

BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

An Introduction to Keeping Sheep, 2nd edition

Jane Upton and Dennis Soden (1996). Farming Press Books: Ipswich. 115pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, Wharfedale Road, Ipswich IP1 4LG, UK (ISBN 0 85236 332X). Price £14.95.

Combine the artistic skills of a (once) novice sheep keeper who is also a freelance artist and photographer, with the practical skills of an experienced shepherd and the result is this most attractively produced book. The stated aim is to 'help guide those who are keeping sheep for the first time' and the cover claims that 'emphasis is on the essential skills and techniques that should be at any shepherd's fingertips'. It largely achieves these aims by covering a wide variety of topics including attributes of different breeds, fencing, housing, handling, routine tasks, record keeping, common diseases and even a section on showing. It is profusely illustrated with a wide selection of excellent colour photographs supplemented by many helpful and clear line drawings. These illustrate such diverse subjects as different types of fencing and hayracks, rolling a fleece and injection sites. There is also a particularly helpful series of line drawings on how to turn a sheep over. Lots of good advice is included about making sure that ewes and rams selected for breeding are fit and I was very pleased to see the issue of checking jaws for molar teeth problems mentioned. This is an important cause of thinness in sheep which is often overlooked. From the point of view of safety, particularly of inexperienced people, I was also pleased to see a warning against making pets of rams, since these 'pets' can become very aggressive and dangerous.

As might be expected, there is a large section on lambing and lamb care, again well illustrated, with importantly, a prominent warning to consult a vet in case of uncertainty. Although readers are instructed to 'practise as high a standard of hygiene as possible' and disposable gloves are included in the list of what to include in a lambing kit, I would have liked more specific instructions on how to approach an internal examination of a ewe in difficulty. This book is after all, aimed at beginners. I thought the common (and very worrying for the beginner) condition of vaginal prolapse could have been covered better by including photographs or diagrams. I was disappointed that use of a wire or plastic retainer was suggested rather than a more welfare-friendly commercial harness. Abortion is covered briefly, with sensible instructions for pregnant women to keep away from lambing ewes. The involvement of cats in one type of abortion is mentioned (but not named - toxoplasmosis) but there is no mention of the equally dangerous chlamydial abortion. I was concerned about advice to try mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on a newborn lamb which is not breathing, since it is diseases such as those just mentioned that may cause the weakly lambs which people often try to revive.

Castration and tailing (using rubber rings) are described in a matter-of-fact way, the assumption appearing to be that this should be done as a routine. There is no mention of considering whether these procedures are necessary in the first place.

The book presents a few niggling inaccuracies. Scab is said to be notifiable (no longer so) but there is no mention of scrapie which is notifiable. There is confusion about the cause of scald since it is stated that the causal organism can only live off sheep for three weeks and therefore can be eradicated. This is not true and applies instead to the causal organism of footrot. I was surprised that there was no mention of maedi-visna, particularly as new buyers may encounter MV-accredited sheep in the pedigree world. Scanning for foetal numbers also went unmentioned, however it may be possible to get this useful procedure carried out when next door's friendly sheep farmer is having his/her flock scanned.

Overall, these are fairly minor criticisms of a book which all sheep-keeping beginners would do well to acquire, read and take note of the many common-sense pieces of advice it contains.

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Agricide: The Hidden Farm and Food Crisis That Affects Us All, 2nd Edition

Michael W Fox (1996). Krieger Publishing Company: Malabar. 278pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, Krieger Drive, Malabar, Florida 32950, USA (ISBN 0 89464 945 0). Price \$29.50.

Dr Michael Fox presents a powerful title with more than a hint of impending catastrophe awaiting the reader. The text soon bears this out with an inventory of examples and ideas as to how man in general, and the current American agricultural system in particular, will lead to Armageddon if left unchecked.

It is not an easy book to become involved in until one has become used to the language and the farming practices described. This is further complicated by a feeling of being submerged in an inventory of examples of a factual nature, too many of which are qualified by 'may', 'might' or 'can'. These early chapters deal with changes that have taken place in agriculture since the war, resulting in a move away from a traditional family-based occupation to one driven by business interests, which have in turn led to large, impersonal systems. The author argues that in spite of the best intentions of farmers, these modern farming methods give little consideration to the long-term effects on soil, crops and animals. Whatever one feels about the nature of these changes and their results, there can be little doubt that they have contributed to moving both animal and food welfare up the political agenda.

If one manages to sustain interest into the second section of the book, I believe more rewards are to be found. Dr Fox develops his arguments and ideas further and points a way forward in what is a complex, ongoing problem of how to integrate the views of many interest groups in the future of farming. Many of his aspirations were echoed in the recent address of the Prince of Wales to the Soil Association Conference. We have, of course, watched similar changes occur in the United Kingdom over the last fifty years, driven by the same need to produce food cheaply and in quantity. My own practical experiences with animals tell me that we haven't travelled quite as far and as fast as the United States. Dr Fox concentrates on where these developments could lead us and shows us how we can make changes in our diet and land management practices to avoid the worst of these implications.

Responses in animal welfare practices have already taken place although not always as quickly as some people would like. It is difficult to find a path which avoids complacency on the one hand, with prematurely changing established systems before we fully understand the animals' needs.

Recent animal welfare initiatives in the United Kingdom have begun to point a way forward. We have already banned veal crates and sow tethers are soon to follow. The Farm Animal Welfare Council has established the 'five freedoms' for farm livestock and this is supported by the RSPCA's freedom-food campaign. The British Veterinary Association Animal Welfare Foundation has created the first university chair of animal welfare and helps