

# The Colonial Williamsburg Animal News

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## NEW SHEEP IN 1989

By Richard Nicoll

Since early spring we have been working on bringing in an English Leicester Ram and some ewes from Tasmania. This has involved working with an agent in Canada who was doing the purchasing for us and taking care of the numerous paperwork details required to carry out a project as this.

Hanging over us throughout these months has been a deadline. To get the pregnant ewes we wanted we had to select them right after they had been bred (which would have been March, April or May), check to be sure they were pregnant 32 days later, and then we had just enough time to go through the quarantine procedures in Australia and Canada to get them to Colonial Williamsburg where they would have given birth approximately 21 weeks after being bred.

All this relied on the fact that we would be able to get all our "ducks" (sheep) in a row. But one duck refused to get in line—the Canadian Quarantine station where we had to reserve a "room", so to speak. This we were unable to do because of our late start on the project and thus we have had to cancel our importation until next year. We will then have more time to get all our bookings done early.

Also, the World Sheep Conference will be held in Tasmania next spring, which our agent will be attending. There he will be able to personally pick the sheep for us, which is to our advantage. Meanwhile the fund to carry out this project will have more time to grow, so that we may bring in more ewes.

We will keep you informed as we get nearer to Sheep Time '89.

## NEWS RELEASE ON GEESE

By Richard Powell

Six freshly hatched white Embden goslings arrived at the stable one Sunday afternoon in early April, a gift from a local farmer whose flock had just experienced the explosive growth of a successful hatching season. Since no facilities had been prepared for the new arrivals, they were placed in a brooder full of chicks, where they remained for about ten days, when their increasing size demanded the first of many moves to larger quarters. During their stay in the brooder, the goslings showed signs of imprinting on, or forming a parental bond with, their handler. They were seen responding not only to food and water, but to the handler's physical presence and

voice, as well. These reactions suggested that the birds had been removed from the nest before bonding with their natural mother, and were ready to adopt a foster parent.

Bonding between the goslings and the handler was encouraged by frequent contact, and was focused by a limited set of words and voice tones used in their presence. Later, by using these words and tones, other handlers were able to gain the goslings' confidence and develop even greater control over the young birds.

Geese, particularly Embdens, gain weight very rapidly. The goslings followed nature and grew so quickly that existing pens would no longer accommodate them. To compensate for cramped quarters, the handlers decided to range the goslings on grass during the day. It was soon found that the goslings would willingly follow a familiar person to fresh grass, so they were taken on walks of gradually increased length in search of the tender clover that young geese prefer. At the same time, children of employees were invited to visit and play with the geese, in order to prevent the birds from accepting adults only.

Knowing that the strength of imprinting would fade as the geese matured, the handlers also began to carry a switch to direct the goslings with gentle prods and waving motions. The combination of physical and vocal signals allowed more control over the goslings, and permitted the handlers to drive them from behind when they were reluctant to follow.

The initial handler eventually withdrew from work with the geese, while the husbandmen/interpreters increased their contact. The short walks to clover were constantly extended until the goslings began commuting to public appearances at the carpenter's yard. Occasionally they even rode across town in the tumbrel with Star for interpretations on the Palace Green.

With no space left at the stable, the goslings were moved to the Deane Ravine in early June. From there handlers were better able to lead the geese to interpretive sites near the Geddy House. The Ravine also offers adequate shade, water and grass, allowing the geese to live well on their own.

So far the young geese have proven very popular with the staff and visitors alike. Names have been chosen from English tradition and classical legend to fit each bird's developing personality. The geese continue to be well behaved adolescents, save for a few flights of fancy.

## INTERPRETING WITH ANIMALS

By Deni Fulp

The Coach and Livestock department has an importance beyond carriage rides and interpretations. Animals are one of the things young children can really enjoy here at C.W. Many do not have the ability to appreciate fine furniture, enjoy the presentation of historical facts, nor have palates which will revel in anything more than a visit to a fast food restaurant.

