



Picture courtesy of Elsa Glanville

Introduction to Sheep Behaviour and Handling

DVM1 2023: Live Animal Practical - Dookie

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Sheep handling: live animal prac 1-3

Important information

Location: These live animal sheep handling practical classes will be run in the sheep yards at Dookie Campus. Please meet at the yards appropriately dressed and ready to start at the appointed time.

Clothing: Please wear overalls, washable boots (either gumboots or work boots) and your name tag. Part of this practical session will be held outside in an area with no cover so please check the weather forecast and bring warm clothing, rain jacket and caps/beanies in case of cold, wind or rain; and a cap/hat and sunscreen in case of warm, sunny weather.

Preparation: Please review what you learned in the online session prior to attending the class (some of it is repeated in this material for your reference).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this class you should be able to:

- Assess the risks of situations requiring moving and/or handling sheep
- Safely move sheep into and around yards and races.
- Safely restrain a sheep in a standing position
- Safely tip a sheep using a two-person method
- Be able to identify major external anatomical landmarks of sheep
- Understand the process of aging sheep by their dentition
- Understand the ear tag system used in Australia to identify sheep

Outline

Following an introduction and demonstration of the methods of moving and restraining of sheep by your instructors you will work in pairs to complete the activities outlined below.

Remember at all times:

- Work quietly and calmly around the animals
- Be aware of your own safety, the safety of your colleagues and the wellbeing of the sheep

Part A:

1. Observe sheep behaviour before entering the pens – note body posture, head position and respiration, consider any hazards to you or the sheep in the pen.
2. Work in pairs to confine the group of sheep to one corner of the pen
 - a) Then one person choose one sheep to restrain in a standing position (see page 5)
 - b) either move your selected sheep away from the others or allow the others to move away from you to make examination of your individual easier. Do not leave single sheep that are not being examined separated from the remainder of the mob. This can create fear and the animal will forcefully try to reunite with its mates potentially causing injury to itself and people in the pen.
 - c) Identify the following external landmarks (see figure 10):

Rump, flank, fetlock, knee, stifle, hock, shoulder, breech, ribs, inguinal region, axilla, brisket, short ribs, dew claws.

Do you know the proper anatomical terminology for these landmarks? Try to correlate these with what you have learned/will learn in your anatomy classes.

3. Use a two-person method to tip the sheep and restrain in a crutching position (see page 5)
4. Mark each sheep with livestock paint as directed by your instructors (to indicate they have been tipped once)
5. Repeat steps 2-4 above so that each student has the chance to restrain a sheep standing and to perform both roles when tipping.

Part B:

1. Observe sheep behaviour in yards:
 - note body posture, head position and respiration.
 - Assess the yards for any potential hazards to you or the sheep

2. Working in groups of 2-3 people move a small group of sheep between yards and the race as directed by the demonstrator. You will need to consider:
 - How you will need to set up (and secure) gates (+/- other people) to get the sheep where you would like them to go.
 - How you will safely enter the yard
 - How you will position and move yourselves to get the sheep to go where you would like them to (with minimum stress to the sheep and minimum risk of injury to yourselves)
 - Securing gates so that the sheep don't escape after you have got them where you would like them to be!
 - Try and count the number of sheep in a mob as you move them from group to another

3. With the animals in the race:
 - Familiarise yourself with the ear tag – what information does the tag tell you? Can you determine how old the sheep is based on the ear tag?
 - Examine the incisors and estimate the animal's age by their dentition (do the tag and teeth agree?)

4. Working in a group of 2-3, move the animals back to their yard and secure the gates appropriately (see above).

Restraining sheep

IMPORTANT: Never catch a sheep by its wool as this may pull and hurt the sheep, blemish the skin, and bruise the carcass (reducing carcass value).

Standing restraint

- Stand the sheep against the side of the pen or fence and hold it with your knees
- Aim for one knee to rest against the shoulder and one knee against the thigh of the sheep, depending on frame size. Place one hand under its jaw and hold the fence with the other
- Keep the head elevated to reduce the sheep's 'pushing power'
- For further restraint:
 - back the sheep into a corner and/or
 - use two handlers, one to hold the forequarters and one to hold the hindquarters
- Do not attempt to keep a sheep from moving by pulling on its head or horns as it will resist this. Use gentle pressure around the neck and rump.
- Before releasing the sheep make sure there are no obstacles (including people) between it and the rest of the mob. Release calmly and swiftly, step back to allow the sheep to return to the rest of the mob.

