

After a couple of weeks without our regular newsletter (due to technical difficulties, as the old saying goes), we are back. So, here is an update on the lambing season.

Yesterday, a black Icelandic ewe provided the last entry in our lambing record for this spring. Ása, one of the few named ewes in our flock, and one of three black ewes awash in a sea of white, gave birth to a big, curly white ewe lamb. One ewe is still without a lamb, but it is evident that if she is going to give birth to an offspring this year, it will be during the summer on the pasture.

So, now I can begin to look at our lambing records a little closer as I enter them in the permanent flock book. The first lambs were born on March 20th, and by the 30th of that month, half of the ewes had their babies by their sides. Ninety per cent of the ewes were bred during the first heat cycle, and only a few stragglers went much longer. There were seventy-four pairs of twins, fourteen sets of triplets, and one set of quadruplets. The rest were single lambs.

Not all lambs survive, of course, but our losses this year were minimal. That does not mean that every lamb that looks healthy and strong now will survive the summer. Things happen. Lambs can get sick, have accidents, or consume something that is toxic to them. But, most of them, we hope and expect, will grow and thrive on the meadow grasses and forbs on the pasture paddocks here.

Of the 220 lambs that are in the lambing barn now, waiting for a little break in the weather before facing the elements, about forty are tagged as potential ewe lambs to keep in the flock. We will not keep all of them, but they are the ones that looked the best when we docked tails on all of the lambs and castrated the boys. This told us that those ewe lambs had mothers that were milking well.

All of our lambs have tags in their ears—wether lambs are tagged in the right ears, ewes in the left. These tags are required when we sell our stock. They identify the farm from which the livestock came. In the right ear of each ewe lamb we keep for breeding stock, we have an additional tag, colored to correspond with the year. This year, 2017, the tags are green. We number them ourselves with a permanent black tag marker, beginning with 17-1, and on through as many numbers as we need. The color coding helps us identify ewes in the flock by age precisely and easily. It also makes it easy to look in our flock book to see her ancestors and to keep track of her lambing statistics.

The month of April always flies by for us. When we spend so much time in the lambing barn, taking care of new lambs, feeding, bedding, watering, docking, castrating, vaccinating, dealing with the occasional illness, lameness, or other problem, we are not always aware of passing days and weeks. Everything flows together in one seemingly unending stream. Then, we look up, and grass is green, spring flowers are blooming, and we realize that the season has changed while we have been preoccupied with the daily work of the lambing season.