

SHROPTALK



The Newsletter of the Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association

Winter 2020



Season's Greetings to all our Members!

Apiary Janet, bred by Jan and Charles Morris, owners of the Apiary Flock (XA) based in Stoney Stretton, Shropshire.

NEWS FROM THE AGM AND AUTUMN COUNCIL MEETING

THE Breed Society held its first ever "virtual" Annual General Meeting on 28th November. In order to comply with Covid 19 restrictions, proceedings had to take place on-line, with members watching on their computer screens or dialling in by phone. Despite the difficulties, 27 people participated and all the usual agenda items were covered, apart from the presentation of show points trophies.

Reflecting on an extraordinary year, President Alison Schofield reported that the SSBA had risen to the challenges created by the pandemic. In fact many big projects had been completed on behalf of Shropshire breeders during 2020:

The SSBA's website had been revamped to provide a much more professional presence and a better "shop window" for our breed. She thanked Peter Geddes for project managing the improvements, which included

introducing new Society email addresses for some of the key officers.

The Society has also been partnering with the on-line stock sales site **Sell My Livestock**. This website has now become the main method of selling Shropshires. Thanks to Claire Jakeman, we now have our own portal, just selling pedigree sheep from members of the Society and a link to this from our own website.

Work has also been underway to formalise all the job descriptions of Council Members and Officers together with compiling a list of all society documentation and archives with locations and ownership. This is something that Alison had undertaken and it is 99% there.

The biggest project of all has to be **BREXIT** and what happens to the SSBA after 31st December. We are in the first tranche of breed societies to apply, through DEFRA to get Listed Country Status with the EU. This will

Continued over-page/...

IMPORTANT RULE CHANGE

FROM 1st January 2021, the Breed Society will alter its rules for lamb Birth Notifications. This will affect ALL members who are breeding sheep, so please make sure you take the changes on board:

Under the new rules, Birth Notifications made on or before 30th June each year (for the current season's lamb crop) will remain **FREE OF CHARGE**.

However, there will now be a charge of **£6/head** for late Birth Notifications made from 1st July until 31st December.

Very late Birth Notifications, applied for after the 31st December of the year in which the lambs were born, will be allowed only at the Registrar's discretion. They will be considered individually on a case-by-case basis. If allowed, they will be charged at **£20/head**.

As before, only sheep that have been Birth Notified can be fully Pedigree Registered with the Breed Society.

"It is vital that breeders Birth Notify their lambs promptly after lambing, so that the breed society can verify their records, in line with the requirements of a pedigree flock book society," explains the Society's Registrar, Alison Schofield.

"Unfortunately, an increasing number of breeders have been failing to Birth Notify lambs before trying to Register them. Members must follow the Society's rules properly, and the charges have been brought in to encourage compliance.

"Having looked at the pattern of lambing within the Society, we know that only one flock lambed in June last year. All the rest produced their lambs earlier in the year.

"This means that everyone has the opportunity to comply with the Society's rules without having to pay the new charges.

"Many other breed societies charge for all Birth Notifications, at whatever time of year they are made.

"There will still be no charge for SSBA Birth Notifications, if members send them in during the first half of the year."

AWARD WINNERS AT THE AGM

Long Service Awards



GOLD AWARD - breeding Shropshires for 30 years:

Marshall and West, Orchard Flock (flock letters HJ)



SILVER AWARD (25 years) – none this year



BRONZE AWARD (20 years)

Barry Hodson, Southworth Flock (MM)

**Peter Tavernor, Shebdon Flock (MR)
Anne Harvey, Roydon Flock (MY)**

Congratulations to these breeders, who will receive framed certificates from the breed society to mark their achievements.

Sansaw Sidedowns Most Prolific Ewe Award

This award recognises the living female that has the highest number of registered progeny. This year the winner is 024LU07 (“Dolly”). She is owned by Mark and Yvette Openshaw (Holtridge Flock) and was bred by Peter and Pippa Geddes (Alderton). Dolly has produced 12 registered progeny.