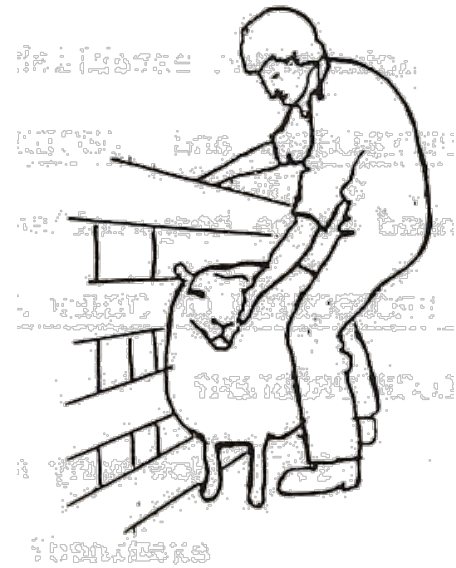


Figure 1 Safe restraint of sheep against a fence.

Tipping a sheep: two-person method

A two-person method is an easy and safe way to tip sheep. For larger sheep or smaller operators it is the method of choice but even with moderately-sized adult sheep it can be a good option if there are two people available. Briefly:

- Person 1 stands on the left side of the sheep at the head end and person 2 stands at the hind end of the sheep, also toward the left (swap right for left above if more comfortable)
- Person 1 reaches over the sheep's neck and grasps the front legs
- Person two grasps the inguinal skin in front of either hind leg
- At the same time, person 1 lifts the front of the sheep up, turning the legs away from them while person 2 lifts the hind end just enough to get the feet off the ground, turns the legs away from them and places the hind end on the ground in front of person 1.
- Person 1 then adjusts the sheep so that it is sitting comfortably on one side of the rump, resting against their legs

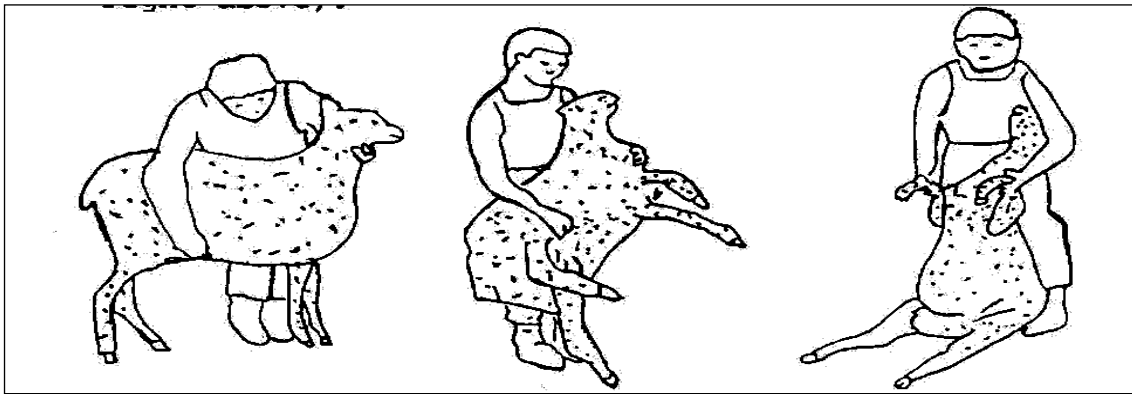
Sitting restraint

The method chosen for casting (sitting or lying it down) a sheep usually depends upon the size and weight of the animal. Light sheep can be cast by the 'lift method' and heavier sheep by unbalancing the hindquarters. The lift method may also be an option if there are two (smaller) operators and a heavier sheep.

Lift method

Stand on the left side of the sheep with legs close together and behind the shoulder. Put left arm under and around the sheep's neck (near the point of the shoulder) pass the right hand over the sheep's back and grasp the skin of the flank. Lift the sheep off the ground. A nudge with the knees at the same time prevents the sheep bracing its left hind leg. Place sheep in a sitting position. If more comfortable or appropriate in a given setting, substitute left for right above.

Figure 2 Three step process to tip a sheep by the 'lift method'



Unbalancing the hindquarters (method 1)

Place one hand on the lateral aspect of the rump of the sheep (see Fig.3) and the other under the tip of the jaw. Turn the head towards the flank whilst at the same time exerting pressure on the rump and take a step backwards. The hindquarters should drop to a sitting position. Bring the fore-end up so that the sheep is tilted back towards the holder. Allow the sheep's head to drop to one side, in a 'crutching' position.

