



Whitefaced Woodland Sheep Society

Web site: www.whitefacedwoodland.co.uk

Newsletter 83 - December 2012

The Chairman's Year

Report given at the AGM on 13 October

The last twelve months have been a roller coaster ride since my election to Chairman. When invited to take the nomination I did not know that I would be sailing the seas when the AGM took place. Rob Ford chaired the meeting which was held at Stott Hall and business was conducted. Thank you for your support.

The Spring committee meeting was held at the Dog & Partridge, not many problems, all was taken in hand. Then came the weather to spoil the early shows, Honley, Harden Moss, North Yorkshire County, were all lost.

Chareen and Dennis represented the north at the Royal Norfolk and returned with a large selection of trophies. A request has been made to have a larger attendance next year at this wonderful show. I can recommend it, the hospitality is first class. Let's have a party next year!

The Yorkshire Show managed one day, it was very muddy. The show in the afternoon was a success with many sheep forward. Shortly after judging ended, the heavens opened and put paid to the rest of the show.

Many members attended Skipton rare breeds sale. Thanks to Ann for bringing the stand. Not many sheep forward but excellent trade for Julie Beardwell's shearling ewes.

Hope Show was a success. I could not attend but gather that Paul won the show with his gimmer and Chareen took Champion of champions with her ewe.

We held a committee meeting at the Dog and Partridge on 17th August when many items were discussed and put forward for the following year. Mottram Show was another victim of the weather.

Penistone show was held on one of the best Saturdays of the Summer. The largest entry of sheep at Penistone for some years was judged by myself. The Champion was won by Paul with his shearling ewe and the Reserve by a shearling ram from John Jones.

Hayfield Show was held in bad conditions.

Thanks to all for keeping the show open.

Sadly, at the last minute, John Illingworth was not able to host the AGM and farm visit. By then it was too late to change the date, so we arranged the AGM and lunch at the Dog & Partridge. Jill has done a good job with the calendars, which were available at the AGM.

Following all the washouts the worst was yet to come. What could it be, Bretton Mill planned for the 29th. The pens were erected by Matthew and his team on Sunday 23rd in the driest part of the field, hoping for a dry week but we get rain on Wednesday. Matthew goes to finish off and his van gets stuck in the field. On Thursday morning it was clear that there was no way to get wagons off the road, and the police and health and safety reasons frightened me. So what do we do now?

A quick decision needed. Phone calls to Anthony at Holmfirth Market and the field occupiers to ask if they could help. Yes came back the answers so in a different place on a different day. Sunday 7th October it would happen. When there were so many people relying on me I had to do something. Hope all the effort was worthwhile! Then e-mails to everyone we could and phone calls to others we thought might be coming. On the Saturday I sat at Bretton telling people (possibly 10) that events had been cancelled. Wagons were loaded with gates and off we go.

Next Sunday morning came. The first to arrive were the furthest travellers, two tups from Sally Windsor in Wales. Thanks to Tony Redfearn for judging the rams and Philip and Katy Onions, the females. The breed Champion was a shearling ram from Clive Mitchell of Holmbridge, the nearest sheep to the market. It was purchased by the judge and made a new breed record of £1620. Not a bad price for a sheep purchased as a lamb at Bretton last year. Clive has an eye for a good prospect. Sale prices in general were no more than up and down. I don't like the ring. Pens are the best. What will happen next year?

The Vice Chairman sent this message to the AGM
I took great pleasure in reading (in the Farmers' Guardian) of the record price at the annual WFW show and sale. I also saw good turn outs, with quality to the fore at Hope and Penistone shows.

Our registration system is jogging along nicely but does need to have pedigree information accumulating more than appears to be the case so far. In this respect, I welcome Rachel's suggestion of a kind of birth notified register – which as it won't presumably cost the breeder anything, should elicit a good response. We could then encourage those thus notified to go for full registration, which I think is of great importance when setting stock with new breeders.

This year saw our Society affiliated to the National Sheep Association as a Breed Society, which should raise our profile within the industry.

We have been in contact with RBST via its new director over their initiative to set up an agisted flock of RBST registered sheep – with our assistance. I have offered, on behalf of WFWSS to find a suitable location for the flock. I feel it should be within the south Pennines, probably some sort of institutional run farm. However, as the proposal requires public donations of £2000 by Christmas, it may not get off the ground.

Because of this new found cooperative approach to promoting our breed with RBST, I have postponed my promised 'relationship' document as it's clear that a consensus view is still some way from being formed. I should however, reiterate what has been said before: RBST has nothing to fear from WFWSS as regards the CFB register of Woodland sheep. We regard this as a 'conservation' register and of significant potential value to the national flock in that blood lines present (which have been separated from the Hill for some 30 years) may add to the genetic diversity of the National flock **if** used sparingly and **only if** the quality is there.

Rob Ford 12 October 2012

Show results

Penistone show - Judge: Paul Dixon

Aged ram: John Jones

Shearling ram: John Jones

Ram lamb: Karen Dowey

Aged ewe: Karen Dowey

Shearling ewe: Paul Thorp

Ewe lamb: Paul Thorp

The Champion was Paul's shearling ewe and Reserve Champion, John's shearling ram.

Annual Show and Sale held at Holmfirth



Harold Hodgson, Clive Mitchell and Judge, Tony Redfearn, with the winning tup. Photo: P J Onions

Senior ram: Mike Salisbury

Shearling ram: Clive Mitchell

Champion and Ken Wild Trophy: Clive Mitchell

Reserve Champion: John Jones's shearling tup

Pen of shearling ewes:

1st John Illingworth; 2nd JC Nutter; 3rd Paul Thorp

Pen of aged ewes:

1st J Illingworth; 2nd JC Nutter; 3rd J Illingworth.