There were also three runners up that each have 11 registered progeny: 016KD05 – owned by the Turnock Family and bred by Claire Jakeman (Morley); 0610PR00015 owned by David Kelly and Anita Kirkpatrick; and RH1044B – owned and bred by the Turnock family;

This is the third time that Dolly has won the award. Her owners will receive a cheque for £25 and the Hardwicke Trophy to keep for a year.



Dolly, pictured a couple of years ago, with Yvette Openshaw.

enable us to export pedigree stock for breeding to the EU.

The rules governing the way the country exports live animals to the EU are changing. It seems paperwork is doubling and there will be limits on which ports will accept live animals. Export Officer, Sue Farquhar, is keeping abreast of this and will let us know what the changes are.

EUROPEAN SHEEP REGISTRATIONS

The biggest BREXIT change for us as a Society, is currently ongoing: We will no longer be able to register any sheep from the EU as a Zootechnical Society. We currently have registering members in Belgium, France, Spain and Eire. We have registered sheep in Eire since the partition of Ireland in 1921, so this is a huge wrench for us. The way this is all going to work in the future is being worked out and overseas members will be receiving correspondence from the Society very soon with a way forward.

EAR TAGGING POST BREXIT

Ear tagging requirements will also change from 1st January. It looks as though sheep born before the end of 2020 and destined for live export from England, Scotland and Wales will have to have a new, additional GB management tag. Sheep from the same countries born in 2021 and destined for live export will need a matching pair of GB tags including an EID tag. See diagram above.

This diagram, supplied by DEFRA, is an interim solution and, at the time of writing, rules for Northern Ireland have yet to be confirmed. DEFRA is in communication with ear tag manufacturers, who are able to

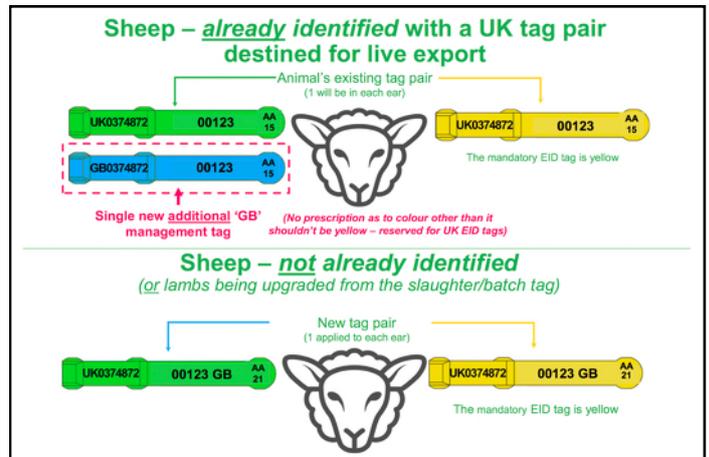
advise individual breeders what the current rules are. The SSBA suggests that breeders liaise direct with their tag suppliers. Please ensure that your Shropshire Society Flock Letters and year of birth are also on the tags.

Alison concluded her report by thanking the Officers and Council Members who have helped to keep the Society on an even keel in these strange times.

“Agriculture will be undergoing huge changes over the next few years, from new grants and subsidies to the focus on the environment, all of which will present new challenges and opportunities to Shropshire sheep breeders. The unique grazing attributes of our sheep has already seen increasing sales in this country with many flocks being formed to graze within tree plantations. Long may it continue.”

SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

The Secretary, Simon Mackay, reported that the Society had received 51 new membership



applications this year. He thanked all members that had been involved in selling sheep this year to make this possible.

The SSBA now has 294 Members and the breakdown is as follows:

- Members within the UK & Eire: 261**
- Overseas members registering sheep: 9**
- Junior members: 16**
- Overseas members (not registering sheep): 7**
- Associate members: 1**

Looking ahead to 2021, Simon reported that agricultural show societies were planning their events, but predicted that some were likely to be different and smaller.

