

East Yorkshire Ouessant Sheep

Congratulations on the purchase of your Ouessant sheep.

I have produced this sheet with basic information about their care and needs. It is the same advice that the breeder from whom I purchased my flock gave me, and it has proved to be very helpful. I hope you find it useful.

The basic needs of an Ouessant are grazing, a shelter, fresh water and hay when grazing is poor during late autumn through to early spring. Also a mineral block. We use the yellow "Rockies" blocks.

Water - Ouessants do not need huge water troughs, a large dog bowl or washing up bowl will suffice. When you have lambs be careful that you do not use containers that they can get into and drown.

Hay - It is important to be aware that once the quality of your grazing deteriorates in late autumn/winter the grass will not be sufficient in quantity or contain the nutrition that your sheep need. It is necessary therefore to provide them with a continual supply of good quality hay throughout this period to sustain them until the grass returns in late spring. The hay needs to be provided in a suitable hay rack, as they will not eat wet or soiled hay or hay that they have spread over the floor with their bedding.

Ouessants do not require additional feeding. They do best on grass and hay and will only require concentrate if they are very old or just before and after lambing. Over feeding them is not good for them, being overweight can give them problems conceiving and lambing. It can also give them other health problems and shorten their lives.

Please check anything that you give to your sheep to ensure that it does not contain copper. Copper is poisonous to sheep. This especially applies when choosing mineral licks.

Shelter - Ouessants, whilst pretty hardy, are not as hardy as some breeds and do need a shelter to get out of hot sun, rain and strong winds. When choosing your shelter, if you are planning to breed them, you might want to think ahead to lambing time and whether the shelter will also need to be big enough to accommodate this, or whether you have another suitable building that can be used.

Vaccinations - All of our sheep are vaccinated with Heptivac P+ Details of the date of their last vaccination will be provided to you. They will require a booster once a year. I would suggest that you discuss future vaccinations with your vet who will be able to supply you with the vaccine and show you how to administer it.

Worming - This is an area that causes much debate. Some owners worm their sheep regularly (usually twice a year), others take faecal samples to the vet and treat only when necessary and

for the specific types of worms identified. As a sheep owner it is a subject that you will need to get some understanding of and make a decision about.

If your sheep are left un-wormed/untested, worms have the potential to make them very sick or worse. Typically symptoms might be scouring and/or animal losing weight and looking fed up and lethargic. Of course these can all be symptoms of other problems. I would strongly suggest that you discuss this with your vet and decide with him/her how you want to manage this for your flock.

If you keep your sheep in an area that has particularly wet ground or they are able to graze around a pond or stream you should also consider liver fluke in your worming programme.

Another point to note is that most vets have never seen an Ouessant and may not appreciate how small they are. When discussing any kind of take away treatment from a vet please ensure that you can tell the vet the approximate weight of your animals. An average adult ewe will weigh around 17kg and a ram up to 20kg.

Hooves - When worming your sheep, it is good practice to take the opportunity to check their feet. Look for any overgrown horn which is curling underneath the foot. Also any toe tips that are getting too long. Take care as overzealous trimming can cause bleeding. You can buy specific sheep foot trimmers from a farm shop. If when trimming the hooves you find any signs of infection, clear out any muck from the hooves and spray with purple spray (discussed below).

Dagging - This refers to cutting away soiled wool from their backside. This is not necessary unless your sheep has been scouring and is dirty, but is good practice to avoid flies being attracted to the area and causing "fly strike". You can buy small dagging shears from a farm shop.

Minor cuts and grazes - An antiseptic (purple spray) can be used. It can also be a good idea to keep some fly cream handy (a buttercup yellow cream) which is put on wounds to deter flies from laying eggs in the cut (fly strike). Again both can be obtained from a farm shop. Hopefully you will never need these two items, but if you do, you will be glad if you already have them in the cupboard.

Having said all of that, Ouessants are not particularly prone to foot problems or fly strike, but it is better to be aware so that you can keep an eye out for any problems.

Shearing - Your adult sheep will need to be sheared once a year, usually in late spring/early summer. Leave it until after lambing, if you are breeding them. Lambs are not shorn in their first year.

Tupping/Lambing - There is so much to say about this that cannot be covered here, but here are a few key points:

- There is a gestation chart available via my website in the FAQs. Traditionally the ram goes in with the ewes on Bonfire Night and you start watching for lambs from the 1st of April.

- Rams are ready to breed in their first year.
- Ewes are not typically bred in their first year of life, but held over to the next year. Breeding ewe lambs can result in an increased number of problems and caesarean births.
- There are differing views on how long to leave a ram in with your ewes. We opt for 10 weeks to cover 3 of the ewe's reproductive cycles and hopefully increase our chances of success.
- Pregnant ewes must be treated with great care. They should not be chased or handled unnecessarily as this can cause the loss of their lamb. Ensure that any medications that you administer are safe for pregnant/lactating ewes.
- Ewes can be given a very small amount of concentrate just before lambing and for a couple of weeks afterwards, when they are feeding their lamb.
- You will need a safe/warm place for your ewes to lamb. You will need to be able to make separate small pens inside your lambing shed for each ewe/lamb to spend their first few days in together to bond and rest. You will need to be able to bring ewes and lambs in at night for at least the first month of life.
- It is recommended that you take some time to learn about the lambing process and how to spot when lambs are due, how to spot a problem and what to do immediately after the birth.
- Ouessants typically only have one lamb. Twins are very rare.
- Mature Ouessants seem to lamb without assistance in most instances. Due to their size they cannot be assisted in the traditional way therefore you should register with a large animal vet used to dealing with farm animals so that they are available in the event that assistance is needed.
- Ouessant lambs are tiny (puppy size) and easy prey for predators. You will need to consider this before you decide to breed them in terms of fencing/gates and protection from predators.
- Ouessant Ram Lambs do not have any testicles at birth and therefore cannot banded. If you intend to castrate them you will need to have this done by a vet.
- Due to the tiny size of their ears it is recommended that you get the smallest ear tags possible for your lambs. Also it is suggested that tags are not put in until the ears have had an opportunity to grow a little. I tend to tag mine just before I wean them off their mothers at 16 weeks.

If you have any questions at any time please contact me. I have put love and care into breeding these little sheep and I want only the very best for them.

Also please see the FAQs section of my website www.ouessant-sheep.co.uk

If you wish to learn much more about sheep in general, I can recommend a couple of books. These are

1. Sheep Health, Husbandry and Disease - By Agnes Winter and Clare Phythian
2. A manual of lambing techniques - By Agnes C. Winter and Cicely W. Hill