

From School Children to Shepherds - Living Lambing Live

An article for the Stevington Village Magazine

By

Tom Collins age 10yrs & Joanna Collins age 9yrs

We got our first sheep in July 2011 from our friend John. We have two Jacob sheep, Maggie and Bramble and our little Jacob cross Dorset, called Gwen.

There is a saying that goes, 'put the ram to the ewe on Bonfire night and you will have your lambs by April Fools Day'. This year Maggie was due to lamb. We put the ram to her on the 5th November 2011, so the lamb was expected on the 1st April.

As lambing time approached we had to keep a close eye on her, and look for the first signs of lambing, which is 'bagging up', this is when the bag that carries all the milk gets bigger and starts to fill up with milk so the ewe can feed her lambs. We noticed Maggie bagging up on Friday 6th April.

Tuesday 10th April 6.15am

We all went up the sheep field. Joanna ran head and looked over the stable door. Joanna called for us to hurry up and said that she could hear bleating, she then called out to mum, "there's one, no there's two". We unlocked the stable door and quietly went into the stable to check the lambs. We lifted them up to find one was a girl and one was a boy.

We think the lambs were born about 5.30am because when we arrived the boy lamb was still a bit wet. We had to help dry the boy because he was shivering a bit, so we got a towel and gave him a rub until he felt a bit warmer. But they both looked strong and healthy. They had already had a drink of milk from their mum. We had to do a quick health check. We felt their stomachs with the flat of our hand, to check for fullness of the belly to make sure that they had been drinking, and we could feel milk in their bellies. We could tell they were strong lambs because they were standing well.

We were very surprised to see that the lambs were born with little horns.

Mum sprayed a purple antiseptic spray on their umbilical cord, to stop and help prevent infection. Mum pointed out to us the afterbirth and Dad cleared it away.

Tom was so excited he said he wanted to scream his head off, so Mum said "go on then, but go outside" he walked out of the stable and screamed, whilst doing a silly little dance. Tom said he felt so happy and he had a little giggle. Tom said he needed to try to contain his emotions before coming back into the stable. We were happy that they were alive and doing well.

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We thought of a name for the girl lamb, Floss, which is Joanna's nickname and we all agreed. Floss has a little marking on her lip that looks like a fish. We decided to name the boy lamb Fig, Tom's first nickname at school.

We could tell Maggie was a good mother because she kept feeding the lambs and their tails were wagging, she licked Floss and Fig clean. Maggie was bonding with them so she could get to know them and they could get to know her. Occasionally Floss came over to us and then went back to Maggie.

It was a good morning for Maggie to give birth, because it was the first morning all our family had all been up together to check on the sheep.

Wednesday 11th April

We let the lambs out into the field for the first time, each hop they took was more bouncy they were like a child on a trampoline, the lambs were very playful and head butting each other it was so funny. when they walked it was as if they were on springs.

The lambs were very curious and inquisitive because they had never been out before and everything was new to them. It seemed like the lambs were saying "hey check this green stuff out, wow it's cold, but milk still tastes better"!

Thursday 12th April

John came up to guide us through the process of docking the lamb's tails, John is our mentor and helps us with the sheep, because he has more experience than us. Docking is where you put a really tight band around the lambs tail, this stops the blood circulation to the end of the tail which later drops off, docking has to be done within the first few days of the lambs being born.

But why do we do it... well we do it because it can help prevent fly strike, which is where the flies lay eggs on the sheep usually around the tail area, maggots then wriggle into the fleece and the sheep's skin and can make the sheep seriously ill and they can die.

Saturday 14th April

The lambs are getting a lot stronger now as well as bulkier they are also more confident around us. They will start hand feeding them soon with creep feed which is similar to what their mum eats but much smaller

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Floss and Fig are more confident now, Fig is very cheeky but no way near as cheeky as Floss. Floss even escaped from her little pen in the stable today, we thought she might try and suckle from Bramble again, but she didn't otherwise she would have got a little head butt.

We are stroking our lambs all over their bodies to get them use to being handled; it also helps us with other jobs that we need to do with them like dagging (clipping poo off their tails). This will also help them if we take them to a show, because the judges have to touch then all over.

Our next goal is to halter train them, this helps us to manage them when they get older

We hope you enjoyed our story,

Thomas Collins & Joanna Collins