

Lambing season is winding down here on Coe Creek. About twenty ewes are still without lambs, and it looks as if four or five of them will not have lambs. If they don't, we will sell them in the spring.

There are about 215 babies in the lambing quarters now. Most of them have spent only a couple of days in individual "jugs"—what we call the small pens for the ewes and their new offspring. Then, they move to "mixing pens" where they become accustomed to life in a group setting. There is a lot of bleating for the first few hours after they are moved from their private quarters—mostly lamb noise; the mothers have gone through this year after year. But, soon, they youngsters find that communal life is a lot more interesting than they might have guessed. It is not long before gangs of lambs run full length of the pens, turning and dashing back the other way. They find that it is fun to have many playmates and a larger arena for their activities.

We have a lot of triplets this year. We prefer twins, and some ewes, especially the first time lambers, do best with just one lamb each. But, triplets come anyway. Sometimes, we are lucky and successfully graft a triplet to a ewe that has just given birth to a single lamb. When these adoptions work, it lessens our labor with triplets. We had one set of quadruplets this year, as well, and we were fortunate to have a single lamb born about the same time. That adoption worked perfectly.

We are vigilant at lambing time. There can be problems for ewes giving birth that requires human assistance, but that is not the major difficulty. We like to be in the barn when lambs are born or shortly after to divert the "stealers." There are always ewes that have not yet had their lambs that seem to think it is preferable just to take some other sheep's lamb. This often happens when a ewe has had one lamb and is occupied in birthing its twin. While she is busy, her lively firstborn may wander to another area of the pen, and if there is a ewe there that is so inclined, that sheep may begin licking the lamb, the first step in bonding it to herself instead of its rightful mother. Since the "stealer" hasn't had a lamb yet, and may not for several days, this can be a problem. So, if we are in the barn, we can move the new lambs and their mother to the alleyway between the large pens and the individual jugs. Ewes that are lambing for the first time are often vulnerable; they haven't yet learned to keep their lambs close and butt away other sheep.

It is interesting to see an experienced ewe use her skill to establish her territory in the pen. Often, one will see all the other ewes in a pen at one end of the area while she has the other half to herself. This happens only shortly before she has her lambs. Other than just prior to giving birth, the sheep maintain friendly, or at least, neutral relationships most of the time. There are times, though, not necessarily just in the lambing barn, when two ewes have some unexplained controversy that leads to fighting each other with mild blows—not like the rams, but certainly having some meaning. It is interesting to occasionally see another ewe intervene—does she want to stop the argument, or is she just taking

sides?

With this snowy, cold mid April, we are waiting and hoping for warmer temperatures that will allow the snow and ice to melt, the ground to thaw, and the grass to start. We need to have our flock on pasture by the end of the first week in May, a date that is approaching all too rapidly. In the meantime, we will dock the young lambs, castrate the ram lambs, and give vaccinations.

