



Whitefaced Woodland Sheep Society

Web site: www.whitefacedwoodland.co.uk

Newsletter 84 – May 2013

Chairman's Ramble

Dear all,

By the time you all get this newsletter I will be on the seven seas again.

The sun has started to shine at last and the rain has ceased (just in time for the hill lambers, thankfully). Most of you will have had to put up with atrocious weather this winter.

When I return it will be just in time to meet representatives of the RBST to discuss the present position on registration. I will report later.

I hope the weather is now with us for the summer. On the showing front I have been told of one casualty – no Woodland classes at the Royal Norfolk, due to lack of entries. I hope there are no more, so please support if you can, Wish you well,
Paul Dixon

Editor's Bleat

My apologies for the lateness of this Newsletter. I know I should have got it done before lambing, but it didn't happen. Our outdoor lambing coincided with the start of the March snows, and just getting to the ewes two or three times a day took up most of our time. Then the water supply froze in the wall, despite all our thick new insulation. As a final straw, the snow drifts got into the internet connection, so for three weeks, no e-mails, banking or replay of BBC programmes!

I managed to get the list of Shows to Rod Corderey, who so kindly hosts our web site and keeps it up to date, but here they are, for those of you who prefer to see them on the page.

Other dates for your diary are:

North Sheep 2013 on Wednesday 5 June at Crimple Head Farm, Beckwithshaw, Harrogate, where we shall have a display of sheep and, with a bit of luck, our new display board.

Our **AGM** will be held on **Sunday 6 October**, to coincide with an Open Day here at Plover Hall. A lot of renovation work and clearing up is going to have to happen before then!

WOODY WONDERFUL – OR WOT?

Here to cheer you all up is a rather wonderful invention to keep all those snow rescue cade lambs happy.



All recycled materials! Except the teats, which don't get pulled off because the bottles go in and out like pistons.. being restrained by the bungee straps. The *sterilised milk* bottles may be difficult to find but as a bonus the "stera" milk as we used to call it when I was a kid and sent out to get a few bottles from the horse drawn milk cart wheezing up the hill in the smog in Birmingham, goes really well with *CAMP coffee* .. so a nice nostalgia boost as well for those of industrial working class origins !

Note also how you can angle the crate to get that oesophageal groove working as it supposed to. More woody wonders next time and until then, best of luck with the remainder of lambing and grass growing.

Rob Ford

Shows in 2013 offering Woodland classes

8 June - Honley Show, Honley, West Yorks.
Contact: Sally Hampshire 07775 898647.
www.honleyshow.co.uk
General enquiries: 01484 661072
Judge: Karen Dowey

16 June - Rare Breeds Day at Royal Three Counties Show – may offer Woodland classes.
Contact Fiona Parker on 01684 584901 e-mail:
fionap@threecounties.co.uk

23 June - Harden Moss Sheep Show and Sheepdog Trials, Holmfirth. Contact: Christine Smith 01484 680823.
Judge: John Jones

26-27 June - Royal Norfolk Show, Norwich.
Phone 01603 731965.
www.royalnorfolkshow.co.uk
Woodland classes cancelled this year

9-11 July - Great Yorkshire Show, Harrogate.
Contact: Amanda West on 01423 546231 or
amandaw@yas.co.uk .
www.greatyorkshireshow.com
Entries close 14 May
Judge: Rider Howard

30 July - Ryedale Show, Kirkbymoorside.
Contact: Mrs A Welham 01652 697820 or
download entry form at www.ryedaleshow.org.uk
Entries close 4 July
Judge proposed: Jeff Dowey.

18 Aug - Mottram Show, Mottram, near Glossop.
Contact: Angela Oldham 0161 351 1263.
Judge: Tessa Wigham

Mon 26 Aug - Hope Show. Champion of Champions follows regular WFW classes.
www.hopeshow.org.uk. Contact:
jane.dalton@lineone.net or Mrs H Morris: 01663 750318, hope.morris1@btinternet.com Entries close 15 August
Judges: Craig Bradbury; Martin Warburton (Championship)

31 Aug – Bilsdale Show Contact: Mr G A Allison 01439 798295. Entries close 15 August.
Judge: Rob Ford

14 Sept - Penistone Show. Contact: Mrs Earnshaw 01484 766542.
Judge: Neville Belfield.

22 Sept - Hayfield Country Show, High Peak.
Contact: Sarah Mellor 01663 746580 or
sarah.mellor4@btopenworld.com.
Judge Harold Smith

Sales in 2013

31 Aug - Rare Breeds Show & Sale at Skipton.
Craven Cattle Marts: 01756 792375.
www.ccmauctions.com

13-14 Sept - National (RBST) Show & Sale. Sale on Saturday for CFB registered stock. Melton Mowbray Market: 01664 562971.
www.meltonmowbraymarkets.co.uk

21 Sep - Show & Sale of Rare & Minority Breeds at Carlisle. Entries close 12 August. Harrison & Hetherington : 01228 640924 www.livestock-sales.co.uk

28 Sept - Annual Whitefaced Woodland Show and Sale at Bretton Mill, near Barnsley. Contact Paul Dixon at William Sykes 01484 683543.