For example the Royal Three Counties had just announced that it will not have any undercover facilities available, which would reduce the numbers of entries and visitors. No prize money would be on offer and all entries would be on-line with only a digital catalogue and brochure available.

Simon also particularly thanked the lady behind the scenes that not many people have met, although she deals with numerous emails and completed forms from SSBA Members - Ruth Mawer the ‘Registrations Clerk’.

NEWS FROM AGM AND AUTUMN COUNCIL MEETING

SOCIETY FINANCES

THE SSBA's treasurer, Marion Webb, reported that income had increased for the year to the end of August, with annual subscriptions rising by £1,100 due to the growing membership.

More sheep were registered too, increasing income to the SSBA by £2,000. With more members came an increase in expenditure on items such as printing and postage. More had been spent on the website too, for an essential upgrade.

Overall, the Society had made a profit of £6,627. The figure would not have been as high if 2020 had been a normal year. With the pandemic restrictions, the SSBA had a much reduced spend on items such as show expenses and travel.

NEWS FROM THE AUTUMN COUNCIL MEETING

FOUR breeders left the Council, having completed their three-year terms: Liz Bowles, Rob Kerby, Trevor Lightfoot and Peter Tavernor. President Alison Schofield

thanked them all for their valued contributions.

Anne Harvey and Rosie Lee had been nominated to come onto Council as voting members - and they were duly elected. Alison Schofield was elected as President for another 12 months. Rob Kerby was appointed onto Council as Vice President, in accordance with the Society's Memorandum and Articles of Association.

Most Officers agreed to continue in their present roles. There are, however, a few changes:

The job of Publicity Officer will now be split between Claire Jakeman and Harvey Clay.

Rosie Lee will shadow Claire in her role assisting the breeders who are taking part in Society Exports, with a view to taking over this role in a year's time.

Trevor Lightfoot agreed to remain as the Society's debt collector.

Adrian Norton, previously our Irish Co-ordinator, has agreed to become the Society's European Co-ordinator - a new role that will become increasingly important after BREXIT.

2021 WALL CALENDARS

CALENDARS featuring pictures of Shropshire sheep from members' flocks have been produced by the Society. Each Flock will receive a complimentary copy. There are a few surplus ones for sale - please contact breed society Secretary, Simon Mackay, for details. Production was coordinated by Pippa Geddes, with Claire Jakeman and Alison Schofield assisting with the selection of images. The SSBA would like to thank everyone who submitted pictures - it was difficult to choose. Here are a few nice shots that didn't quite make it into the calendar, but we thought our members would like to see them anyway!



Upper House Flock



Finepines Flock



Above: Sewand Flock

100 CLUB WINNERS

TWO draws for the 100 Club were made at the Society's AGM. The winners of the first draw were:

Peter Tavernor (winning £48), and Oliver Holdaway (winning £32)

The winners of the second draw were:

Robert Webb (winning £48) and Heard and Manford (winning £32).

EXPORT PRICES FOR 2021

AT the October Council Meeting, the following prices were set for next year's exports:

Ewe Lambs: £230 for animals with an unspecified Scrapie Genotype, and £280 for those with R1 (ARR/ARR) Genotype;

Shearling Ewes: £300 (unspecified Scrapie Genotype) and £350 for R1 Genotype;

Ram lambs: £450 (unspecified Genotype) and £500 for R1 Genotype;

Shearling rams: £550 (unspecified Genotype) and £650 for R1 Genotype. For more information about exports, contact Claire Jakeman 07766 238346 or Sue Farquhar 01531 670439.



A ewe from the Millenheath Flock, owned by Jeanette and Robert Hares, is having her "Fifteen Minutes of Fame"! She features in the current advert for Dallas Keith High Energy Tubs.

SHROPTALK

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Check out our Facebook page:
"Friends of Shropshire Sheep"

NSA: Your voice for sheep farming matters

THE National Sheep Association (NSA) is an organisation that represents the views and interests of sheep producers throughout the UK. It is funded by its membership of sheep farmers and its activities involve it in every aspect of the sheep industry with both pedigree and non-pedigree, commercial flocks, and smallholders all at the centre of its work.

