

From the
Premier Breeder
of British Registered
Soay Sheep



SOUTHERN OREGON SOAY SHEEP FARMS

Viewpoint

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

Breeding the Older Ewe

by Kathie Miller

A special nutrition program preserved a cherished legacy.

Emerald was my favorite. I had imported her from Canada—her parents had been imported from England—and at 13 she was the last remaining member of the first generation of British Soay born in North America.

Because Emerald was so important to my breeding program and she'd had only a few lambs, I decided I would give it one more try before I retired her. Maybe she would produce another ewe, her legacy. Most breeds of sheep begin to lose productivity by age eight, but I knew of Soay ewes in the United

Kingdom who had lambed at 14 and 15. I also knew that if I was going to ask this of Emmie, I was going to have to give her very special care.

When she was 12 she started to have a problem keeping her weight, but I didn't think much of it. She had plenty to eat, she



Emerald at 13

was alert, and she was healthy. But when she

produced a premature lamb that did not survive even one day, I knew I had missed something. I had not really appreciated how having and nursing a lamb had been a drain on her old body, how it had aged her.

Despite Emerald's underweight, the rest of the flock (I was often accused of over-feeding) was in good condition, so I knew that in general the sheep were getting sound nutrition. I began right away in the spring after she lost her lamb to boost her food intake by putting her on my OAP (Old Age Pensioners) ration, a trick I had learned from a friend in Wales. This consisted of

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A Mother's Need

by Kathie Miller

Emerald's lamb only lived for a day or so, and when she died I learned a profound, unexpected lesson.

I had taken the dead lamb away to bury it, but was called back to the barn by Emerald's crying. She was inconsolable.

Walking away, I realized she didn't know what had happened to her baby. "I wonder if she needs to know," I thought, which seemed a little silly at the time. But I was willing to give anything a try.

In the hope of easing Emmie's sorrow, I returned to the barn with the small box in which I had placed the lamb and showed her the little body. She sniffed it all over and seemed comforted, and when I carried away the box, she followed.

I took Emerald with me to bury the lamb under an old oak tree in her favorite part of the pasture. I set the box down as I dug the hole, and she continued to sniff as though she understood. She watched intently as I gently laid the box in the

bottom of the hole and covered it with earth. Then she looked up at me as if to say "It's okay now". We took a little walk and then went back down to the barn to join the rest of the flock.

Emmie never cried again. She seemed perfectly satisfied that she knew where her baby was. I have never again dismissed the impact of the loss of a lamb on a ewe. I haven't lost very many lambs since then, but now I always allow the mother time to grieve for her baby. 🐏

OLD AGE PENSIONERS (OAP) REGIMEN

Basic Formula

Adjust to your own situation. Cut ewe and lamb portion for males.

Soak overnight:

1 cup sugar beet pellets in
2 cups of water

This makes about 4 cups
of mash.

Add:

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup rolled barley
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup ewe and lamb ration

This equals one feeding for
one sheep.

Schedule

Give twice a day to old,
underweight sheep.

For pregnant ewes,
increase the amount given
(based on the individual
ewe's needs) beginning six
weeks before the expected
lambing date.

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consult your veterinarian.

The Older Ewe *continued from page 1*

moistened beet pulp mixed with rolled barley and a commercial ewe and lamb ration for extra vitamins and minerals. Emmie ate this twice a day in addition to her hay. (Of course, every other ewe wanted her treats and each feeding became a game of musical buckets. I finally taught her to sneak out the gate behind me and run into a special pen where she could eat in peace. This had its good points as well as bad—she was ever after sneaking out gates, and I often found her eating the flowers in my garden.)

Over the course of the following six months Emerald gained weight. She was bred about late November, the normal breeding season for Soay, and was kept on her OAP regimen.

During the last six weeks of gestation, the fetus is growing at its fastest pace. At that time, I increased Emmie's daily intake of ration to ensure that she was getting enough calories to support herself and her growing lamb, and



Emerald and Germaine

to produce sufficient milk and colostrum, critical to a newborn's survival.

To my delight and exactly on schedule, Emerald produced a robust ewe

lamb that I named Germaine. And did she have milk! So much that we had to milk her (something very uncommon for Soay).

As Emmie weaned Germaine, I reduced her supplement, in part to get her milk to dry up, but continued it for the rest of her life. Had Emerald not been so important to my conservation program, I never would have asked such a late-in-life pregnancy from her.

After Germaine's birth Emmie was retired from breeding. Now her beautiful daughter is producing lambs herself. As a vital component in Soay preservation, Germaine is making history—and is a fitting legacy to her mother. 🐏

April Calendar

- Discard last year's left over packet of castrator bands (rings); replace with new ones.
- Check expiration dates for vaccines, Bo-Se, Vitamin A & D, etc. Replace those that are out of date.
- Vaccinate ewes one month before lambing and worm if they are due. Make sure wormer is safe for use during pregnancy.
- Restock lambing supplies, milk replacer, colostrum replacer, rubber nipples.
- Check for barnyard hazards: water buckets hung too low, old rolls of fence, spots where lambs can crawl under and get trapped.

TIP OF THE MONTH

With new lambs arriving, be certain all bungee cords, chains and ropes with clips are not left dangling in reach of the sheep. Soay of any age like to fidget with things that dangle: but their mouths can get caught and they'll be unable to free themselves.