

Southdown News

Newsletter of The Southdown Sheep Society

Issue 27

Spring 2019

New trophies to celebrate the achievements of our younger Southdown members

Two new trophies will be presented at this year's AGM which celebrate the successes and achievements of our younger members, breeders and exhibitors.

The Chichester branch of NFU has kindly donated some silver Southdown medals. These have been incorporated into two trophies by a local Sussex craftsman and will be presented for the first time in 2019.

Pictured is James Wiseman of NFU Chichester branch, and Stephen Humphrey, representing the Southdown Sheep Society Council.



To find out how Southdown ewes and lambs made a difference to Norfolk school children, turn to page 9



Sparhawk Infant & Nursery School, Norwich, with their Southdown lamb.

2019 Southdown Sheep Society

Annual General Meeting and Field Day

Saturday September 7th
2019

at The Barn,
The Sheep Centre, Malvern,
Worcestershire, WR13 6PH
11.00am – 3.30pm

AGM 2.00 – 3.00pm

An informative and interesting day featuring guest speakers on topical subjects, including Phil Stocker, CEO of National Sheep Association

Signet's new genetic analysis: The National Terminal Sire Evaluation - An Update

The 2019 Southdown Year Book contains an article about Signet's relaunch of their genetic evaluation service for terminal sire breeds. This newsletter article provides some additional information on the evaluation service.

Currently 13 leading Southdown flocks are recording, representing c. 15-20% of the national flock; the performance information on these flocks can provide valuable insights to all members looking to buy rams and breeding stock, especially as commercial performance is not just about winning rosettes.

The improved service is using a new multi-breed evaluation approach, introduces new Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) with major changes to the calculations made for existing traits expressing breeding values on a more commercially focused and weight-adjusted basis.

Rebasing of indexes

One of the biggest changes to the analysis, is that all breeding values are being re-based for the first time since 1990. This means that the new scores will no longer be comparable with previous EBVs. In practice this means that individual scores for some animals may have changed significantly although their relative ranking will have stayed more or less the same. In my own flock seven or eight of my original top ten are still in the top ten. The range of indexes has also changed e.g. the bottom 5% Terminal Sire Index used to be 64 and is now 89, while the top 5% was 318 is now 243.

CT scanning... not yet

A number of breeds are now using CT (computerised

tomography) to help better predict carcase composition (muscling/fatness) and as well as new measures such as eye muscle area, number of vertebrae (they do vary!), spine length and intramuscular fat percentage. Unfortunately the availability of scanning is limited in the UK with scanning services primarily being located in Scotland, and quite expensive £97/lamb at a mobile site although this is reduced to £42 with an AHDB grant. Currently no Southdown has been CT scanned yet... but watch this space.

Weight adjusted traits

Another significant change within the new analysis will be to move all carcase traits from being age adjusted (current method) to weight adjusted. This means the updated EBVs will be a better prediction of carcase composition (muscling/fatness) at a fixed weight. As commercial lambs are selected for slaughter based on a combination of weight and finish, rather than age, this will give a more meaningful information to commercial ram buyers.

New Maternal Index

As well as the Terminal Sire Index which is a composite weighted measure of growth rate, muscle depth and lean weight and fat depth, the breed now has a new Maternal Index. This is a composite of the maternal ability, litter size, early growth rate, carcase size and mature size and especially relevant for breeder looking to improve their "within flock" lambing performance. The Maternal Ability EBV is the one that focuses just on genes for milk production.

Patrick Goldsworthy

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to the Society's new members

Bufton The Trevol	Llandrindod Wells	Powys
Reece Clayton	Rockland St Mary	Norfolk
Master Gruffudd & Miss Non Crimes	Pont Steffan	Ceredigion
Mr Richard E Drake	Haywards Heath	West Sussex
Mrs Marie DuBoulay	Alresford	Hants
Kevin Wynne Jenkins	Mold	Wales
Mark & Ellie Jennings	Selside	Cumbria
Sophie Long	Bishops Frome	Herefordshire
Emma Merricks	Nonington	Dover
Jenni Metcalfe	Brecon	Powys
Melvin Jermy & Paul Rogers	Lenwade	Norfolk
C & N Tester	Barrow Upon Soar	Leics
Vanessa Thatcher	Weeley Heath	Essex
Amber Wood	Burton Latimer	Northants
Harry & Emily Yates	Lichfield	Staffs

Southdown Sheep Society approved sales in 2019

Saturday August 10th

**The Premier Breeders Show
& Sale
at Worcester Market**

Closing date for entries: July 12th
www.mccartneys.co.uk

September 13th – 14th

**Traditional Native Breeds
National Show and Sale
at Melton Mowbray**

closing dates: Sunday 4th August
for paper entries
and **Sunday 11th August**
for online entries

NOTES FROM THE SOUTHDOWN OFFICE

2019 LAMB REGISTRATIONS

More and more members are choosing to register their lambs online using the Pedeweb system. All paid up members should have received details of their password and information held on line. There is a User Guide available to download from the Southdown Sheep Society website, together with some FAQs. To access the on line Flock Book simply follow the link from the Society website. Email the office if you need a reminder of your log-in details.