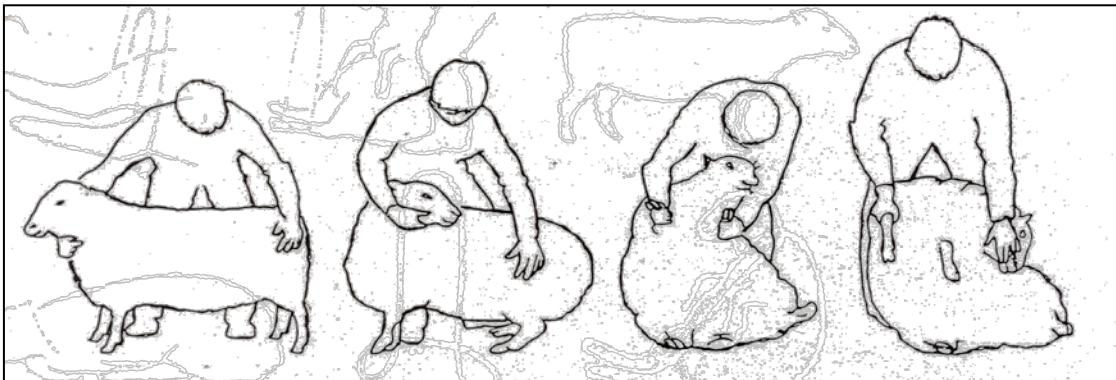


Figure 3 Four step process to tip a sheep by unbalancing the hindquarters

Unbalancing the hindquarters (method 2)

Place one hand under the tip of the jaw and turn the head towards the flank (away from yourself). At the same time fold the near hind leg under the body. The sheep should drop to a sitting position.

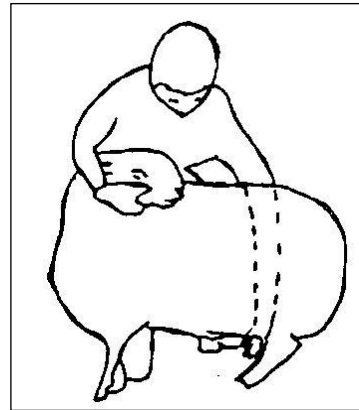


Figure 4 Unbalancing the hindquarters, method two.


Sheep identification

All sheep in Australia are required to be fitted with an approved, whole-of-life ear tag (in either ear) that identifies their property of birth, via a unique property identification code (PIC), prior to movement from a property. In Victoria, electronic radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags are now required. To identify an individual sheep:

1. **Record the numbers on the ear tag and the ear the tag is in** (L or R): number may only be a PIC, but an RFID or visual ID (VID) number should also be present on Victorian sheep
2. **Record the colour of the tag:** there is a standardised NLIS (National Livestock Identification Scheme) colour code for tags that correspond to the year of birth (see below) NB: it is worthwhile enquiring as to whether a producer is tagging according to this system before relying on it to age a sheep.

Year	Year	Colour	pink tag = post-breeder tags must be pink.
2008	2016	black	
2009	2017	white	
2010	2018	orange	
2011	2019	light green	
2012	2020	purple	
2013	2021	yellow	
2014	2022	red	
2015	2023	sky blue	

Figure 6. NLIS tag colours and corresponding year of birth

There may also be a stamp on the ear tag e.g.  if vaccinated with specific vaccines like OJD Gudair® vaccine.

Ageing sheep

Temporary incisor teeth:

- Usually no temporary incisors are present at birth, central and middle appear within 1 week
- Transition from lamb to two tooth is important in marketing 'lamb'

Permanent incisor teeth:

- Incisors erupt from central to lateral (Figure 9)
- Considerable individual variation in the times of eruption of the permanent teeth exists
- Compare size of temporary and permanent teeth side by side: permanent incisors are larger, broader and more square in shape; temporary incisors are shorter and more 'triangular'
- Beware of mistaking all temporary teeth for all adult teeth and use other methods such as bodyweight, size, time of year and ear tag (if present) to help with the ageing process.

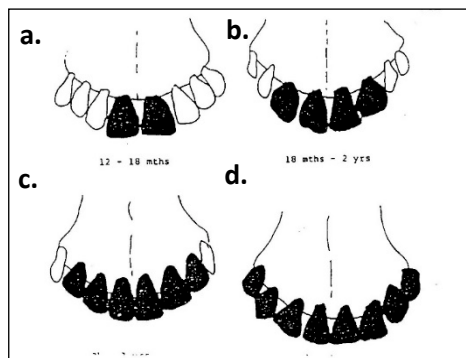


Figure 9 Eruption of permanent incisors in sheep

	Terminology	<i>Permanent incisors</i> 'erupted'	Avg. eruption time (years)
a.	2 tooth	2 central incisors	1-1.5
b.	4 tooth	above + 2 medial	1.5- 2
c.	6 tooth	above + 2 lateral	2.5-3
d.	Full mouth	above + 2 corner	3.5-4

