



Raising sheep the EASY way!

Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International

# Blackbelly Banner

## Blackbelly Sheep—Domestic, Exotic, or Wild

By Carol Elkins

Last year, a BBSAI member in Georgia was told by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division (GA DNR) that she must purchase a wild animal license in order to raise her Barbados Blackbelly sheep. Over the course of 10 months, the BBSAI engaged in an extensive education campaign to try to help the GA DNR understand that both Barbados Blackbelly and American Blackbelly were biologically categorized as domestic sheep. We know that several U.S. states classify our breeds of sheep as "wild" or "exotic," so we provide in this article the information that you might use to educate YOUR state wildlife department if the situation arises.



American Blackbelly sheep  
safariworkstaxidermysales.com

### Biological Taxonomy

Whether or not blackbelly sheep are domestic or wild is not something that state bureaucracies should determine arbitrarily. Sheep, and all animals, are part of a large biological taxonomy that categorizes organisms into groups such as genus or species. Biological classification is based on an animal's shared descent from its nearest common ancestor. These taxonomies should be the first point of reference when deciding if a breed is domestic or wild.

There are seven main ranks assigned to an animal: kingdom, phylum/division, class, order, family, genus, and species, with various "sub," "super," and "infra" ranks fitted between the main seven ones.

The full biological taxonomy for all domestic sheep is provided by the Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS).<sup>[1]</sup> Briefly, it is

Class Mammalia  
Subclass Theria  
Infraclass Eutheria  
Super order Laurasiatheria  
Order Artiodactyla  
Sub order Ruminantia  
Infra order Pecora  
Family Bovidae  
Subfamily Caprinae  
Genus Ovis  
Species O. aries  
Subspecies O. aries aries  
(domestic sheep)

The full biological taxonomy for Barbados Blackbelly is available from the International Species Information System (ISIS).<sup>[2]</sup> It is

***Ovis aries aries barbados\_blackbelly***

By extension, American Blackbelly would be

***Ovis aries aries american\_blackbelly***

continued on page 3 >

### Inside this issue:

Blackbelly Sheep—Domestic, Exotic, or Wild .....	1
Sheep Management Computer Software .....	2
Is Cow Colostrum a Suitable Substitute? .....	5
Results of the 2012 Annual Meeting Election .....	5
Ask the BBSAI.....	7



## Sheep Management Computer Software

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By Carol Elkins

There are so many software programs available for keeping track of your sheep. Where to start? I had a look at Web sites for a bunch of them and narrowed the selection down to a few that I think would work well for blackbelly breeders. If I had to make a choice, I'd probably start with FlockFiler or Ranch Manager first because they are fairly inexpensive, have a lot of features, and I know several people who happily use them.

As with all software, be careful to do your resesarch on the company, read reviews, visit user forums, and try to talk to someone who uses the software in the same manner as you plan to. Many software companies consist of a programmer working in his basement. He may have a wonderful product and excellent service to customize his software to your needs. Or not.



### **FlockFiler** [www.flockfiler.com](http://www.flockfiler.com)

\$50 for the Lite version; \$295 for the Pro version. FlockFiler Lite has many features rarely found in other programs at any price.

- Versions for both Windows and Macintosh computers
- Powerful search capability and user-friendly windows
- Free online support forum and video tutorials; good user manual

### **Ranch Manager: Sheep Edition** <http://www.lionedge.com/products/SheepSoftware.php>

\$99 Easy to use and affordable with free unlimited technical support. Document sheep breeding records, identification (including scrapie), treatment records, shearing records, show records, animal movements, income and expenses. Add a sheep picture and view a picture pedigree. Due Date report shows data for ewes due to lamb. The ranch calendar allows you to record upcoming events or note reminders.

### **Cewe Database** <http://www.sheep.cornell.edu/management/economics/cspsoftware/cewedoc/index.html>

Free Microsoft Access database created by the Cornell University Sheep Program. Microsoft Access is required to run the software.

### **Breeders Assistant** [http://www.tenset.co.uk/ba/edition\\_personal.html](http://www.tenset.co.uk/ba/edition_personal.html)

\$119 Personal Editions This is a British software company and their product is well-respected. The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy uses the Professional version of this software.

