

While much in life changes from day to day, week to week, season to season, and year to year, a lot also remains the same. And so it is with lambing season. We don't have as many sheep as we had when we were younger, but there are enough to give us very full days and a little night work, too. Seventy-some ewes will lamb this spring, and we knew we might have the first lamb as early as March 22. Usually, a few early lambs are born, but the birthing that begins as a trickle turns into a steady stream before slowing to a trickle again toward the end of the season. This year, though, so far, the trickle was nonexistent. We did have only one lamb that first day, but now, just about half way through the 17 day period that corresponds to the ewe heat cycle, we have had almost two thirds of the new lambs.

But, we will not complain. So far, the lambs have been healthy and the ewes have given birth with few complications. Less work for the shepherd is not something to take lightly. It makes life a lot easier, especially when there are other non-sheep tasks waiting.

And, as always, it is interesting to see the variations in markings from these crossbred sheep. The mothers are either Polypay/Dorsets—all white, or crossbred ewes with some Clun Forest blood. Those ewes have dark or spotted faces. Now, there are even more variations in the markings of their lambs.

So far, we have just one black lamb this year. A black ewe with some Icelandic blood had twins, as usual. And, as in most years, her lambs look nothing at all alike. One is completely black. The other has white wool, but has a dark face and legs—similar to other lambs with Clun Forest heritage.

We have moved the older (one week is “older” this time of year!) lambs with their mothers to what we call “mixing pens.” For the first couple of days after lambing, each ewe has a private pen where she can bond with her lamb without interference from other sheep. Once that has occurred and the lambs are eating well and filling out, they need to learn to live in a flock. And, we also need the small pens for the new arrivals. In addition, it saves the shepherd work to have the ewes and lambs in larger communal quarters.

Besides, the lambs in the mixing pens learn to socialize. Already, after only a couple of days in the big pens, the lambs are getting together to play. It is fun to watch. One lamb will start the game, running from one end of the pen to the other, then turning and running back, probably picking up a companion along the way. Two soon become three or four, and before long, all the lambs in that pen are running back and forth, tails flying. Watching young animals at play never gets tiresome.

Looking through my uncle Albert's diary of 1968-72, it is easy to see why he never gave up the sheep flock. Over eighty years old and troubled greatly by arthritis, he and Mabel managed to care for the small flock of Corriedale ewes and lambs that were their main interest in life. And as I read about Woo, Becky, Nub, and others and see the careful recording of their yearly lambing, I realize how important meaningful work is in the lives of most of us. And so, we might be tired after the intensity of lambing season, but we, like Albert and Mabel, will probably never give up this flock of sheep. The seventy-five ewes we have now may dwindle as the years go on, but if we are able, we will yawn our way through many more lambing seasons.