There are greater numbers of people these days whose only experience with animals such as we have here at C.W. is through reading books, watching T.V., going to the zoo, the all-too-rare Sunday drive out in the country, fond memories of a farm childhood or hearing grandpa talk about days long ago. Those experiences greatly limit opportunities for close-up observation, a chance for touching, hearing animal sounds and taking in smells to thoroughly appreciate the animals.

Interaction with animals has proved to be therapeutic in a number of ways. I have observed adult visitors with stressed or harried looks on their faces (perhaps from trying to take in as much as possible in a short amount of time) who, coming to a pasture with sheep, cows or horses, slow down to a stop, lean against the fence and watch and talk about the animals within. In passing to care for other animals, I have seen the same visitors still there a half hour later. The end result being that those strained expressions have transformed into much gentler, happier features. Seeing visitors smile genuine smiles when they come in contact with C.W. animals is heart warming. As for myself, I have grown very fond of the animals here.

After having worked on a modern dairy farm, I'm finding that there are aspects of animal use from the 18th century that would be wise for the present-day farmer to reconsider. There were days on that dairy farm when it was so cold the tractor would not start, and having a pair of trained oxen to pull out a large bale of hay would have been a much welcomed solution.

The animals here at C.W. also have provided the atmosphere for me to experience a variety of emotions. You may be imagining that closeness and observation of animal behavior (or misbehavior) might be the cause for such emotions; but, you may have missed the full impact unless you've considered what position we Livestock Husbanders are in during an interpretation and the animals follow through with normal bodily functions. I'd just like to state for the record that I find no amusement or shock in this. It is, however, the audience whose responses evoke such feelings. I am amused when folks giggle, when children break out in choruses of "Oooh, yuck!" or "How gross!" Or when adults either verbalize or facially express "Boy, I'm glad it's YOU that has to answer that question and not me!" There are split seconds of pressure when children raise sensitive questions about intimate animal activity (or parts),

and there are adult visitors present who scowl or appear to be thinking "Aha! So HOW are you going to answer THAT one!"

There are fun times when the animals are playful and there are tender moments, too, when the animals respond in gentle ways. For our visitors these times come when Tom, the horse, drops his head for babies in strollers or folks in wheelchairs to pet him; when little Arthur, the oldest of this year's lambs, walks right up to the fence, lays down, and allows the children to touch and pet him; when Star eagerly nods her head as people tell her what a good girl she is; or when our popular visiting Jersey cow, Sissy, gives those melting looks with her big brown eyes. For us Livestock Husbanders it comes in a look, a snuggling rub against us, or a face-to-face caress, that seems to say, "thanks for taking care of me."

## OUR COLONIAL JERSEY COW

By Elaine Shirley

Sissy, the Jersey cow, has joined our staff for the summer and is providing milking demonstrations twice daily. As last year's milking demonstrations met with such success, we were very unhappy none of our Devons were in milk this summer. We decided to borrow a cow from Susie English in Toano, who also provides us with the goats we use each year at the Colonial Fair.

The Jersey cow is an old English breed, coming from the Isle of Jersey in the English Channel. Jersey is very close to France and although it has been under English rule since 1204, these cattle were often called French or Alderney cattle until the 18th century.

The breed is relatively small, ranging in color from very light brown to almost black. The Jersey has several characteristics which make them easy to identify. They have large brown eyes which almost bulge from their head, a large dish or dent between their eyes and a fine thin face which ends in a large muzzle.

The breed has been adapted over many generations on the island to produce a high amount of cream or butterfat in their milk. Jerseys average 5% fat in their milk. The average Holstien (black and white spotted cattle) has 3.5% fat.

People on the Isle of Jersey were very strict about keeping the Jersey a pure breed and as early as 1763 they enacted laws to prevent the importation of other cattle to the Island. The Jersey cow enjoyed wide popularity in the 19th and early 20th centuries and even today remains the second most popular dairy breed.

Sissy is 5 years old and her third calf was born in February. She is very friendly and well mannered.

**QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? Please write to: Animal Editor, MHW. Colonial Williamsburg Animal News is published by Coach and Livestock Operations, Historic Trades Department. Kay Williams, Editor; Richard Nicoll, Manager.**