Lamb registrations

Members should make every effort to register lambs as soon as possible to avoid omission from the next edition of the Flock Book. Please note that all late registrations (ie after the year of birth) remain eligible for registration but at the late fee charge of £20 per registration.

All lamb registrations should be with the office by November 30th, and at the latest, by December 31st. Whilst we try to turn around all registrations promptly, there may be a delay in processing registrations at busy times in the Southdown office.

The Southdown Office is closed for all but emergency enquiries for two weeks over Christmas and New Year. **Please note that registrations cannot be processed until payment has been received and subscription is up to date.**

REGISTRATION CHARGES

on line registration fee per ewe lamb	£4
on line registration fee per ram lamb	£10
paper registration fee per ewe lamb	£5
paper registration fee per ram lamb	£15
late registration fee on line and/or on paper	£20 per animal

Imports and Exports

Members are reminded that the Office must be notified of any intended exports and imports. The rules as published in the current Flock Book state that "an export certificate must be obtained from the Secretary at a cost of £10 per Southdown and the sum of 5p in every pound of the sale price shall be paid within six months of the sale".

This zootechnical (export) certificate for pure-bred breeding sheep, their semen, ova and embryos certificate should accompany the animal (or germinal product) where they are traded or entered into the European Union to allow an entry or registration of those animals in other breeding books or breeding registers.

The Southdown Sheep Society therefore fulfils its obligations as a Defra recognised breed society by issuing the export pedigree certificate to allow entering of pure-breed breeding sheep in flock-books.

Getting it right

Do we have your correct information? Please try and update the office with any changes of address or contact details. If you spot any errors or inaccuracies in the information included for you in this year's publications please let the office know.

Email

If your email address changes, please remember to inform the office, this can be done via Pedeweb.

All members for whom we have an email address receive the Southdown Enewsletter throughout the year. The Enewsletter gives the office a chance to share information with members on a more regular basis in between the paper newsletters in Spring and Autumn. If you would prefer not to receive our eNewsletters then please let the office know.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Many thanks to all those members whose subscriptions are already paid up to date.

Just a reminder that the annual membership subscription is £40.

Standing Order instruction forms are available to download from the website or from the office. Please ensure that when making a BACS payment, or setting up a Standing Order for subscription payment, that you include your name as a reference with the payment. Just occasionally it is impossible to trace the source of a payment!

And finally...if you have not yet updated your Standing Order Instruction, please inform your bank that the annual subscription is £40.

BACS payment details

Account name: Southdown Sheep Society

Sort Code: 60-02-13

Account Number: 51501376

SELL YOUR STOCK ON THE SOCIETY WEBSITE

Members may advertise stock on the Society website at any time. The cost of placing an advert is £10 per advert. All adverts will include the flock name, breeder's contact details including telephone number/s and email, and a brief outline of what is available for sale. Please note that no show results or photographs will be included. Adverts remain on the website for 3 months. Simply email the office with details.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE REGIONS

South West

The South West Regional Group held its annual 'Christmas' lunch at the King's Arms, Tedburn St Mary, on February 10th. It was well attended by members and friends.

Group co-ordinator Caroline Brown says: "We had a fabulous carvery followed by a short meeting where future trips were discussed and a brief summary of accounts was given.

Following on from this meeting on March 5th we reconvened at South Molton for a tour round the BWMB's South West depot. The tour given by Mr Mike Berry, the depot manager, was very informative and made us all aware of the importance of keeping wool

uncontaminated, especially at shearing time, and to keep our sheep in good condition to realise the best prices.

Jessica Cross of Southdown Duvets also made us aware of her plans for the season's wool clip. After the hour-and-a-half visit where members asked many questions, we adjourned to the Poltimore Inn for another lovely lunch and discussed the possibility of a trip to the main Wool Board in Bradford next year to see the processes and the wool auction.

Another date for the South West diary is the NSA Sheep South West event on June 18th where we will be manning the Southdown Sheep Society stand."

West Midlands

Resistance and Refugia

Nineteen members and friends gathered at the Lord Moreton pub near Oswestry for the Autumn meeting of the West Midlands Southdown Group.

