

# **American Black Welsh Mountain Sheep Association Newsletter**

**Paonia, Colorado**

**October 2006**

## **Board Nominations Needed**

It's never too early to plan, so get those board nominations in SOON. Send them via phone, letter or email to our Secretary, Oogie McGuire. Our Fiscal year is January 1 to December 31, and we need to keep our Term year for Officers and Board members in line with that, so we need Nominations by Thanksgiving, so we can get ballots, membership reminders out in time to get the Election Results out to you, our membership, before half our year is over!

## **Registry Reports and Requirements**

### **Lambing Reports for 2006**

IF you haven't gotten this in yet, PLEASE GET IT IN NOW! These reports are due in the year of the birth of the lambs. Again, the association is REQUIRED by both the bylaws and Federal requirements, to record and keep records of ALL births of ALL member flocks – both live births and still borns. There is a birth notification form available upon which you need to record FULL date of birth, Birth Type (single/twin/triplet), Sire and Dam Reg.# and Name. Birth Weight and other info is optional.

There is NO charge to Birth Notify (it's required). You may birth notify and register at the same time, or register Birth Notified lambs after evaluation for registration purposes.

## **Membership Fee for ABWMSA to Increase Slightly**

Due to increased costs of all sorts, the Board discussed and ultimately voted to increase the Membership Fee for the Association by a modest \$5, to \$20 year for Standard Voting Memberships. Junior Members are still free with a paid voting Adult membership. This slight increase will help your association produce the newsletter and help towards all the costs of running the association. Our modest \$20 yearly fee is still far below that of many other associations.

## **Flock Book Report**

It is in the works, but, again, rising costs have created a hitch: we really don't have full funds to produce it – yet. Again, the board discussed options such as charging for the Flock Book, and producing it on CD, again at a modest cost, and with hardcopies only on special request. NO decision was made, and we NEED YOUR INPUT.

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## **General Conference Presentation by Ted Williams, our Welsh Visitor/past Council Chairman, U. K. BWM Sheep Association**

**By Claudia Pettis, edited by Ted Williams**

Edward D. Williams came from Wales to report on the Association in Europe, and evaluate sheep at Desert Weyr as the guest of the ABWMS Association on August 23 in preparation for the August 25<sup>th</sup> Four Day Conference in Paonia, Colorado.

Mr. Williams explained that because of the similarity of his name with another respected breeder of Black Welsh in the UK, he is usually known as Ted Williams. Ted noted that his own history with the Black Welsh breed began 31 years ago, when he received a gift of six ewes and one ram for his 10<sup>th</sup> birthday from J. Price's flock. He said he was probably given the Black Welsh as his family owned flocks of white sheep at the time, and this gave him his own distinct breed .

His father's family who farmed in the same area since early in the 1900's, began a family farming enterprise on what has now become part of Ted's farm known as Garth Uchaf Farm, at Pentyrch, 10 miles from Cardiff. Garth Uchaf has 600 acres of pastures and 20 acres of plowed turnips, which are reseeded and planted with grass. The property additionally has important grazing rights for the sheep on adjoining 500 acres of common land. The highest point on the land is 1012 feet above sea level and it is located 10 miles from the coast. Of Ted's father's brothers and sisters, 4 have families farming in South Wales. Just recently they acquired a butcher shop in a local village, a new business to compliment the sheep breeding, and market the meat.

He explained that his mother's ancestors represented what used to be the other main employment and resource in Wales -- mining. His mother was born in Cardiff. Her great grandfather came from Cornwall and he moved to South Wales where he owned and ran a coal mine. It was uncanny that at the meeting as Ted was describing his family and their connection with mining, trains were loading up coal down the block in Paonia: two very distant communities, but more than once I was struck by their acute similarities.

In addition to the 1400 South Wales Mountain Sheep, Ted's family farm owns about 60 breeding purebred Black Welsh Mountain sheep, other of the Black Welsh Mountain sheep are kept for crossing. They also keep about 150 Welsh Black cattle for beef production.

Ted gave a report on the status of the Black Welsh Mountain Sheep in Wales on Friday at the opening of the Meeting. The UK flock report was as follows: there are approximately 200 registered Flocks in the UK registry (4 Flocks are located in the US but registered in the UK)of which probably half of these are flocks of under 20 ewes. He reported that there also are a substantial number of small non-registered flocks.

He reported that the Association is doing well and the breed numbers are increasing. The Black Welsh Sheep entered in the Royal Welsh Show in July were very numerous. It is a popular destination for tourists and breeders and the show itself was well attended. 4 families from the US and members of the ABWMSA, also attended the show in 2005 or 2006—Wymans, Sands, McGuires, and Morses. He said that one of the reasons for this interest in the breed, in his opinion, was that the sheep have proven to be easy keepers and are suited to small flock owners. They can be managed without the workload of the larger flock types of sheep and are distinguished by being a Welsh heritage breed. However they are not on the RBST list as endangered nor at risk.

He briefly described the British Association which he is now the retired Chairman, and he added that the newly elected chairman is Will Workman, the 2004 guest at the ABWMSA meeting in Maryland at Wye Heights. The Association in the UK was formed in the 1920's and published its first flock book shortly thereafter. He noted that there are still a few founding flocks registered. The Association Council is made up of 12 members, each serving 3 years, 4 replaced every year. Active core breeders put nominations before the council and the council then votes. Financial compensation is given to the secretary for administrative duties, one of which is the flock book. Flocks are registered as well as rams in the UK, but ewes are not. The Association meets 2 times a year at the Museum of Welsh Life. Usually the attendance is about 20 members. Membership is dispersed throughout Wales, and there are members in other parts of England as well as in Scotland.

