



The Birds and the Bees

Puberty

Puberty marks the beginning of sexual maturity. In sheep/goats, age at puberty is affected by a complex interplay of factors such as breed, nutrition, and season of birth. The average age of puberty for females in both species is 5 to 9 months. However, it can be later or earlier. Males usually reach puberty earlier, 4 to 6 months or when they reach 50 to 60 percent of their mature weight.

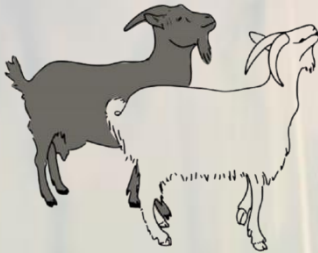
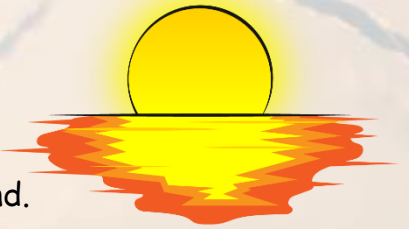


Seasonally polyestrous

Sheep and goats are seasonally polyestrous which means they experience multiple estrus periods (heat cycles) during a specific season of the year. Melatonin is the hormone that regulates their seasonal reproductive activities.

Short day breeders

Sheep and goats are short-day breeders which means they initiate their reproductive cycle in the autumn and winter months when daylight hours are shorter. Some breeds and individuals may exhibit estrus in the spring and summer months as well. Close to the equator, sheep and goats breed year-round.



Estrus (heat)

Estrus is when the female is sexually receptive and ready to mate with the male. Estrus cycles average 17 days in sheep, with a 24-to-36-hour period of receptivity. In goats the estrus cycle averages 21 days, and "standing heat" lasts for ~36 hours. Ovulation (egg release) occurs towards the end of estrus.

Male to female ratio

The number of females that a male can service (in a defined breeding season) varies, as do recommendations for male to female ratios. 1:25 for ram lambs and buck kids and 1:50 for experienced males are general rules of thumb. Extra males are needed if estrus is synchronized



Flehmen response

The flehmen response is when the male curls his upper lip to detect the scent of females in heat. It is part of the courtship process.



Gestation (pregnancy)

Gestation is about 5 months; 147 days is often used to calculate due dates. Length varies between breeds and individuals and can be affected by various factors such as parity, nutrition, litter size, and sex of offspring.