The farm vets from the Park Issa Practice spent the morning with the group to help unravel the mysteries of flock health. The presentation covered the lifecycles of the main parasites and signs of parasite infestation along with practical control and reduction strategies.

The key elements of a prevention strategy is knowing your system and the associated risk for example:

Early vs late lambing

Wet vs dry land

Pasture management and ability to rotate and rest pasture.

Biosecurity strategies

With wormer resistance on the increase and a very real threat to future flock health and management the emphasis should be on measuring outcomes for the flock including fecal egg counts, fecal egg count reduction tests and keeping a close eye on changes to performance measure such as lambing percentage, daily live weight gains and mortality.

In summary:

- What are you treating?.....know your nasties!
- Who are you treating?To limit resistance don't treat the best sheep and only treat 20% of the flock. Aim to keep a "refugia"sheep with a population of "susceptible" worms rather than aiming to be worm free.
- When are you treating? Know the cycle of your troublemaker and treat when it will be most effective.
- What are you using? Make sure the product matches your needs.

After a hearty lunch there was a brief business meeting. The group now has a facebook page and all were encouraged to join and invite others. Plans for the spring meeting were finalized and back by

popular demand will be a sheep "Showing and Trimming Day" on Saturday 4th May, see below.

West Midlands Southdown Group "Spring Gather"

Saturday 4 May 2019

at

Helen and Simon Lakin's

Heltom Flock

Gorphwysfa, 6 Nant Road

Bwlchgwyn Wrexham LL11 5YN

Back by popular demand/request! Helen and Simon Lakin have kindly volunteered their sheep to undergo some buffing and fluffing. This will be a hands on chance to have a go or refine your trimming skills. For those new to showing or thinking of taking the plunge there will be experienced folk to help you along and for the old hands a chance to catch up and exchange tips and tricks.

Programme:

10.30 Gather, coffee and cake

11.00 Trimming Practice

13.00 Lunch....bring and share

14.00 Farm walk ...Heltom Flock

15.00 More cake. Council update, plans for Cheshire Show and next meeting

15.30 Depart

There is limited parking at the farm but space near the village monument about 500 yards away.

RSVP by 1 May Please to:

Helen Lakin

Tel: 01978 755986

Email: helenlakin554@btinternet.com

NEWS FROM AROUND THE REGIONS

Wales and Borders



Wales and Borders Southdown Group is off to a good start, as group secretary Lynda Richards-Davies reports: "We had our first meeting on the 8th of March at the Kings Head, Llandoverly. Seventeen members attended, lots of ideas for events and social get-togethers have been suggested.

Aberystwyth Show have kindly agreed for us to hold our first Welsh "National" Show with them on the 8th of June this year.

Exciting times ahead – anybody interested in joining us please contact :

Secretary- Lynda Richards-Davies on 07791596865
lyndafree16@aol.com

Chairman- Dylan Williams 07771542578

Welsh National Southdown

Show 8th June 2019

The first ever Welsh "National" Southdown Show will take place at Aberystwyth Show.

<http://www.aberystwythshow.com>

Judged by Gail Sprake, the show will have a range of trophies and special rosettes. The show is being promoted by the Wales and Borders Southdown Group. The group has been set up to promote the Southdown across Wales and the Borders, one of the most productive and active sheep rearing areas in the UK. The show will form part of the group's annual breed promotional activities. The group hope you can support the event either by entering or take a trip to the beautiful County of Ceredigion.

"Dylan Williams the Group Chairman says: " I am very excited about the future of the Southdown in Wales and the Borders. We have seen an increase in the numbers of breeders across Wales. The group's aim is to promote the breed to a range of people including commercial breeders and those wishing to start their own pedigree flock. The event at Aberystwyth show

will showcase the breed and will form part of our annual breed promotional activities ".

FORTHCOMING EVENTS AROUND THE REGIONS

The West Midlands Group will be holding a "Showing & Trimming" day on Saturday 4th May. For more details, please contact Miriam on 07740 122958

The South West Group will be manning the Society stand at NSA Sheep South West on June 18th – offers of help much appreciated. Please contact Caroline on 01398 361245 for more information.

The East Midlands Group will be getting together again for a BBQ at this year's Lincolnshire Show on Wednesday 19th June. Everyone welcome. For more details, please contact Sophie on 07899 833157

Wedding Congratulations

The Southdown Sheep Society would like to pass on Congratulations to Lorraine Clements on the occasion of her marriage to Mr Chris Levell.