4-5 Oct - Show & Sale of Rare & Minority Breeds York Livestock Centre 01904 489731
www.ylc.co.uk Entries close 28 August

Stock for Sale

Hazel Hindmarch has for sale: 6 ewes in lamb to White House Supremacy. These are large hardy ewes that would make an ideal starter flock. Also two shearlings, not related to the above tup. Any questions, just call 01388 527119 or 07710 463412 (Crook, Co.Durham) or e-mail roland.hindmarch@btinternet.com

Fiona Hunt, Livestock Manager at Hatfield Park in Hertfordshire may have a small starter flock of woodys for sale. She writes “I have ewes with lambs at foot as well as an unrelated ram (sire of lambs). The ram is not for a novice handler, but does throw really nice lambs! The adult sheep are all registered. The flock is currently at Hatfield Park Farm Herts, an open farm attraction.”
Contact details are: 01707 287006,
mobile 07867 524783

And now for something completely different...

THE ALMOST COMPLETE AND UTTER HISTORY OF SHEEP AND MAN

PART 2: Why domesticate sheep?

11,000 years ago, at the dawn of agriculture, our ancient ancestors enjoyed a rich and varied diet as they hunted a cornucopia of game through a virgin landscape, so why is it that they chose to domesticate only a handful of the wild creatures that they found there and not others?

Livestock farming in the UK today is dominated by farming cattle, sheep, pigs and chickens, with smaller numbers of goats, deer, wild boar, ducks, turkeys, geese, salmon and trout also being farmed. Occasionally there are outbreaks of attempts to economically farm other species such as rabbits, quail, snails, alpaca and ostriches, but we keep going back to the same basic four species that dominate the market. So why is that?

In many parts of Asia, elephants have been domesticated to become great engines of war (for example the Persian Empire used elephants against Alexander the Great in 331 BC at the battle of Gaugamela and he was so impressed that he then used them himself in wars against other Asian peoples) or beasts of burden as in India and Thailand even today, and yet there is little evidence to suggest that they were ever farmed as a food source. The fact is that northern nomadic hunters slaughtered woolly mammoths into total extinction for food, so be under no illusion, elephant and mammoth is edible, so why is it then that they were never farmed for their meat?

ML Ryder¹ speculates that it is the biology of the sheep that made it a suitable candidate for domestication. Indeed the biology of our domesticated species as we know them today does make them convenient subjects for domestication and I shall discuss this later, but this is not the whole reason, I suggest that other factors have had a far bigger influence.



“Gort do we really need ‘em halter training?”

Opportunity

Archaeologists have found the earliest remains of simple livestock farming in the area known as the Green Crescent in the Middle East around what is now Northern Iraq, Iran and Southern Turkey and it is from this area that we now assume all livestock farming evolved.

¹ ML Ryder 1983 “Sheep and Man” Duckworth publishing

11,000 years ago this environment would have had wild forms of sheep, cattle and pigs present but probably not mammoths. Had mammoths been there, they might have been farmed and who knows, today we might have farmed mammoths too!

So I suggest that we farm sheep because they were available to these early farming pioneers and they just didn't have the opportunity to farm mammoths.

It is easy to be flip and assume that farming something like a mammoth would have been too dangerous when we think of modern cattle, sheep and pig breeds, but these species as we now know them, did not exist then, they are products of human breeding, the species our ancestors had to deal with were aurochs a giant wild cow, mouflon or wild sheep with huge horns and wild boars. I don't expect any of these wild species were a picnic to domesticate either!



"Okay punk, I'm ready for shearing, are you?"

Culture

Anyone who has ever had to shear a fully-grown Whitefaced Woodland tup will know that sheep can be quite a handful, and yet no one has ever tried to breed battle sheep! On the other hand elephants can be very gentle and docile creatures that can be trained so why not rear them for meat? Clearly a violent bull elephant can do a lot more damage than an angry ram!

So animals were obviously assigned roles that fitted their perceived uses. This then became a cultural thing, with humans farming one species for food and keeping another for other purposes in a different country.

A good example of the cultural use of animals is that of the horse; here in the UK horses are kept almost exclusively as beasts of burden, whereas just across the sea in Western Europe horses are also bred to eat.

In Scandinavian countries reindeer are farmed extensively. Ryder shows that reindeer were actually one of the very first mammals that were domesticated and farmed by tribes in northern parts of Europe and Asia, tribes that did in fact have access to mammoths as the Ice Cap moved back following the last Ice Age, but these tribes also had access to wild sheep species that were also following the receding ice. This then would seem to contradict my previous assertion that mammoths were not farmed because there was not the opportunity to do so, however mammoths were already very endangered, possibly even extinct in many parts by the time mankind first started to develop farming techniques.

Convenience

Farming, as an idea, is not one that suddenly started all over the world at different locations at the same time; it is one that started in the Middle East and spread out slowly around the world with the passage of people as they took their ideas with them. People probably travelled with their animals and took these domesticated animals with them to new countries. As such there is the distinct possibility that new cultures meeting the whole concept for the first time, simply adopted the tame animals that they met, because it was convenient to do so. Farming already tame sheep was more convenient than domesticating new species. I shall return to this theme at a later date, but first I shall consider the biology of sheep in my next article on the history of sheep farming and why this particular species is well adapted to the life of domesticated animal.

Philip Onions 20/11/12

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