At this time of uncertainty for the UK sheep industry NSA is working harder than ever to ensure the sector is best placed to cope with the challenges that may come our way following the UK's departure from the EU. As well as this important work NSA works tirelessly on long standing challenges and opportunities, promoting sheep health and the role of sheep meat in a healthy diet, and supporting and encouraging the industry's next generation onto the sheep farming ladder.

NSA believes the highly distinct nature of the UK's sheep sector, with rich breed diversity and high welfare production methods is something to be proud of and firmly believes this is an asset the industry should be promoting to a population that increasingly is asking for produce with good environmental, animal welfare and people credentials.

As well as acting as a voice for the sector to policy makers, consumers and more, NSA's vision is also for the people involved in keeping sheep being enthusiastic, knowledgeable and aspiring to best practice and for that reason NSA encourages you to consider becoming a member today. The wide range of benefits available to members include: Sheep Farmer Magazine, published 6 times a year with the latest news and technical information

Weekly Email updates about what is happening in the sheep sector

Free legal helpline offering 30 minutes free legal advice to help members businesses

Free or discounted entry to NSA regional and national Sheep events

Opportunity to sell pedigree breeding stock at NSA ram sales

Use of the NSA lambing list service, providing help at lambing time

Regional meetings, a diverse range of farm walks, meetings etc

With so much work to be done to secure a positive future for the UK sheep industry there has never been a better time to join the association or to visit one of the NSA events that it is hoped will be able to take place in 2021. For information on how to subscribe to NSA membership please visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership or call 01684 892661.

THE EXPORT EXPERIENCE

WHAT a year to be invited to join the breeders exporting on behalf of SSBA. At 52 years new experiences get few and far between. But I so wanted to share it with you all.

I was so thrilled, excited and very nervous, a new challenge, a real step up for me and my flock. I didn't need to be nervous, the inspectors, export officers and other breeders who have done this before were all there to support and offer advice.

First of all buyers come forward with their orders - it is like a shopping list. Vendors who opt to be part of the export providers are in system of rotation answer the call. At this point for me the journey had begun.

Next stage "selection". It was wonderful to spend the day accessing and learning about my flock. I enjoyed the process so much. I thrive on learning and being able to discuss my sheep.



This gives the inspectors a full picture of what the flock has to offer to the order and any other that may come in later in the year. The selected animals go under watch, separated but under watch alongside of the rest of the flock.

The dates begin to be communicated: deadlines for vet visits; preparation to present the best version of our breed begins, medications are factored in to the timetable. The National Covid-19 lockdown actually meant the sheep were getting better beauty treatments than me: haircuts, hooves manicured and bottoms trimmed.

Dates change due to haulage requests. This is all managed from a central point - everybody rallies to the



changes. Lockdown was affecting the waistlines of everyone - the sheep were on the scales to ensure they weigh in for the journey. The vets are put on standby for health inspections.

Thinking about these animals departing to new foreign pastures absolutely thrilled me. The commitment of our Export Officers and inspectors is representative of their passion for Shropshires and the reputation of the Society. The buyers trust them to ensure that the very best of the breed leaves these shores to continue to excel as breeding stock wherever the Global destination may be.

The departure day arrives we set off on the next part of 2020 adventure to deliver them to the holding centre. To see the sheep all coming together ready to be collected was amazing looking at these wonderful sheep all ready. So you may think it was time to breathe a sigh of relief for me as this year's supply had been fulfilled. However, further orders were still coming in. This has made me start planning even earlier for next year should the opportunity to do it all again come around with even more enthusiasm. If things return to the new normal then I want to involve the junior breeders.

Rosie Lee





SHROPSHIRE AND CHRISTMAS TREES



We were introduced to the idea of keeping Shropshire Sheep through the British Christmas Tree Growers Association (BCTGA). This was back in 2012 when our tree crops were relatively young and required a fair bit of maintenance work in terms of grass and weed control using mowers and strimmers.

