

On this last day of April, we have just one ewe left to have her lambs. It has been a rather odd lambing season in some respects. We had the first lambs on March 23rd, a couple of days before our estimate of the earliest births. One ewe had given birth to too-early triplets a couple of days before, and they were stillborn. But, after that, we had only two lambs that were born dead, plus two that were euthanized due to birth defects that prohibited them from eating. Other than that, all of the lambs were born healthy. Too many of them were triplets. Over 20 per cent of our ewes had three lambs each, not a habit that we wish to encourage. We like twins and the occasional single lamb—less work for the shepherds.

The lambing usually dwindles, many ewes having their lambs in a day diminishing to three or four, then to two, and finally, one. This year has been an exception in that regard, too. It was full speed ahead birthing until the 11th of April. Then, it stopped. Abruptly. We had no more lambs for six days, although we still had about ten ewes who had not given birth.

Then, all of a sudden, four ewes had their lambs in a three hour period. The next day, two more. After that, there was a lull again, not unusual with just two ewes left. Yesterday, little Icelandic Fina had twin buck lambs. Now, there is just Åsa left. It will be interesting to see how long she makes us wait for that final lamb.

We have the docking and castrating finished on all but the smallest lambs—the 13 that have come in this “second lambing.” All have paint marks to make them easier to identify if they wander from their mothers. All have ear tags, too, a requirement for selling livestock, and necessary for record keeping here on the farm.

The next step is a waiting period for a little more green grass. This spring has not been an early one, a disappointment following a winter when most livestock raisers have had to ration hay after last summer’s dry period. So we are hoping for a nice, warm rain and some sunshine to turn the pastures to emerald.

We will give the ewes medication for combating parasites before we turn them out, and then, a pen at a time, the ewes will return to pasture, and the lambs will learn what grass and forbs taste like. And, they will spring into action, hundreds at a time, in long and enthusiastic races back and forth across the meadows.

And, we shepherds, beginning to recover from sleepless nights and busy days, will regain the energy to tackle the other tasks that lie before us. Runo is hooking up the manure spreader to begin to cover the hayfields and garden with well-composted animal wastes. And I am heading, once again, to the greenhouse. This time, I hope to get some spinach seeds planted. One busy season slides into the next—equally busy—and the variety that is farm life keeps our interest high, even when our lids droop after a long day outside.