

I could have said “Happy New Year” yesterday, but it wouldn’t have made sense to most folks. But, if I used those words this time of year to a sheep raiser who lambled in late March and April, the term would be perfectly understandable.

The day that the rams join the ewes without fences between signifies a new year for those of us who tend our flocks. Approximately five months from that day lambing season will be underway.

We started yesterday by sorting out some year and a half old ewes that would join others of their age group with Ghost, the Clun Forest ram we recently bought. Half of the replacement yearlings had spent May/October at “summer camp” in the Leelanau Peninsula north of us. Friends have borrowed young ewes two summers now for “soil building,” something sheep are particularly suited for. Their little hooves open the soil, their manure and urine fertilize it, and, managed correctly, they improve soil rather than deplete it as the old westerns of cattle vs. sheep ranching days portrayed. Now that the vacationing yearlings were at home, in the sheep shed with Ghost, they welcomed the reunion with their old friends.

After sorting out this group of young ewes, we ran the flock through the chute again and hazed out the spring ewe lambs that we kept as replacement ewes. These we confined in a pasture close to the barn. We will not breed them, so they have no ram to keep them company.

Then, we gave worm medicine to the mature ewes—sometimes, though not this time, using the substance that many misguided individuals are using for “Covid prevention”. Runo’s comment on hearing about some person taking ivermectin was, “Maybe she was wormy.”

Finally, we divided up the ewes, each group going to a pasture with a ram. So, we helped set in motion what Nature had already made evident in the sheep flock, with ewes and rams eyeing each other longingly over two fences and a barn lot. In late March we will begin to see what the results of these matings will be. And, as we trudge to the barn in the middle of the night, we may wonder what we have wrought.

We devoured an audio book this past week. Well, sort of. The book was printed and very new, and we both wanted to read it, so, to avoid nearly grabbing the book from each other’s hands, we had three sessions of “out loud reading” by me. The final marathon stretch covered over 200 pages in one afternoon. It was worth it. If you are a reader, you might like *State of Terror*, the new political thriller by Lousie Penny and Hilary Clinton—yes, they collaborated on this book. You won’t be disappointed.