Sale Prices at Holmfirth

Clive Mitchell's Champion tup, bred by Robert and Angela Crampton, sold for a record price of £1620 to Simon Burford. Paul Thorp's shearling tup made £750 and two from Simon Burford, £580 and £980 respectively. A further five sold for between £200 and £380. Of 35 tups forward, 28 were sold. There were only six tup lambs; James Gill's sold for £110.

Top shearling ewe price was £120 (R & A Crampton), with a pen of Paul Thorp's at £112 and a pen of John Illingworth's at £101.

Altogether, 71 shearling ewes were forward, with an average price of £84. 171 aged ewes averaged £57, with top price of £70 for two pens from John Illingworth. Of his 50 ewe lambs, the highest bid was £50, with an average of £43.

At Bakewell Hill ram and breeding sheep sale on 13 October, top price for shearling ewes was £134 from David Shirt, with an average of £113. Aged ewes from G & GW Green of Wessington reached £92, with an average ewe price of £71.20

Peter Harkness charts the growth of his hobby, and offers some interesting ideas on cross breeding...

Five years ago I made my wife two promises – if she let me start a hobby sheep flock I would only have half a dozen ewes and she would never, EVER have to be involved. This year we had over 60 sheep in the fields round the house and Sarah has first-hand experience of veterinary nursing, tracking down escaped sheep and crisis lambing (..well, she’s got smaller hands than me).

While all this makes for entertaining dinner party stories, even an over-indulged husband like me knows there is a limit to how far he can push his luck and after this year’s lambing I felt I had three choices – pack up sheep, cut back to half a dozen again (where’s the fun in that??) or build the enterprise up even further, without relying on a dwindling supply of domestic goodwill and free labour.

So a few months ago I rounded up the bulk of my Yorkshire flock and herded them into a livestock transporter bound for the Cotswolds. In Gloucestershire I have partnered with a young chap who has decided against the University route and is making his own way in farming direct from school. Since it's almost impossible for farming folk without family land to get a start - I thought I'd give him management of my sheep, and some others I'm buying, to bulk up his own enterprise up a bit.

Our partnership is staying in WFW sheep to a degree, as I like rare breeds in general and Woodies in particular. But we’re expanding a cross-breeding scheme which I have been developing. A couple of years ago I sold some WFW lambs to a local farm shop. I was happy with the price and the owner was too. But his butcher didn’t like the conformation of a Woodie (despite acknowledging the taste). I took this as a challenge and did some research on commercial sheep production. I confess I hadn’t really understood the sheep meat production chain before – but when I studied it I felt that a Woodie might be a pretty good basis for cross-breeding. I bought a decent Suffolk tup from a well-known lady breeder in 2010 and last season produced a couple of dozen SuffolkX lambs. The ewes look really fine, shorter and sturdier than Woodies. Pictured are a set of crossbred twins with their WFW mother and a comparison photo showing two lambs of the same age - one SuffolkX and one pure Woodland.



Suffolk X lambs with Woodland mother at 6 weeks

This is all old hat to you professional farmers, but I was pretty pleased with myself. Even more so after the flock moved to the Cotswolds, and the male Suffolk x Woodland lambs were sold and did an excellent trade, topping the market at Cirencester in mid October for 2012 lambs out of over 600 entered - £82.60 a head.



Suffolk X and Woodland lambs

Ben, who I have partnered with in the Cotswolds, has rented land and will also be using a modest acreage which I have acquired nearby. His enthusiasm is a pleasure to see – he’s the third generation of a Cotswold shepherding family and his dad, Tom, is well known as a sheep judge and expert. When Tom saw my Woodlands as they came off the livestock wagon he was very flattering about them. He wasn’t particularly familiar with them as a breed but now he thinks they are great.

My sheep have settled down well (probably quite delighted to be away from my amateur care and in the hands of professionals!) and Ben has worked out a breeding regime and allocated the ewes to various tuppings groups. A few best-quality WFWs will breed pure (ewes will be kept in the flock and tups for meat, unless Ben spots a really cracking potential ram among them) using my home-bred tup which has won a couple of

rosettes at the Hope Show. Then the bulk of the WFWs will be tupped by my Suffolk ram to produce more ewes for the “commercial” flock and tups for the market.

We are also going to start a new pedigree flock of Berrichon du Cher sheep. They are Ben’s special interest and he has been winning prizes with his own flock throughout his teens. He and I are going to the Berrichon ewe sale at Welshpool in November to buy some in-lamb ewes. We will keep a pure-bred flock and hope to emulate Ben’s own show success with them. Ben’s contribution to my cross-breeding project is to put a good Berrichon tup on to my 2012 Suffolk cross gimmers and see whether it would be the ideal terminal sire. He says the gimmers are plenty big enough to tup - I lambed very early this year so

they are pretty mature. Apparently Berrichon lambs have comparatively small heads and start smallish but grow fast. We'll see!

My own plan had been to buy a Texel tup, but I’m delighted with Ben’s idea because Sarah has always thought that Texels were pretty ugly sheep, despite their renowned sire qualities.

All I've kept in Yorkshire is half a dozen 2012 WFW tups lambs, which we'll kill at 12 months+ - as we like the hogget meat better than lamb - and some 2011 tups and wethers which are heading for the freezer this autumn. It’s nice to still have Woodies in the fields around the house and even better (finally) to be able to keep the original promise to Sarah!

Peter Harkness

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