Dog Worrying

“The distressing report from Lesley Mead highlights the scale of dog attacks on livestock. It is now recognised that across the UK around 15,000 sheep a year may be killed in this way, and that the main problem is attacks where owners are not present; they have got loose or been let loose. There is now a concerted attempt by Police and a group of MPs to significantly toughen laws to help reduce these attacks. Messages to dog owners are increasingly emphasising this issue of loose dogs, as recently on the South Downs:



Hear why it's important to use a lead when walking your dog near livestock and how to dog-proof properties

Friday March 8, 8-10.30am

Clayton Windmills Car Park,
Clayton, Hassocks, BN6 9PG

#takethelead

For info Caroline Harriott 07774 190189



What is most important is that **all** incidents of sheep worrying are reported to the Police and that you know that the dog's owner, or person in charge of a dog which worries livestock on any agricultural land *commits the criminal offence of livestock worrying.*

'Worrying' includes: attacking livestock; chasing livestock in such a way as may be reasonably expected to cause injury or suffering;(in the case of ewes, this includes abortion or loss or reduction in the number of offspring); and importantly not having a dog on a lead or under close control when close by, or in a field or enclosure with livestock.

If you do not get a Police response I would be happy to advise 07826 947 154”

Further details at www.sheepwatch.co.uk

Tim Morris

The Holly Bar flock of President Mrs Lesley Mead suffered a dog attack during the winter which left a number of animals dead or dying. Lesley would like to express her gratitude to all Southdown friends who came to her assistance during this traumatic time.



2019 Lambing Percentage... Disappointed?

Many sheep farmers have reported a much lower lambing percentage this year, this has been more significant in the East of England where ewes lost condition in the summer drought and the late autumn rain didn't come so ewes never had a chance to flush or recover condition.

Talking to my scanner, who works all over the UK, scanning percentages were down 10-20% or more. My impression is that this drop was more significant for spring lambing flocks than for January lambers who wean earlier etc. For my own March lambing flock, scanning percentage was down by 22% on a normal year (c. 170%).

So if you have ended up with fewer twins and triplets this year, you are not alone. I am not sure if there is any good news about this, except that you won't have to spend so much money on rubber rings, ear tags or have the hassle of triplets to bottle feed!

Patrick Goldsworthy

The Ridings Flock wins The Cresswell Crook for 2019

The Cresswell Crook, which is awarded for the most improved Signet Recorded Flock, has been won for the second time by the Wakeham-Dawson and Harmer's Ridings flock. The Ridings flock previously won the award in 2014. The runner up this year was Rob and Anna Paton's Lawton flock.

A focus on Maedi Visna

by Dr Lis King (AHDB Senior Research Scientist)

With approximately 20 Southdown flocks currently MV accredited, it was felt it might be helpful to the wider membership to explain Maedi Visna (MV) and the different options for checking MV status. AHDB's Lis King has provided the following article.

What is Maedi Visna?

Maedi Visna (MV) is a highly infectious respiratory disease of sheep caused by a virus. Once infected, the sheep will produce antibodies, typically within weeks or months of infection. The disease has a long incubation period of several months to years. Symptoms of MV are persistent pneumonia in older sheep (typically those over three years old), leading to weight loss, reduced fertility, reduced milk yield and poor young lamb performance. Infected sheep may be culled for other reasons without further investigation, therefore the significance of MV may only be recognised when the prevalence within a flock reaches 50%. The disease is incurable and eventually fatal. There is no treatment and no vaccine.

How is it spread?

The MV virus is spread through lung secretions and milk. The virus can also be found in semen, saliva, urine and in utero infections can occur.

What's the level of the disease within GB?

The level of disease within GB's national flock appears to be increasing with the number of infected flocks having doubled from 1.4% in 1995 to 2.8% in 2010. There is however significant regional variation, with prevalence in counties such as Leicestershire and Gloucestershire as high as 15%. Disease prevalence within infected flocks also varies, with evidence of up to 85% of sheep affected within some flocks. There is no data on the prevalence within the Southdown breed.

Breed and genetic susceptibility

Some sheep appear more susceptible to infection than others and some research has been conducted on genetic susceptibility to MV. There is no data on the Southdown breed but data suggest that UK hill breeds such as Herdwick, Rough Fell and Dalesbred are less likely to carry the gene that increases susceptibility to MV. Therefore genetic information could potentially be used to select less susceptible genetic lines within flocks to control MV infection but this needs further investigation.

MV testing and health schemes

Early diagnosis is essential for efficient prevention and control. Screening cull ewes and fallen stock is highly cost-effective and is the simplest way of testing the 'high risk' group of any flock. Post mortem examination with gross pathology and histopathology has been shown to be a highly informative surveillance method for MV and allows a variety of other diseases and abnormalities to be detected simultaneously.

