

The ewes are all shorn, and later today we will tackle the bucks. They are much bigger than we are, so it may be an actual “tackle.” But, there are only five of them, so we want to get their wool packed with the rest instead of waiting to shear them later. And, then, too, I can wash our shearing clothes.

We expect to have a little break between shearing and lambing, hopefully, at least a week. But, we will see. When that first little “maaa” from a lamb or the peculiar maternal chuckle from a ewe greets us when we enter the hay barn, we will know that the trickle of births has begun and will swell into a torrent before tapering off a couple of weeks later. The whole procedure goes pretty quickly, since we have plenty of “ram power.” We usually have most of our lambs during a 17 day period that corresponds to the first heat cycle of the ewes five months before.

After a period of relatively mild, benign winter weather, we had a cold, stormy weekend, and that, we have discovered, is usually what occurs as we approach lambing season. Or, at least, it seems that way. Such times are, I suppose, much more easily remembered than a nice, mild spell of weather. Someone we know once said that climate change seems to have given our area easier winters and beautiful falls and, this time of year, springs from hell. That seems to have been the case during many years.

One of the most memorable lambing seasons I recall was particularly notable for something that had nothing to do with our sheep flock. In 1997, I went to the barn every morning at 4 a.m. to check for new lambs and feed pets. Runo had the night shift in those years. The Hale-Bopp comet was brilliant all that spring, shining like a beacon in the northeast. I don't recall anything special about the sheep flock or the new lambs from that year, but the the picture of that lovely comet is still as clear in my mind as if it had appeared yesterday.

As a new lambing season rapidly approaches, we can't help but think of what it might entail. Some things will be the same as in every other spring. Most of the ewes will take good care of their lambs, a few will misguidedly believe they have given birth days and sometimes even a week or so before they actually drop their lambs. This will lead them into a period of lambnapping, trying to steal every newborn lamb that is in their own pen. If they succeed, it will be necessary to make the real mother “adopt” her own lamb, always a nuisance and sometimes an impossibility. That is the main

reason we check on the lambing barn as often as we do. If we are there when lambs are born or shortly after, we can move them and their mothers to individual pens where they will have time to bond and not be at the mercy of aggressive baby thieves.

That first lamb each spring is always a thrill. After that, it rapidly becomes just plain work—pleasant work, for the most part, to be sure—but basically, a job.