

FLY STRIKE AMONG LAMBS WITH RED AND BLUE BRANDS

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In the temperate climate of south eastern Australia, as at the Rutherglen Research Institute, we are regularly faced with the problem of sheep struck by blowfly during the spring-autumn period. Normally, strikes are confined to the area around the crutch or pizzle. However, in some of the wetter seasons such as the late spring and summer periods of both 1991-2 and 1992-3 body-strike was a serious problem. During summer 1991-2 there was some anecdotal evidence that the flies seemed to strike the body area next to where red SIROMARK brands had been used. In the following August (1992) for identification purposes, a flock of 83 ewe and SO cryptorchid lambs grazing together were branded on the mid back with SIROMARK; the ewes with red and the cryptorchids with blue. The lambs were not shorn and during October to December the weather was wet and humid and many were fly struck. Strikes were recorded at a weekly weighing and identified as being the first or second time a lamb had been struck.

There was greater incidence of primary and total strikes among the red-branded ewes ($P < 0.05$, Table 1).

Table 1. Numbers of fly strikes recorded during November-December 1992 for ewe and cryptorchid lambs branded with red and blue SIROMARK. Percentages in parenthesis

Colour/sex	Flock size	Number of strikes	
		First	Total (first and second)
Red/ewes	83	15 (18.1)	24 (28.9)
Blue/cryptorchids	80	5 (6.3)	6 (7.5)
Chi Square		5.29	12.44
Probability		$P < 0.05$	$P < 0.01$

These observations supported the previous years anecdotal evidence in that significantly more of the red branded animals were struck by the blow fly. Although the effects of sex and colour have been confounded in these observations the evidence seems to suggest that colour rather than the gender of the lamb was attracting the fly. We can find no evidence of sheep gender having any effect on the attraction to flies and the anecdotal information which suggested flies struck near red brands was from observations taken from a 1 sex (ewe) flock. Further, it is known that some flies at least, are attracted by different colours (Agee and Patterson 1983; Burg and Axtell 1994) and although there appears to be little objective information about the sheep blowfly and its preference for colour, a yellow colour is thought to improve attractiveness of fly baits (Anderson *et al.* 1990).

Further controlled observation is needed to establish why flies were attracted to the red-branded ewe lambs. The answer may lead to mean more care in selecting colour of brands for sheep and improvement to baits for blowflies.

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