Test kits are commercially available to detect antibodies against MV. These tests rely on the immune reaction of the individual being high enough to reach the detection threshold of each test. Sheep with MV

undergo periods of high and low immune response and antibody production after infection. This makes disease screening using blood tests less straightforward. However, it can be overcome by appropriate sample size selection and understanding that some individuals with MV will have inconsistent results over a period of time as their immune response to the infection varies. Note that testing lambs under the age of 2-3 months is problematic as maternal antibodies passed from the ewe to its lamb are indistinguishable from the lambs' own antibodies.

The voluntary Maedi Visna Accreditation Scheme was introduced in GB in 1982 and is run by the Premium Sheep & Goat Health Schemes. Participating flocks follow a structured testing programme, two tests within 6 to 12 months to qualify and periodic testing thereafter, in accordance with strict biosecurity precautions. The annual membership fee varies by flock size and provides discounted rates for MV testing.

Independently of this scheme, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) offer a MV diagnostic package (12 sheep screen) focusing on older, thinner ewes as a starting point to help establish flock status for £45. BioBest also offer similar screening packages. These are highly cost-effective and allow confidence and prevalence to be calculated retrospectively. The use of milk samples collected by the farmer for MV testing can also be used to reduce the costs of sampling for screening as it does not require veterinary time.

Control of MV in a flock

In an infected flock, control of MV can be achieved in two ways: eradication or conservative management

The eradication protocol involves either culling followed by restocking with accredited or monitored MV-free sheep, or repeated test and cull to eliminate infection from the existing flock. The tests are sufficiently accurate to allow rapid eradication using this process.

For farmers who are unable to embark upon an eradication programme, 'conservative control' strategies are another option. These include keeping a younger flock, increasing the replacement rate and increasing culling based on body condition score and performance, or only buying sheep from MV accredited flocks and keeping them separate from older sheep. However, disease transmission and subclinical disease will continue to cause production losses. The cost of keeping a younger flock and increasing culling and replacement rates may outweigh the cost of disease eradication in the medium and long term.

Before embarking upon any testing programme, discuss costs and implications of a positive result with your vet. Further details on testing and practical advice can be found in the **AHDB** Iceberg diseases of ewes manual and on the **SRUC** and **Biobest** websites.

Thoughts on MV and Southdowns

The accompanying article by Lis King is hopefully a useful summary of MV and the options for MV testing. I have yet to hear of any Southdowns being diagnosed with MV (though I am not sure anyone would want to own up to the diagnosis) and for that reason I have never felt it worthwhile to check my flock for MV.

However, a comment from a breeder from another minor breed that they “thought their breed was MV free but had found out too late”, troubled me. So as there was a requirement for candidate rams for the RamCompare research project to be MV accredited or at least screened, I decided to undertake the screening. I selected 12 of my thinnest (!) and/or oldest ewes for the screen and three candidate ram lambs for the test. It took about an hour of my vet’s time, and while I have yet to receive the bill, I estimate it will have cost c. £200-250 (including test costs, vets visit fee/time and

disposable sundries). So it’s not cheap... but it was reassuring, even so to get the all clear... phew!

Costs of MV Accreditation

Full details of the costs and requirements of MV Accreditation can be obtained from the SRUC website. But to give readers a rough idea Also might be worth including additional illustrative costs for a 20-animal flock (over 18 months in age). The costs are likely to be thus:

Year 1 (Start up) = Scheme membership (£96) + two sets of tests (£116) + Vets fees

= £212 + Vet costs

Year 2 = Scheme membership £96 + 2 tests @£2.90/head for one bought-in non-MV ram

= £101.80 + Vet costs

Patrick Goldsworthy

The Southdown Sheep Society Flock Competition

The annual Flock Competition is an ideal opportunity to gain an appraisal of your flock, on a one-to-one basis with the Flock Competition judge.

The judge for this year’s competition is Neil Stainthorpe. Neil’s Biscoombe flock was founded in 1993. Whilst the judge has to compare all flocks and select the winners in the respective classes, at the same time the judge is able to offer an informed opinion and answer any questions you may have. The Flock Competition judge is always an experienced sheep keeper and the experience of taking part in a Flock Competition should be an enjoyable and educational experience.

It should be pointed out that the competition judges the whole flock, and therefore breeders with individual, different groups of sheep within their one flock will necessarily be disadvantaged. The judge is looking to see a flock, rather than a collection of different animals.

The judge follows a marking scheme approved by Council where points are awarded across a number of sections:

A	quality of flock ewes	35
B	intake of shearling ewes	35
C	uniformity	35
D	ewe lambs	20
F	rams	60
E	wool	15
Total		200

Noakes Trophy: Three ewe lambs & three ram lambs sire by a named ram and shown /100

Flock Competition entry forms and rules can be downloaded from the Society website, or email or call the Office if you would like a paper copy sent to you. The entry fee is £25 per flock, and the closing date for entries is September 1st 2019.