### **Magnum Digital, Inc** <http://www.livestockmanagers.com/sheepmanager/sheepmanager.htm>

\$149 for the Small Flock Edition (50 animal limit) and \$289 for the Commercial Edition. You can see screen-prints of many of the program's screens on their Web site.

### **Livestock Management Software** [www.winsoftdevelopment.com/Products.htm](http://www.winsoftdevelopment.com/Products.htm)

\$199 Although it was originally designed to work with cattle, it is generic enough to be used for virtually any type of animal.

### **EasyKeeper** [www.breedmate.com](http://www.breedmate.com)

Designed for goat herds, but would work for sheep as well. Subscription plan for two plans ranging from \$15-\$20/month and \$150-\$200/year.



## Wild or Domestic?

←continued from page 1

These taxonomies clearly fall within the subspecies "O. aries aries," the domestic sheep, as do Dorper, Katahdin, and St. Croix (the other U.S. hair sheep breeds) and, for that matter, all domestic breeds of wool sheep.

The GA DNR eventually agreed that Barbados Blackbelly sheep are domestic sheep and do not require a wild animal permit to own. However, they have deferred any decision regarding American Blackbelly. They argue that because American Blackbelly were developed by crossing Barbados Blackbelly with Mouflon (and also Rambouillet, a domestic woolled sheep breed), and because Mouflon are a wild sheep, American Blackbelly are therefore "wild."

However, the biological classification of the Mouflon is disputed, so this argument is not as solid as the GA DNR would have us believe. You can read a succinct discussion of the dispute in "Mammal Species of the World."<sup>[3]</sup> In short, the debate is whether to consider Mouflon a subspecies of "Ovis aries" as in "Ovis aries musimon" (and thus a domestic sheep) or a separate species, "Ovis orientalis" or "Ovis musimon." If Mouflon are considered a separate species, then they fall outside the category of "domestic sheep." The references provided at the end of this article can help illustrate the difficulty in answering this basic question. The five authoritative resources do not agree.

Because of the uncertainty of the biological taxonomy of the Mouflon sheep, it is more difficult to argue objectively that the American Blackbelly is 100% domestic sheep. But since Mouflon are considered the ancestral species of all domestic sheep,<sup>[4]</sup> one could

argue that all sheep have a certain degree of mouflon genetics, depending on how far back historically one wishes to go.

### Management as a Classifier

I think that the heart of GA DNR's policy lies not so much in the taxonomy of American Blackbelly and Mouflon, but in the husbandry and end purpose of these breeds in the U.S. Flocks of American Blackbelly and barbado sheep run wild in game ranches and open prairies across the U.S. They have been bred and raised for the trophy market. I think it is easier for wildlife departments to arbitrarily declare American Blackbelly to be "wild" or "exotic" because in these cases, the sheep are managed differently than other domestic breeds of sheep. They are not fenced, seasonally driven and rounded up, or deliberately pastured. They are feral and they are hunted. From the DNR's perspective, it doesn't matter what their genetics are. They pose a risk to these states' multi-billion-dollar deer and bighorn sheep populations via diseases such as scrapie and pasteurellosis that are shared with sheep and goats. The DNR believes American Blackbelly need to be controlled as wildlife.

When discussing the issue with your local DNR, in addition to pointing to the taxonomy of your breed of sheep, you also can point to the fact that the US Department of Agriculture regulates your flock by virtue of mandatory scrapie tags and a farm premises ID. You might ask your DNR why an animal regarded as livestock by one state agency can be regarded as wildlife by another state agency. That hopefully will open a discussion about how you manage your flock differently to ensure that it poses no threat to the lo-

Does being hunted make an animal "wild" and "exotic"?



Black goat [www.fab.com](http://www.fab.com)



Jacob sheep [www.taxidermy.net](http://www.taxidermy.net)



Barbado sheep  
[www. http://clovercreekranch.net](http://clovercreekranch.net)

cal wildlife.

BBSAI member John Carlton has developed this type of relationship with his state's regulatory agencies. Several years ago, John spotted a photo of an American Blackbelly in Alabama's official conservation magazine with a cap-

continued on page 4 ➤



## Wild or Domestic?

← continued from page 3

tion of "Illegal Exotic Corsican Sheep." Having worked with (and being personally acquainted with) folks at Alabama's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), John quickly confirmed that his American Blackbelly sheep were farm animals—but only because they had scrapie tags in their ears and that John had a premise ID issued by the State Department of Agriculture. Alabama made it clear to John that his sheep could not be hunted or knowingly sold for hunting.