Mr. Williams described the major way to acquire Black Welsh sheep in Wales is to attend the Abergavenny Auction first Thursday in September sale. This day of the sale is devoted to the breed only. A show for the traditional auction precedes the sale. Rams are sold as individuals and ewes are sold in pairs. The top ram sale price at the 2005 auction was owned by Ted and sold for 650 guineas; the top ewes sales prices were 200 and 230 guineas. Selling points include an animal's conformation, as well as any history of awards in shows and genetic testing (which is not required but recommended at auction). Bids are usually by on site buyers, although telephone bids are taken. Breeders enter sheep and over 250 are entered in 2006. Breeding stock does not have to be genotyped, but certified documentation of each sheep is required.

He reported that he knows of no scrapie in the BWM in the UK in breeding stock at the moment or at any time in the past. The wide destruction in the UK of all genetically susceptible stock (V at codon 136) has no doubt helped to control the disease in those breeds that had a problem. However Mr. Williams made a point of noting that it was his opinion that the quick slaughter of many scrapie susceptible genetics in the UK took with it perhaps many good characteristics, which might take a long time to recover. He encouraged the US Association and breeders to take their time in culling for genetic purposes, in order to preserve what is best in the breed. He also recommended that a semen archive be set up to keep diverse genetics from being lost. Oogie McGuire has worked with the ALBC to establish some of her ram genetics in such a program as part of the National Animal Germplasm Program of the USDA. It was a welcome thought that the experience of the breeders in Great Britain could shed light on some decisions now being made by the ABWMSA.

Ted did do AI in his flock of the non Black Welsh due to government subsidized grants ( he noted he probably would not have done this without the funding). 40 ewes were inseminated using laparoscopy and all but one in 2004 conceived. Last year they repeated the insemination, and in 2005 it had 85% success rate. It is not a common procedure in the UK and some of the problems were too many triplets due to PMSG levels. He personally thought that the technique of laparoscopy for AI is a much less painful procedure and less hazardous for the ewe than AI vaginally.

With the acquisition of the new butcher shop, he is now looking forward to additional marketing of the lamb and beef. Most of his lamb for slaughter is sold previous to one year of age and Ted will neuter 97% of the rams at 2 to 3 weeks, allowing them to be marketed as wethers for slaughter sale at between 4 & 9 months. This keeps them from becoming too aggressive on the fence lines and from constantly seeking out ewes in oestrus. It is a management issue and also a preference at the market that drives this. His older stock of premium Black Welsh Sheep are purchased most often by farms using them for a few more years for breeding stock.

On the following day Ted Williams presented his evaluation of sheep at Desert Weyr with hands on judging and evaluations for wool, teeth, and conformation of rams and ewes.

## **Discussion of Desert Weyr Sheep at the General Meeting**

**By Oogie McGuire**

Prior to the meeting, Ted, Ken and I sorted the entire Desert Weyr flock of 189 purebred Black Welsh Mountain sheep. Ted picked out 21 of the best ewes, 21 of the worst ewes and we left the remaining 40 ewes in the middle group.

Lambs were sorted with their ewes because we don't wean lambs at this young an age (we aim for most lambs to be born late April to mid May, with a few born late May to early June) – but an injured ram midway through breeding caused many more late lambs than usual. Additionally all 22 adult rams were ranked from best to worst.

Overall our sheep are in poorer shape this year than we would like to see. Water and pasture issues, combined with having the ewes on hay while we visited Wales, meant the lambs have not grown as well as normal. In our area the late lambs never grow as well as the early ones and there is a very short window for lambing between end of the majority of snow and when it gets really hot. About half our lambs this year are the later lambs and still very small compared to our norm. Even our older lambs are not as well grown as in years past due to early hot weather and lack of irrigation water that made it difficult to grow sufficient clover and grass for the ewes during the critical early lactation period.

In general our better sheep are all younger ewes - many selected had not raised a lamb yet as they are shearlings. Condition played a part in the rankings but the biggest difference between good sheep and bad sheep is color. Our flock has a lot more grey in the fleece than is allowable for show stock. We also have a terrible problem with white muzzles. It was interesting to me that some people who have twins of sheep I still have do not report the same level of white on the muzzle as we have in the sheep we kept. This was true for several sets of twins who had gone to very different flocks and to different parts of the country. Similarly, the two rams I got from Tom Wyman did not have bad white when they arrived as evidenced by pictures I looked at after the meeting but both are showing a lot of white now.

I had always thought it was a genetic issue but perhaps there is an environmental component to the color that we have here that other flocks do not. Certainly we are at a higher altitude than any other flock with much more sun and a much greater amount of UV light. We also have very cold and snowy weather and our sheep are not in a barn but are out all winter. I do know that some ewes will get white hairs on the edges of their ears from cold. We also have noted that sheep we have purchased from other flocks are often more reddish colored when they arrive but the same sheep stay a rich dark black in our area after the first shearing.

Feet and legs were considered generally good in the better and middle pens but many of the older sheep show knock knees and some sickle hocks. Ted did not mouth all the sheep but after Will's discussion on tooth alignment I had already culled many of our worst sheep for that trait. Desert Weyr still has some sheep with poor mouths.