2019 SOUTHDOWN SHEEP SOCIETY NATIONAL SHOW

The 2019 Southdown Sheep Society National Show takes place at Royal Cheshire County Show on Tuesday June 18th 2019. A number of classes are scheduled and the National Show is usually supported by a good number of exhibitors. The Cheshire Show is a good day out, even if you choose to leave your own animals at home. The presentation of National Show trophies usually takes place after the judging is finished, and the West Midlands Southdown Breeders’ Group invites all members and friends to join them for ‘Afternoon Tea’.

Kerry Reid
Competitions Officer
Cheshire Agricultural Society CIO

T 01565 650 200
W www.royalcheshireshow.org
E info@royalcheshireshow.org



The show will be attractive and profitable, support of Cheshire Agricultural Society (CAS) is provided for the resident staff. CAS CIO accepts no responsibility for information provided to all members.

We welcome Southdown Breeders

The Small Shepherds Club was founded in 1977 to help shepherds in Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire with all aspects of keeping sheep from good husbandry to legal issues. Today with almost 300 members we provide free training as well as a great forum for small scale sheep keepers to exchange ideas and for help and advice.

If you want to know more?
Visit www.smallshepherdsclub.org.uk

Southdown people

President Elect Michael Sprake



Michael Sprake is President Elect of the Southdown Sheep Society and takes office at this year's AGM.

Michael farms with his wife Gail in the Waveney Valley in North East Suffolk.

The farm has been in the family since the 1800s and is a truly mixed farm: alongside the traditional East Anglian arable crops of wheat, barley, sugar beet and oil seed rape, there is grassland for the native breeds of livestock. The All Saints flock of Southdowns was established in 1987, and a flock of Devon Closewool sheep joined the farm more recently. In addition to the sheep, there are Irish Moiled cattle and a small number of rare Northern Dairy Shorthorn cattle. Rare breed poultry and turkeys complete the mix.

A love of livestock and farming was developed at a young age, with a succession of ponies, and piglets reared to boost pocket money.

Over the years a variety of livestock has joined the farm, and the family has enjoyed many years of exhibiting at shows both locally and further afield.

Michael believes strongly that our native breeds of livestock will have an increasingly important role to play in post-Brexit farming, where the importance of livestock that can finish off grass will prove to be a valuable asset in future farming systems.

"Loan a Lamb" gives 1429 children the chance to get up close to sheep

An innovative and ground-breaking farming project has enabled more than 1400 school children across Norfolk to get up close to sheep.

The 'Loan a Lamb' project was the idea of Tony Bellinger, education manager at the Food and Farming Discovery Trust.

Six junior schools 'adopted' a Southdown ewe and lamb for a week, with children and staff charged with feeding and caring for the animals.

At Sparhawk Infant and Nursery in Sprowston, Norwich, the sheep took up residence on the school field and were tended to by pupils from across the school.

Assistant headteacher Jade Hunter said the children had been "absolutely enthralled".

"Every day they are coming out and learning to care for them, feed them, check their hay," she said. "It has been fantastic for the children to get that hands-on experience. A lot of our children don't often get that close to farm animals so for them it has been a great experience."

The project in each school was linked across the curriculum which involved researching the history of the Southdown sheep, learning about small ruminants, writing sheep-based stories and artwork. Even maths came in to the project as children had to weigh out and calculate feedstuffs.

The six Southdown ewes and their lambs were provided by Gail & Michael Sprake.

For more information about the Food and Farming Discovery Trust:

https://youtu.be/xzftNV_q6aY

www.discoverytrust.org.uk



The ewe and lamb's 'home' for the week.

Fit for Purpose?

We started with a complete flock of 26 ewes, ewe lambs and a ram, purchased from Simon Cutter in 2004. Since then the Southdown breed has increased numbers beyond the RBST's Vulnerable list, to our great relief, but it needs only relatively few keepers to retire or a terrible event like the Foot & Mouth disease outbreak of 2001 to reduce numbers to a low level again. We have bred our own female replacements since then, not using Modern French rams.

We have a holiday cottage on the farm and many guests are keen to take a look at the stock we keep. One of the questions they ask is why the breeds became rare in the first place and why they're worth saving. The answer I give always starts with the words "They're the culmination of centuries of breeding by people who knew far more about the stock and the land they farmed than I ever shall". Some of the guests are farmers themselves and over the recent years, when I talk about genetic diversity and what native breeds can offer, I sense a different perspective from that of earlier years. Several local farmers have tried Continental breeds as terminal sires for their ewes and found they bring benefits but also problems, and have returned to native breeds. Some are finding the cost of feeding lambs to get them to finished weight is becoming prohibitive and are open to considering native breeds that will finish later in the year, after the prime lamb window, but off grass only at far less expense.