It is important that BBSAI members take an active role in educating their state officials and local veterinarians. I live in Colorado and recently sold Barbados Blackbelly sheep to a resident of North Dakota. When my vet spoke to the ND state vet to arrange the import permit, he was told that Barbados Blackbelly were considered an exotic sheep breed and would require a special permit for transport. I have worked with my vet for many years and he is well versed in the history of Barbados Blackbelly sheep and the difference

between them and American Blackbelly. When my vet informed the ND vet of

their error, the ND vet reconsidered, saying that the "horned breed" was exotic and not the Barbados Blackbelly. My vet didn't pursue that misconception, but it would have been the next subject for discussion had I been trying to transport American Blackbelly to North Dakota.

## "Alternative Livestock"

The growth of the "alternative livestock" industry is an indicator of the evolving role that animals play in American economy and society. Elk, deer, bison, emu, and ostrich are considered in most states to be "alternative livestock." In a few states, American Blackbelly have been added to the list. At one time, there were clear distinctions between domestic livestock and free-ranging wildlife. Species could be neatly assigned to each category. Each category, in turn, had its own public regulatory agency that enforced management policies. Free-ranging wildlife species were regulated by state departments of wildlife to maximize hunter yield; livestock species were regulated by federal and state departments of agriculture for health and marketing concerns.

These boundaries are now very blurry, as indicated by the phrase "alternative livestock" itself. The changes resulting from the growth of the "alternative livestock" industry produce conflicts between

individuals and groups that respect animals, often involving particular species and the manner in which they should

be managed. This is the situation facing American Blackbelly sheep.

## BBSAI as a Resource

When defending the livestock status of Barbados Blackbelly sheep, the taxonomic data are definitive and members are encouraged to use the BBSAI as a resource to provide that data.

In addition, Barbados Blackbelly sheep have been under the watch of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (<http://www.albc-usa.org>) since 1977, and were upgraded to a "recovering" breed of agricultural animal in 2005.

As the registry for American Blackbelly sheep, the BBSAI is not involved in how its members manage their flocks, but generally trophy ranches don't register their rams, and conservationists do. So we believe we best represent breeders of American Blackbelly sheep that are considered domestic agriculture and we will help you defend this position with your DNR. We believe that lumping all American Blackbelly sheep into the "wild/exotic" category simply because some of these animals are hunted does a disservice to the breed, does nothing to address the perceived risk that these sheep might pose to wild deer flocks, and reflects badly on state agencies who are already criticized for overextending their authority and making it difficult for farmers and ranchers to continue to stay in business.

The BBSAI will be happy to help its members document and defend the "domestic sheep breed" status of their sheep, regardless of breed. We believe that with good documentation and a well-formed argument BBSAI breeders can be influential in helping their state agencies understand that both Barbados Blackbelly and American Blackbelly sheep are domestic sheep.

## References:

1. The Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS) is the result of a partnership of federal agencies, including the Departments of Commerce, Interior, Agriculture, and the EPA; the Smithsonian Institution; and other international agencies, organizations,