With living in Wales in the Cambrian Mountains this was proving to be a challenge with the wet weather conditions.

After more research we decided to try the Shropshire Sheep and introduced 30 ewes to the plantation. We had to brush up on our shepherding skills and monitor grazing and get familiar to keeping livestock again.

The Shropshires have become part of our lives now with roughly a 80 head flock, rewarding us with great lambs and being a valuable asset to our tree business.

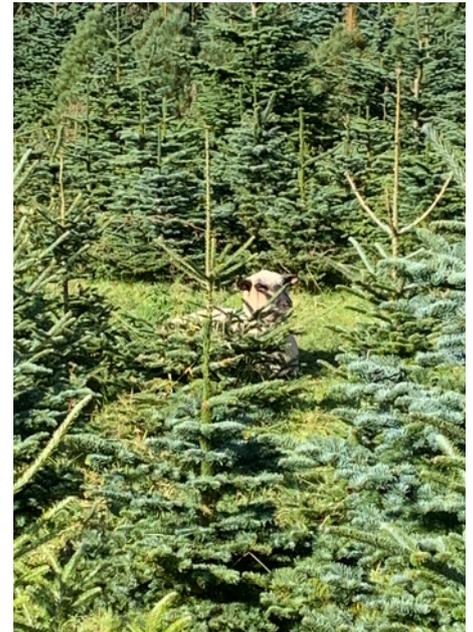


It is something Jane and myself enjoy and we never stop learning from them, with their lovely nature. Lambing can be tough but rewarding.

The sheep are brought into the barns on the yard just as we start the Christmas Tree Harvest, in order to free the fields up for the staff to have easy access and for the safety of the sheep. The sheep will remain inside until after lambing.

We sell small flocks, specialising in plantations up and down the country introducing them to the Shropshire Sheep Society. We have met so many friendly members and helpful contacts this way.

Adam Lionel and Jane Evans,
Cambrian Flock
Cambrian Trees
Ysbyty Ystwyth



Cambrian Trees is a family run business set in the Cambrian Mountains. It has around 100 acres of land growing up to 200,000 trees including Norway Spruce, Nordman Fir, Fraser Fir and Scotch Pine. The business supplies the wholesale and retail trade.

www.cambriantrees.co.uk

For more information about how to manage Shropshire Sheep in tree plantations of many kinds, download the free guide **“Two Crops From One Acre”** from the Publications and Forms page of the SSBA’s Website:

www.shropshire-sheep.co.uk





SHROPSHIRE IN CHRISTMAS TREES AND WOODLAND



My name is Gavin Hogg, I originally trained as an arborist, and have always had a deep love for the countryside and conservation issues. I have lived at Penpont, a 2000 acre estate in the heart of the Brecon Beacons National Park, for 30 years now. It has been in my wife's family since it was built in 1666. Since arriving we have been attempting to achieve a viable future for the estate, by diversifying into different revenue streams, through agriculture, forestry, tourism, growing organic fruit and vegetables, and other activities.

1. What made you decide to choose Shropshires?

I had heard about their ability to graze around and under Christmas trees and within orchards. I have been growing Christmas trees for nearly 30 years. I have always tried to be organic in my approach to growing them, but small trees invariably get swamped by grass and weeds, and ultimately, I had to resort to spot spraying with glyphosate. But this was not something that sat comfortably with me, so I decided to give Shropshire sheep a go.

2. Size of plantation?

It's about 2 acres, but the sheep also have access to a patch of mature woodland, which is about 1/2 acre.

3. What type of trees are they grazing in?

The plantation trees are all Norway Spruce, the traditional Christmas tree. The plantation is surrounded by mixed hedges, predominately hawthorn. The small woodland has Ash, Scots Pine, Cherry, Oak, Hazel.

4. How old are the trees?

Christmas trees vary from 2-year olds, when they are planted through to 25-year-old.

