

Get ready for the tugging season

by Claire Riddell
Alnorthumbria Vets

IT doesn't seem ten minutes since we were last putting the tups out, but the time is nearing again, and it is important both ewes and tups are prepared in advance to prevent disappointing scanning results come the turn of the year.

Both ewes and tups need to be in good condition to ensure conception levels are as good as possible. A body condition score of about 3/5

for ewes and about 3.5/5 for tups is ideal.

Tups will lose a huge amount of condition while working, so being a little more well fleshed is often beneficial. The same goes for ewes, as ewes in better condition have higher ovulation rates than leaner ewes.

"Flushing" of ewes three weeks before tugging will help to improve conception.

Body condition is not only affected by nutrition, but also concurrent disease. Last year, we saw several farms with

disappointing scanning results due to poor ewe condition as a consequence of liver fluke infestation. Therefore, it is essential to have a robust liver fluke and worm control strategy in place.

Lameness is an on-going problem in a large proportion of flocks and has a significant influence on body condition – therefore, ensuring both ewes and tups are sound is very important.

Tups can be tricky to keep sound. However, it is impor-

tant to keep them so, as lameness may play a part in their ability to serve ewes. A combination of vaccination and prompt treatment is the best way to reduce lameness.

Trace elements play an integral role in fertility. Selenium in particular is important in conception rates, and as Northumberland's soil is notoriously deficient in selenium, it is important to check well in advance your flock's trace element status through blood sampling.

The results will tell you the appropriate supplementation which should be carried out prior to tugging time.

To ensure that ewes with chronic mastitis are not sent back to the tup, check their udders in advance of mating.

Abortion vaccinations should also be given at least a month before tugging – some farms will be vaccinating against several diseases, so more time will be required.

Tups should have a full MOT pre-tugging. This should be well in advance of the breeding season in case further tups need to be bought. The "Three Ts" of teeth, toes, and testicles is often used as a reminder for



VALUABLE ADVICE: Claire Riddell is large animal vet at Alnorthumbria Vets' Alnwick branch

key anatomy to be checked. Check teeth to make sure they are in good condition and won't hinder the animal in getting its nutritional requirements.

Toes, as mentioned previously, need to be in optimum condition. And, as testicle size is directly correlated to sperm production, a smaller than average scrotal circumference may indicate reduced fertility.

We are seeing an increasing number of farmers having their tups semen-tested prior to tugging. While not a guarantee of performance, it can be invaluable in picking out

tups with a definite fertility problem.

Feeding is important in the lead-up to tugging, with tups requiring increased nutrition. As protein is important in sperm production, feeding a concentrate with a minimum of 18 per cent protein from six weeks pre-tugging will be beneficial.

So once you have prepared your tups and ewes, let's hope that unlike last year, the sun shines and the grass keeps growing.

● For more information, call 01665-510999 or go to alnorthumbriavets.co.uk.

