

READER'S VIEW - A LAMB WITH NO ANUS

JACK SMELLIE EXPLAINS.....

As owners of just two ewes, lambing statistics and information on the many things that can go wrong can make alarming reading. Here on Bodmin Moor we get told that a 65-70% survival rate is good!! Friends with flocks of 60/70 breeding ewes who lamb indoors and operate a 24/7 policy for four-plus weeks aim for and usually get in excess of 90% survival rate. That sounds a whole lot better to us. Our own figures currently stand at 50%, 86% and this year (to date) 100%. These figures actually represent the loss of just two lambs (such are the delights of statistics and small numbers). In our first year our two shearlings had a single lamb each (one a breach) and all was great until a minor procedure went horribly wrong and our ram lamb had to be put to sleep. Not a happy start to our lambing career. In year two we actually had four ewes who gave us seven lambs between them but we lost one of these to what turned out to be a solid kick to the head (sustained we think as they all ran up to the barn one evening for food...). And so as the start of lambing drew nearer this

year, we found ourselves more nervous than ever. After all, we knew a lot more about what could go wrong and had experienced two fairly tragic examples! Our two ewes, imaginatively called Mrs Brown and Mrs White had the consideration to lamb within five days of each other at the highly sociable times of 8.30 in the morning and 4.30 in the afternoon (as indeed they had done last year.), zero intervention was needed and as we raise all our lambs for meat, the resulting three boys and one girl was fine. We were very happy!! And then within a few hours of his birth, we became aware that the ram-lamb from Mrs Brown was perhaps crying a little more than he should. Why? He had drunk his first milk within twenty minutes and he had taken several drinks since. He seemed to be walking ok, well ok for a lamb just a few hours old. He was warm and he was dry!!! And then having seen the first 'mustard poo' from his sister we marvelled at how clean his bum was and wondered when he might start to produce!! Our last check that first night saw all three of them (mum + babies)

curled up together, all seemed to be well!! The next morning we still had a very clean bum so we took a much closer look and with horror discovered that whilst all looked normal, this poor little fella did not actually have an opening in his anus. Instead there appeared to be a thin layer of skin making it look as though this was a hole that has sealed itself back up. Now we understood the initial crying: this poor fella had not poo-ed at all. He had not even passed the meconium. He was blocked and in pain! We had checked his bum when he was born and just not seen this. Feeling like an idiot we rang the vet and an hour later he was on the operating table, sleeping with the gas and then our extremely clever vet set about the task of creating an anus opening!! It was not clear what she would find when the initial hole was made but fortunately, whilst further down than it should be, there 'was' a rectum and so having pulled it upwards, it was then in a good enough position to be sewn in place, with the appropriate 'exit'!! An hour later we were home, he was back on mum's teat and normal service was resumed!!

At the time of writing, he is just about to start his fourth week of life and as far as we can tell, this little chap is as healthy and happy as his sister and half brothers: he runs and chases and jumps and leaps just as much as the others, if not more. And he has certainly put on a lot of weight! He is ridiculously tame and when he comes up to say hello, we have to stop ourselves checking him bum on every occasion: it's fine, it really is fine now!!

So, despite a most peculiar start, we are currently maintaining our 100% success rate. Fingers crossed that at the next 'vulnerable time' (when the lambs start grazing) we sail through this stage with equal success. It has been an interesting start to our third year of lambing, whilst a closed anus is not unusual it is not, as far as we can tell, that common and it neither does not always have the happy ending that we appear to have had. But what a lesson learnt! Our post-birth checks will be just a little more rigorous from now on.

For more on this story and others, see www.relaxedfarming.co.uk