continued on page 5 >

Blackbelly Banner



## Wild or Domestic?

←continued from page 4

- and taxonomic specialists, formed to satisfy their mutual needs for scientifically credible taxonomic information. The full biological taxonomy for all domestic sheep can be viewed at [http://www.itis.gov/servlet/SingleRpt/SingleRpt?search\\_topic=TSN&search\\_val=ue=552475](http://www.itis.gov/servlet/SingleRpt/SingleRpt?search_topic=TSN&search_val=ue=552475)
- The International Species Information System (ISIS) provides a global database for the world-wide zoological community that contains information on 2.6 million animals -- 10,000 species -- and is constantly growing. The full biological taxonomy for Barbados Blackbelly can be viewed by ISIS members at <https://app.isis.org/abstracts/Abs79417.asp#11.0>
  - Wilson & Reeder's "Mammal Species of the World," now in its 3rd edition, is a standard reference work in zoology giving descriptions and bibliographic data for the known species of mammals. The Smithsonian Museum of Natural History maintains an online site for accessing current information, including taxonomic, as it is compiled. The taxonomy for *Ovis aries* is provided at [http://www.vertebrates.si.edu/msw/mswcfapp/msw/taxonomy/browser.cfm?msw\\_id=13224](http://www.vertebrates.si.edu/msw/mswcfapp/msw/taxonomy/browser.cfm?msw_id=13224) and includes in its comments section a full discussion of the dispute regarding the classification of mouflon.
  - A discussion of the ancestry of modern domestic sheep is provided by the Encyclopedia of Life at (<http://eol.org/pages/311906/details>) They note that the name *O. aries* is often used to refer only to domestic sheep, but has also been used more broadly, depending on which forms are recognized as distinct species—for example, including mouflon as well. The taxonomic backbone of the Encyclopedia of Life is provided by ITIS.
  - The Taxonomy Browser is a tool provided by the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI). IT contains the names and phylogenetic lineages of more than 160,000 organisms that have molecular data in the NCBI databases. The full taxonomy for domestic sheep is available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Taxonomy/Browser/wwwtax.cgi?name=Ovis%20aries> ✎

## Is Cow Colostrum a Suitable Substitute?

Posted By Susan Schoenian to Shepherd's Notebook on 11/05/2012

Greek researchers investigated the efficacy of feeding cow colostrum to newborn lambs. Seventy-two newborn lambs were used in the study. They were divided into six groups.

Groups 1-3 received four meals of 1st or 2nd or unknown milking cow colostrum. Group 4 received 6 ml of a commercial cow colostrum and two meals of UMCC. Group 5 received 4 meals of ewe colostrum. Group 6 lambs were allowed to nurse their dams.

Blood samples were collected at 24 hours and 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th week after birth. Total proteins and albumin concentrations and  $\alpha$ -Glutamyl-Transferase activity ( $\alpha$ -GT) were determined.



Significant differences among groups were observed at 24 hours after birth for all parameters. By the 4th week, differences in total globulins and  $\alpha$ -GT were non-detectable. At 4th week of age, no differences were detected in almost all parameters measured between lambs that received artificially ewe or cow colostrum.

The researchers concluded that cow colostrum could be a good replacer of ewe colostrum as concerns passive immunity in cases where ewe colostrum physically cannot or it is not advisable to be used. ✎

Source: Short Communication, Livestock Production Science, November 2012.

## Sheep Software

←continued from page 2

EweByte [www.ewebyte.com/](http://www.ewebyte.com/)

\$400 Has a good reputation. Many reports for health, inventory, and production. Can calculate levels of inbreeding

Ovitec [www.agritecsoft.com/en/ovitec](http://www.agritecsoft.com/en/ovitec)

\$478 Professional version. Users report excellent customer service and support. ✎

### New BBSAI Members

Robert Castle	Americus, GA
Tiana Franklin	Santa Rosa, CA
Kyleigh Rae Glenn	Lakeland, FL
Valerie Hard	Newcastle, CA
Owen Killman	Havana, FL
Michaela Krafve	Winchendon, MA
John Lowrie	Buckeye, AZ
Donald Mills	Oklahoma City, OK
Louis Richards	Vanceleave, MS
Kathleen Wallis	Fairfax, VA
Keith Watts	Blum, TX

## Results of the 2012 Annual Meeting Election

The 2012 Annual Meeting convened by teleconference on November 14, and ballots were mailed after the meeting to elect the 2013 Board of Directors.

The slate of candidates submitted by the BBSAI Nominating Committee was approved by majority vote.

BBSAI welcomes the following members to the Board:

- Eileen Breedlove
- Carol Elkins
- Sandra Hession
- Nancy Johnson
- Patrick Kahn

We look forward to new faces and new ideas!



## Ask the BBSAI

Questions sent to [info@blackbellysheep.org](mailto:info@blackbellysheep.org) are answered by BBSAI Registrar Mary Swindell.

**Q:** My question is about my farm name. I know it is used as part of my sheeps' registered names, but what if I want to change my farm name. Can I do that? What happens if I move to a different farm and we want to name the new farm something other than the old farm name?

**A:** You are confusing "farm name" with "flock name." Let's start over using the following fictional BBSAI member:

Janet M. Johnson  
Grandview Farm  
300 S. County Road 40  
Sweetspring, OK

There are three components of a breeder's identity within the BBSAI:

1) **Flock prefix** (3 alpha-numeric digits). All sheep registration numbers begin with these 3 digits. The flock prefix is permanent; it cannot be changed once it is selected on the membership application.

