTERED SOAY SHEEP

Soay futures

by Shelley Bouyea

Presently, there are about 375 registered British Soay ewes living in North America, not enough to secure the future of the breed here yet. Finding new shepherds who are committed to their conservation and the expansion of their numbers is critical and has always been the biggest challenge of this project. It has long been my view that exposing young people to heritage breeds, with the hope it will spark their interest, is important to the future of any program such as ours. You can imagine my joy when Shelley sent me the following story about what she is doing with her sheep and her students.



Tracking the sheep's cross country journey

Lesson of the Day

As a proud soon-to-be Soay shepherdess and a science teacher at a vocational school for high school students in New York, I just had to include my Animal Science/Vet Asst. students in the excitement and introduce them to these amazing primitive creatures.

The Animal Science/Veterinary Assistant program where I teach is a hands on learning system. The students spend a portion of their time

in theory, where they learn the skills they need for a career in Animal Science. It isn't just the skills, though. They are taught technical reading and writing,

which includes lab reports, resumés, and professional writing along with how to read manuals, pharmaceutical inserts, and scientific journals. Math skills aren't left out either. Everything from ration calculations, dosing, and dilutions is taught and practiced. I come into the picture with the science lessons. We do dissections, bacteriology, and a myriad of other projects.

The Soay Lesson started with a history lesson on the domestication of all livestock, focusing on sheep and the ancestral breeds of all domes-

tic sheep. This was followed by a lesson on the characteristics of primitive breeds as well as the primitive breeds still in existence today, with a focus on the Soay. As the arrival date for my starter flock loomed ever closer, I showed a copy of the DVD, "Soay - Sheep on the Island at the Edge of the World". Well, that did it. Most of the students and both of the program instructors were hooked and couldn't wait to get the chance to see the Soay in person.

A field trip to my farm was scheduled, and nearly every day of the Soay's 12-day journey from Oregon I was quizzed on location and potential arrival date. Then it happened: They arrived!

It was a Monday, so I skipped school. On Tuesday, I entered the classroom with photos in hand and the date was set for the field trip. Wow, what a day



Arrival day

we had! I shamelessly copied information from the basic care section on the www.soayfarms.com website to create guided notes for the students to follow during the lecture in the barn, as well as

January Calendar

- ❑ If you haven't done so already, merge rams back into bachelor flock. Watch for excessive fighting. Hormone levels will begin to drop by February, and eating will become more interesting than fighting.
- ❑ Remove visual barriers from fences.
- ❑ Merge breeding ewes together, but keep separate from non-breeder flock until after lambing.
- ❑ Check feet. Trim as necessary while hooves are soft.
- ❑ Continue watching for coughing and runny noses. Treat as necessary.

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Resources

Since the study Shelley cited, there have been cases of rabies in Oregon, including one in Merlin in November 2010. A goat also died not far from here earlier in the year. Vaccine is available for sheep and is increasingly recommended by veterinarians in known rabies areas. The vaccine must be administered by a veterinarian. Fees vary from state to state. The fee I was quoted was \$15 per animal. In New York, the state has set the fee at \$20 an animal. With large flocks, this becomes prohibitive for most. An alternative is a dual fencing system with livestock dogs patrolling a corridor between the sheep pasture and the property line, which discourages foxes and raccoons from entering the fields, thus reducing exposure.

For more information, visit:

Vaccinations for sheep and Goats—<http://www.sheepandgoat.com/articles/flockvaccinations.html>

Rabies Prevention in Livestock—<http://ohioline.osu.edu/vme-fact/0001.html>

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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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information about how the sheep arrived with the itinerary from Ron Keener's yahoo group www.travelwithron.com. I also used the RBST site, www.rbst.org.uk, for the other primitive breed information. There were maps of the US with push pins showing all the stops from Merlin to my place, as well as a world map with push pins marking the historical locations of the other primitive sheep. I had posters about fiber grading and how the fleece was used by the



Field trip

St. Kildans. I also displayed photos of work done by Margaret B. Russell of Antrim Handweaving in Byfield, Massachusetts along with an actual piece of her weaving. I was, however, unable to inform the students how much she charged for the shawls and bookmarks. It didn't occur to me that they would be *that* interested. Anyhow, the highlight of the trip, besides the lambs, was Dr. McCormick's participation.

Dr. McCormick is a local vet who has agreed to care for my flock. She has practiced medicine for over 25 years. She has treated everything from an elephant to a guinea pig, but has a soft spot for horses, sheep, and kittens. The latter she rescues, and always has plenty available for adoption.



New arrivals were calm

She spent about an hour checking out the paperwork, explaining the health certificate and nutritional needs, especially in areas with a selenium deficiency. She added that along with the vaccinations that the lambs had already received, we were adding rabies to the mix.

We have a high infection rate in our area of Northern New York and Vermont. In 2005, there were no documented cases of rabies in Oregon, but in 2007 there were enough cases in my area that the USDA dropped medicated bait for raccoons to help lower the number of cases in our part

of New York. This was a great bit of information for the students. As for the Soay, she just loved the little guys. Dr. McCormick's interest extends well past that of veterinarian. She is an artisan weaver, hand spinner, and knitter who can't wait



Hands-on education

to get her hands on the fleece, and she answered some of the textile questions about fiber diameters, raw hank, etc.

It was a very busy day. The students and instructors enjoyed it. I enjoyed spreading the word about primitive breeds and teaching out of my barn. I need to find a way to do that more often! The Soay even seemed un-phased by the attention. The ewes stayed away from the gates, but weren't jittery or acting skittish. The boys really hammed it up. The ram rubbed his horns on the gate



Getting acquainted

and kept chomping away as if this was a normal day. "Jordan" the wether, *baa'd* and *baa'd*. It seemed every time I finished a point he would second it with *baa*. It was really amusing.

All photos courtesy of Shelley Bouyea.

Tip of the Month

Research sheep supply catalogs online.