External anatomical landmarks

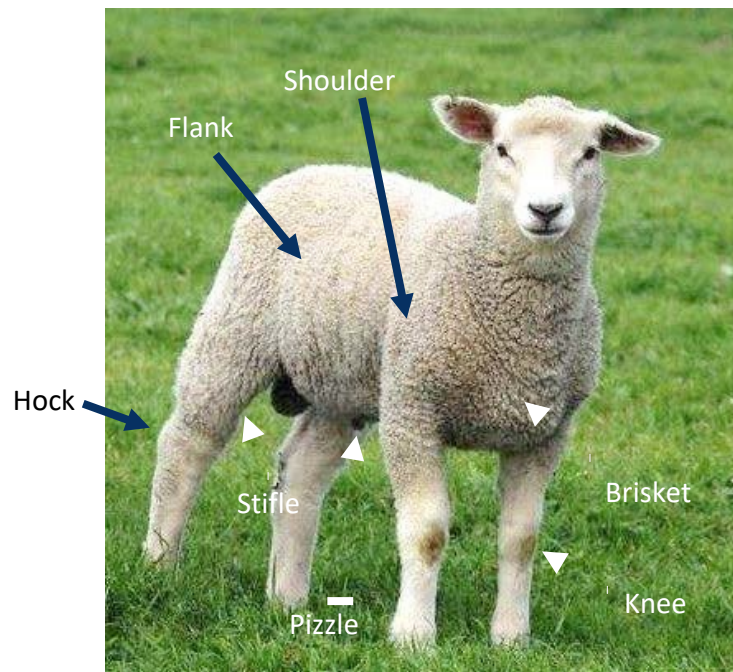
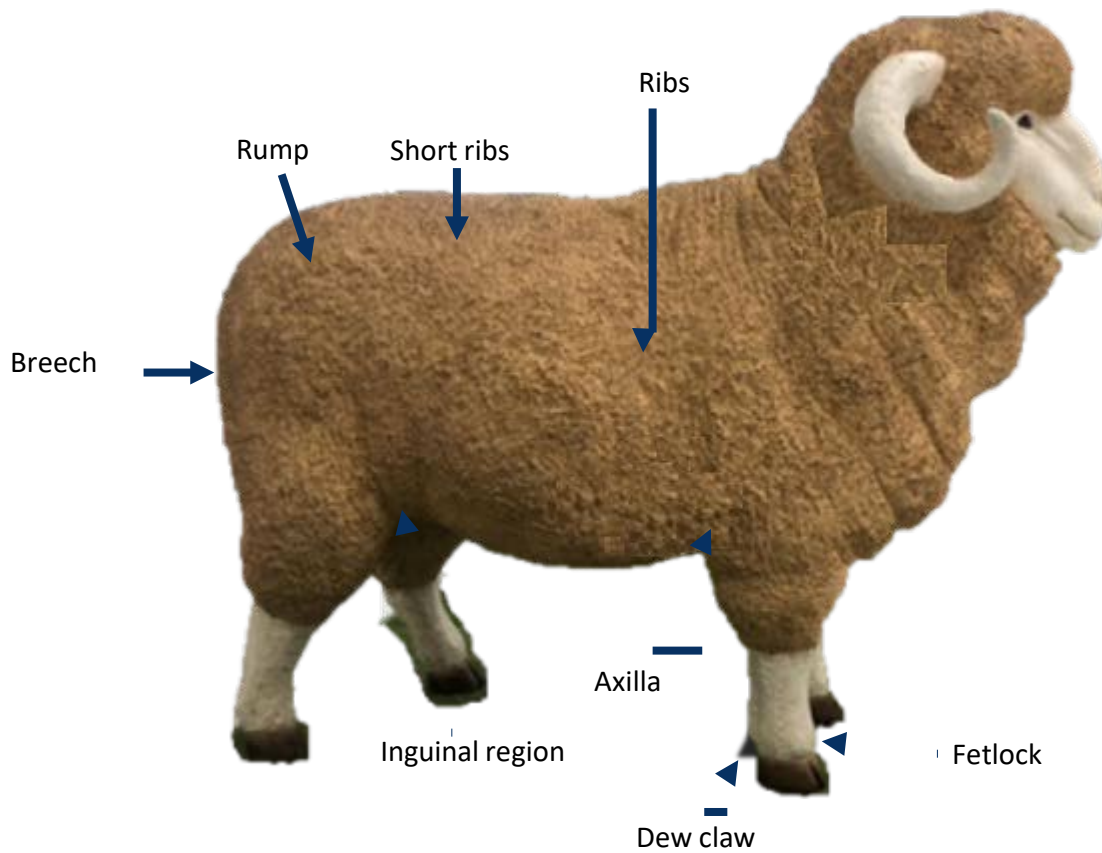


Figure 10 External landmarks (colloquial terminology) in sheep

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