5. Do you move them to alternative grazing once the grass has gone?

So far, the grass has sustained them throughout the main season. I move them out in winter, because that is when we let the public into the plantation to cut their own trees. I have another paddock that has two horses in it, which is about 4 acres, and they part share it with the horses for the winter months.

6. Can they graze at any time of the year?

I was warned to keep them out when the trees flushed up in spring, but this year they have been in with the trees, and I have seen them browsing. It was suggested that if they had rock salt or a mineral lick, they would be happy and leave the trees alone, and that certainly seems to be the case.

7. Management of your land before you bought Shropshires?

I would mow the perimeter of the plantation weekly (it was part of the camp site) and spot spray the young trees once or twice a year depending on growth. I would then have to strim in between the trees at least twice a year - approx 2-man days a strim.



8. Handling ability (easy to manage)?

It was suggested that I should get them used to coming to a bucket rattling with sheep nuts in it... it didn't take long. They now come to a shout in expectation of a treat. If I am taking them from paddock to paddock, they will follow a bucket of nuts. I don't have a sheep dog, and try to avoid loading them into a trailer. They are big and heavy once mature, so you do have to have strength to handle them for shearing or dagging.

9. What size flock are you working towards?

I will probably keep the flock about the size it is. My life is busy enough, and they are here to perform a function, and hopefully provide some benefits over and above selective weeding. I was recommended around 3 ewes per acre, and certainly 6 ewes did the job perfectly.

10. Market for lambs?

To be explored. Ideally, I would like to sell some as stock for people who are interested in Shropshires who might like to graze them in amongst trees. I think we will have some killed for our freezer. What I don't know is whether or not I have bred a prize-winning ram lamb!

11. Do you feel it's been a cost-effective alternative to chemicals?

As a self-employed person, you forget to account for your time. If you just look at the capital costs it would take a few years to pay back, but when you start to look at the time benefits, I would say that they are a cost-effective alternative.

12. Do Shropshires fit in with your organic and eco plans for the estate?

Overall, yes, they represent a small part of a complex jigsaw. They have removed our need to use glyphosate in that area of business. They provide an interest to visitors to the estate, and a sustainable local source of meat and wool for us as a family. Above all they provide a service keeping the weeds down around the Christmas trees.

13. Are they doing the job you expected of them?

Yes, I have been very impressed by them. They have kept the grass down around the trees, and I have not experienced any wayward grazing, they even avoiding newly planted young stock.

14. Would you recommend them?

Yes, for people in a similar situation to me. As an exercise in small scale agroforestry, I can't fault them. It is necessary to have an alternative paddock to put them into when you need to, and a handling area, or a set of hurdles you can set up



Gavin and Davina Hogg, of the Penpont Estate, Brecon, Powys.
www.penpont.com

If you would like more information about the breed or are looking to purchase Shropshires, please contact the breed society's Sales Officer, Claire Jakeman, 07766 238346.

Shropshire sheep are also advertised on the website: www.sellmylivestock.co.uk. Buyers are advised to select only pedigree registered sheep to ensure that they are purebred.

JUNIOR MEMBERS NEWS

IN this strange world of lockdown and not being able to meet with fellow junior members, it is always good to share. So I thought I would let other juniors know what we get up to when preparing for our lambing season.

Well today has been a busy one at Gobbindale doing some pre lambing checks. This involved the treatment Hepatvac for our Dec/Jan lambers accompanied by vitamin / trace element boluses. This is a whole flock treatment to help make sure our ewes are in tiptop condition for lambing.

We also give our sheep flukicide as our ground is very wet and fluke is a problem that we have. This year we are vaccinating for scab as it very prolific this year according to NADIS. With all of the above we were assisted by the youngest member of Gobbindale Shropshires - Lexie.

Owen Powell



THE SHOWLE FLOCK IN 2020

MY name is George Clay, I live in Herefordshire working on the family dairy and sheep farm.