Our plan has always been to breed and sell only the very best of our stock. To this end we strive for our flock to be fit for purpose, which we interpret as healthy, fertile and productive, producing superb lamb and hogget off grass. We have never shown our sheep as we also rear native rare breed pigs and poultry, so show time is also the busiest time of year for us.

Our sheep graze on our ancient pasture for most of their lives and the only supplementary feed is given to the ewes around lambing time. The rams run with the ewes for 16 days. We give the pregnant ewes a small amount of feed for the final six weeks of their pregnancy and the first three of lactation. Over the years we've perfected a feed regime that results in

a plentiful supply of colostrum and good-sized twins without the hassle of large singles. If all goes well after a couple of days the ewes and lambs are turned out onto pasture shut up the previous October, if there is deep snow the flock will be offered ad lib hay but apart from this no additional feed is offered to any of the flock.

We have always bred our own replacement females and bought in a new traditional ram every two years, quarantining for six weeks to avoid bringing in disease problems. We vaccinated the flock against footrot once, in 2007, and haven't seen the condition since. We have also culled out any ewe scanning barren, having mastitis, prolapse, dystocia or poor mothering, and found this has led to all the ewes scanning in-lamb and an easier lambing every year, despite the flock growing in size.

We knew we had three distinct strains in the flock and the recent bloodline survey has confirmed this. We find each has its attributes and that these tend to reappear in each generation, irrespective of the sire used.

We also run a small flock of Badger Face Welsh Mountain ewes and put them to a Southdown tup every third year, to produce a crossbreed with an excellent carcase which sells well as a store lamb at market and ably demonstrates the continuing value of the Southdown as a terminal sire rather than an historical curiosity or the latest fad breed of sheep.

Gillian Herbert

Hareley Flock of Southdowns, No. 00871

THE BURCH DARE PERPETUAL CHALLENGE TROPHY

Throughout the year, points are accumulated by members by their participation in shows. Points are awarded too for the Flock Competition. The principle behind the allocation of points remains true to the wishes of the Burch Dare family's wishes as set out in 1934.

The 2018 results are as follows:

Winner: Wakeham-Dawson & Harmer

Runner-up: Mrs Elizabeth Sargent

Third place: Mrs Amy Readhead-Higgins

ERRATUM

In the previous newsletter there was no mention made of the Staffordshire County Show, where long-standing members Chris & Dave Rhead were awarded the Supreme Interbreed title with a homebred shearing ewe. With over 1000 sheep present at the Staffs Show, this is an impressive achievement.



Embryo transfer, what, how and why

Some members may well have seen reference in recent years to the use of embryo transfer (ET) in some flocks in the breed and indeed in the wider sheep industry as a whole, writes Jonathan Long.

But what is ET, how is it done and why would you want to do it?

Put simply, this breeding technology, which has been used in sheep for the last 25 years or so, with increasing success, involves the transfer of embryos from one 'donor' ewe to a number of 'recipient' ewes, helping maximise the number of lambs from some bloodlines.

In order to achieve this the donor ewe undergoes superovulation treatment prior to artificial insemination (AI), with the resulting embryos then 'flushed' from the donor six days after AI.

The process involves ewes being programmed with superovulation hormones in the run up to AI. Firstly, the donor ewe is synchronised for breeding using either a chronogest sponge or a CIDR (CIDR controlled internal drug release). Recipient ewes, usually crossbreeds, are synchronised at the same time.

Ten days after the donor ewe is synchronised, superovulation injections begin. These take at a specific time each morning and evening and last for four days.

On day 12 the sponges/CIDRs are removed from both donor and recipient ewes and then on day 14 the donor ewes are AI'd.

Following that on day 20 of the programme the embryos are flushed from the reproductive system of the donor ewes using saline solution and checked under a microscope to assess viability before being transferred in to recipient ewes. This transfer uses the same laproscopic procedure as the initial AI.

Donor ewes then receive an estrumate injection and return to natural heat five days after embryos are flushed.

Due to the physical size limitations of sheep both AI and ET flushing are surgical procedures which are done by specialised vets.

The key part to this process is achieving a suitable level of superovulation and using high fertility semen to ensure as many fertilised embryos as possible are harvested from the donor. While in theory superovulation should be an exact science, there are a number of variables which can have a significant impact.