The sheep enterprise of 150 ewes comprises of Jacobs, my own Greyfaced Dartmoors and the Showle Flock of 130 pedigree Shropshire ewes, which was established in 2003. Over the years we have taken the sheep to many shows, and I have enjoyed taking part in various young handler competitions including being part of the Shropshire Young Shepherds and the Orchard Graziers teams in the National Young Stars competitions.

This year I had plans to take the sheep to several shows and meet up with friends after I finished college in June, but it could not happen.

Instead I focused on the main flock of ewes, culling unproductive ewes which had poor feet, legs, teeth, mothering ability and milk, to improve the commercial viability of the flock, reducing the overall number of breeding ewes which would give us more space at lambing time and increase the productivity of the flock in 2021.

We were fortunate that Hereford Market continued to operate throughout the year so we were able to sell our cull ewes, achieving a top price of £166 and averaging at £85 for the rest. I critically selected the lambs with

most going to Hereford Market at 40-49 kg. The best ewe lambs were retained for breeding, the top 25 being kept as flock replacements for ourselves, and the rest sold to start up 5 new flocks this year.

May and June were busy months as I sheared all our sheep, and then went on to shear two other small local Shropshire flocks as well as flocks of Rousin, Black Welsh Mountain, Blue Face Leicesters and Beltex all of which have their own challenges.

The money from sheep shearing I have invested in buying a dog to herd the sheep and cattle on the farm, reducing the need for help with an ageing work force, to help me get the job done quickly.

This autumn we got an inbreeding report for our flock, (thanks Alison Schofield for preparing it), which made dividing our ewes into tugging groups much easier as we could easily see which matings to avoid. With a big pedigree flocks it is hard to keep track of each sheep parentage, and over the years we have retained

some of our own rams to keep blood lines going while buying in rams to improve certain traits within the flock. The rams have all been hard at work, and it will soon be time to take them out, get the sheep scanned and prepare for lambing.

Let us hope that 2021 will be a better year for everyone.



BREED IMPROVEMENT SCHEME RESULTS 2020

THE Shropshire Breed Improvement Scheme completed its 14th season of Signet recording in 2020, with a total of 14 Flocks participating.



Still Number One: Stonegrove Archie

Stonegrove Archie retained his position as the top ranked ram for Terminal Sire Index for the 2nd year, as a result of his phenomenal genetic merit for growth and carcass traits. He actually increased his Terminal Sire index score by more than 50 points with the addition of records from the 2020 lamb crop. Archie will also be familiar to many breeders because he was breed champion at the SSBA's National Show and Sale in 2013 (pictured on the left as a shearling).

The top ten ranked stock sires used by SBIS flocks in 2019/2020 are shown on the right. The SBIS also evaluates Shropshires for Maternal Traits such as prolificacy, ease of lambing and rearing ability. Copies of all the Shropshire reports for this year can be downloaded from the "latest reports" section of the Signet website:

www.signetdata.com

The SBIS is open to new recruits at any time. Please contact Pippa Geddes for more details 01743 741689.

TOP STOCK SIRES & LAMBS (Ranked on Terminal Sire Index)

Top Stock Sires

1. Stonegrove Archie (348)
2. Ushers Austin (289)
3. = Ushers General (288)
3. = Ushers Duke (288)
5. Cefn-Carnau Endeavour (278)
6. Holloway Fred (277)
7. Ushers Griffon (274)
8. Hayne Oak Algy (271)
9. Alderton Mitchell (254)
10. Hayne Oak Sterling (245)

Top Ram Lambs Retained

1. Ushers Harry-Bob (330)
2. Ushers Hector (322)
3. Holloway Roy (309)
4. Alderton Major (269)
5. Cefn-Carnau Gandalf (267)
6. Ushers Hercules (260)
- 7.492 Cefn-Carnau (259)
8. 486 Cefn-Carnau (252)
9. Ushers Harry (249)
- 10.699 Holloway (247)

RAMCOMPARE UPDATE FOR SHROPSHIRES

TWO Shropshire rams with high genetic merit have been taking part in the National Trial. Here's an update on how the trial has progressed this year.