Chaileybrook 16/0033 is an ET son of Golden Valley 10/0039 and was top priced ram at the Society Premier Sale 2017. He was one of 14 live lambs from a flush of his dam to Sarkozy. Flushing has the ability to deliver as many lambs in one year as many ewes manage in a lifetime.

The first of these is ewe size, some smaller ewes can over ovulate when programmed using a standard dose of the superovulation drug. This leads to a large number of unfertilised embryos, and potentially a wasted opportunity.

Ewe diet in the run up to ET can also have a significant impact on ET success and ewes should be on a rising plane of nutrition and definitely in a 'fit not fat' condition.

However, even when everything is done correctly there can be instances when ewes fail to superovulate or produce large numbers of unfertilised embryos. That is, unfortunately, the luck of the draw.

So, why would you consider this technique and what are the benefits? From a personal point of view the reasoning is simple. It allows us to maximise the genetic potential in our very best females and extend their influence through the flock.

At a cost of more than £500/ewe it is not something we undertake lightly. It is a technology we use sparingly and only with ewes we know will deliver high quality lambs which will be of significant value to us and, hopefully, other breeders.

Ultimately though the question is 'how much would it cost us to find other ewes of the same quality to deliver as many lambs as we can achieve in one flush?' With successful ET meaning one ewe can have as many progeny in one season as many do in their entire lifetime, the answer is always 'more than the cost of flushing.'

To be certain we're breeding from the right ewes, we generally like ewes to have had two natural crops of lambs before considering them for ET, although in some instances we have flushed ewes after their first crop. Ewes we flush usually come from proven breeding families and are AI'd with semen from sires we have a high level of confidence in.

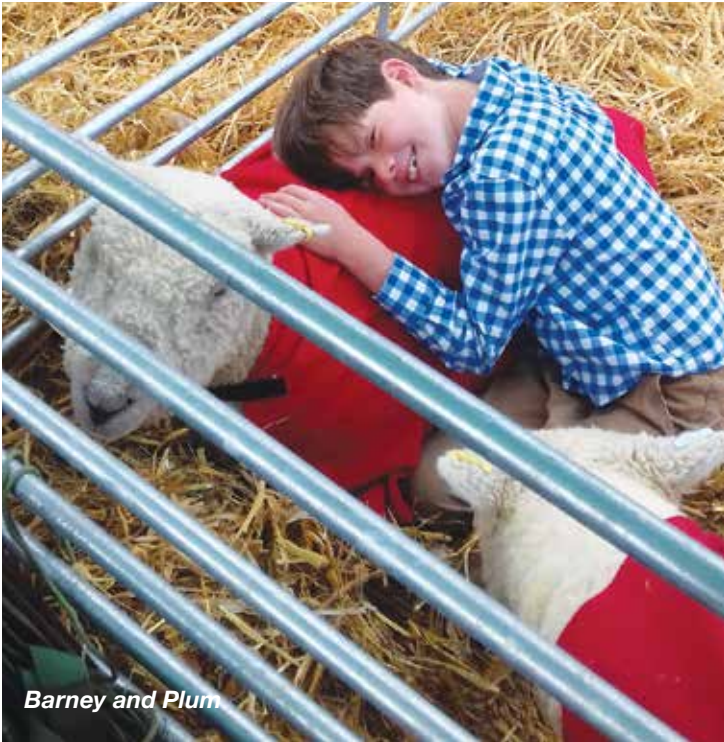
Despite all this, success is not guaranteed, but the law of averages generally balances out and we have had great success with ET, with ewes delivering up to 17 viable embryos and, in several cases, all transferred embryos resulting in live lambs.

There is no doubting it is not a technique which is right for every flock or every ewe, but where a ewe is breeding particularly well or has specific genetics you wish to exploit then it has a valuable part to play in breeding plans.



Embryos are generally transferred in to crossbred recipient dams.

YOUNG HANDLERS' PEN



Barney and Plum

Proud grandma Mrs Jane Ing provides an update on the young handler activities of her grandchildren Kitty and Barney:

“Kitty, almost 15, has been helping with our Chelsea flock and showing since she was eight. She has her own blood line started from a Light Oaks ewe. She is helping with lambing at the moment and feeds the ewes about 7am before going to school at 7.45, so they are used to her handling.

Her shearling, Chelsea Nutmeg, shown in the picture, was reserve Rare Interbreed Champion at Oswestry Show last August. The picture was taken just after Kitty got the cup. Nutmeg is due to lamb any day now. Kitty is doing sheep management as part of her bronze D of E award and would really like to be a vet.

Barney, at ten, is also showing and has his own sheep too. He is not into early morning helping yet. His ewe Plum, shown, had handsome twins this year.”

*Lynda Richards-Davies:
nephew Rowan*



Kitty and Nutmeg

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