Adrian Coombe at Dupath Farm is located at Callington, in Cornwall. Using North of England Mule ewes, he has been pleased overall with his 2020 lamb crop. Lambing got off to a smooth start and early growth seemed impressive with the mild spring conditions.

Artificially inseminated (AI) ewes started lambing around 20th February, each AI sired group consisting of 30 ewes and progeny numbers for each sire group ranged from 26-37 lambs for these sire groups. Ushers Alexander KX13301 achieved a 53% conception rate, with just over half his ewes producing lambs, a total of 28 progeny reared from 35 born. Four other AI sires were used at Dupath farm in 2019 and achieved conception rates of 53%, 57%, 77% and 83%. Within this project we aim for a minimum of 60% to ensure enough lambs in the progeny groups to represent these rams and provide a fair test of their genetic performance. Even though three rams provided a slightly lower conception rate last season, progeny numbers and survival rates were good.

NATURAL SERVICE SIRES

The natural service sires, turned out the same day as AI, 5th October 2019, were allocated to single sire mating groups of 40 ewes. Hayne Oak LX171343 was one of five new natural service sires put on test. With three other rams used for a second season to provide linkage to previous years at Dupath Farm.

Within RamCompare, we aim for at least 40 progeny from each natural service ram, so this season we were delighted to have between 71 and 83 live lambs to monitor

from each sire. LX171343 produced 71 live lambs. Alongside the Shropshires, the other breeds on test at Dupath Farm are Charollais, Hampshire Down, Meatline, Suffolk and Texel.

SLAUGHTER LAMBS

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we were unable to ultrasound scan live lambs at Dupath Farm. However Adrian recorded weights, including eight-week weights on 4th May, 10 week weights on 22nd May and 12 week weights on 5th June, from just short of 700 lambs in total. His first group of lambs were selected for slaughter the last week of May and he has consistently sent lambs every two weeks through to the middle of November, selling on average 50 lambs/batch. With each group of slaughter lambs selected, he submits weights from all lambs so we are able to build really good insight to how these lambs grow over the season. All lambs are treated as the same management group throughout the season which again provides a great dataset from this farm. He has another small batch or two left to kill to finish his season.

SHROPSHIRE CASE STUDY

We would be delighted to provide a Shropshire breed case study next spring, similar to those we produced alongside the results update this year. Within a case study we are able to provide the full picture, showing how the breed has performed at Dupath with full analysis and details of their EBVs, of course drawing out all positives from the dataset and providing key focus points for your breeders to use as part of their future marketing strategy. It is hard to draw conclusions before the season completes as we only have the raw data to work with and prefer to run the full analysis from all rams on test this season. We aim to draw a line under data collection in February 2021.

This season's lambs complete phase II of the RamCompare project and we will be producing a final report next year as a result of five years data recording. We are in the process of applying for a continuation of funding for the project but have not had this confirmed as yet. However during this interim year, Adrian is one of five of our farm partners who has agreed to continue to collect data the coming season for the benefit of RamCompare and the wider UK sheep industry.

As one of our Strategic Farm Partners for AHDB he remains fully committed, collecting on-farm data monitoring the performance of lambs from his N E Mules to ensure his farm business remains profitable. He turned rams out as single sire mating groups in early October and will collect full data again next year. We have provided him with six new rams, from Charollais, Meatline and Southdown breeders.

LX171343 USED FOR 2ND SEASON

Whilst you await the full results, due early spring next year, as Shropshire breeders you will be interested to hear that Adrian has used Hayne Oak LX171343 for a second season to ensure full linkage to previous years data and thus additional progeny will be analysed from him next season. This provides more than a hint that he has been happy with performance of lambs so far!

We hope to be able to do a farm event with Dupath in July 2021 combining RamCompare with an AHDB Strategic Farm Event and will provide more details of this in the new year.

I hope this update is of interest to your breeders and would like to take this opportunity to wish you all well for the winter season. Stay safe and we look forward to catching up with you in 2021 when we hope more normal activity can resume again.

Bridget Lloyd, RamCompare