Example: GVF (taken from Grandview Farm)

2) **Flock name** (this can be as short as the three digits above, or it can be something else such as your last name, or your farm's name). All sheep names in your flock begin with these letters or words. The flock name is permanent; it cannot be changed.

Examples: Grandview  
Charlie, Grandview Annie,  
Grandview Napoleon

3) **Farm name** This is your farm's business name. It will appear as part of your mailing address in the Member Directory and on your sheep registration certificates. This farm name **CAN** be changed if you move or change the name of your farm. However, please keep in mind that you cannot change your flock name or flock prefix, just because you change your farm name.

Example: Grandview Farm

A sheep registered by Janet might have the following registration number and name:

Number: GVF03071301BB  
Name: Grandview Napoleon

**Q:** Can a pair of American Blackbelly sheep produce a totally black lamb? We have had offspring from this pair a couple of times and they have always been very traditional looking. This time they produced a totally black lamb. There is no possibility of cross-breeding because they are the only sheep we have.

**A:** Yes, this happens occasionally. In fact, some sheep breeders deliberately seek out totally black lambs, hoping they can establish a black flock of hair sheep. The Black Hawaiian sheep breed originated by crossing Mouflon and Barbados Blackbelly and, like American Blackbelly, is just one of several color combinations out of that cross that have been selected.



Black Hawaiian sheep. Photo courtesy of Robin Blakley, [Buffalo Creek Farm](#)

tively bred to conform to a breed standard and developed into a separate breed.

The breed standards for Barbados Blackbelly and American Blackbelly sheep require that to be registerable, the coat of extremely dark sheep must be at least light enough for the facial stripes and the black belly to be discernable, even if it is only barely discernable from the dark coat.

**Q:** I am new to American Blackbelly sheep breeding. I have two registered American Blackbelly ewes and have a chance to buy a registered Barbados Blackbelly ram. Should I cross these breeds?

**A:** I'm glad you asked this question because it is a very important one. The BBSAI considers the American Blackbelly and the Barbados Blackbelly to be two separate registered breeds, each breed having its own set of genetic and phenotypical traits, and each having its own set of breed standards. The BBSAI acted to close these two registries in order to protect the integrity of the gene pool of each breed.

In the past, there were instances of indiscriminate crossbreeding between the two breeds, which became a problem for both breeds, including disappointingly small horns in the AB breed rams and half-horns in the BB breed rams (who should not have any horns). Therefore, to eliminate such problems in the future, the BBSAI does not recognize any crosses between the two breeds.

So the answer is no, I would not recommend that you purchase a Barbados Blackbelly ram to breed with your American Blackbelly ewes, because the offspring will not be registerable under either

continued on [page 7](#) ➤



The Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International is a non-profit organization registered in the State of Missouri



### Raising sheep the EASY way!

The BBSAI Newsletter is a benefit of membership in the BBSAI and is published quarterly. The BBSAI Newsletter welcomes articles, photographs and classified ads that relate to American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep. Publication of articles or advertisements does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by BBSAI. No part of the BBSAI Newsletter (including photographs) can be reprinted, put on Web sites, or used in any manner without written permission of the BBSAI.

Issue deadlines are  
January Issue – December 15  
July Issue – June 15  
April Issue – March 15  
October Issue – September 15

Please send changes of address to  
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Pueblo, CO 81006

or email  
[newsletter@blackbellysheep.org](mailto:newsletter@blackbellysheep.org)

#### BBSAI Officers:

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Newsletter Editor: Carol Elkins  
Registrar: Mary Swindell  
[registrar@blackbellysheep.org](mailto:registrar@blackbellysheep.org)

## Ask the BBSAI

←continued from page 6

the AB or the BB breed registry. Instead, if you wish to continue breeding and registering the offspring of your American Blackbelly ewes, you should purchase a registered American Blackbelly (horned) ram to breed to them.

**Q:** Must I have a scrapie ear tag to register my sheep?

**A:** No, you do not need to have scrapie ear tags in your sheep ears to register your sheep.

But the BBSAI requires that you have some kind of permanent separate identification on each sheep that you register. This would be either 1) some kind of ear tag, 2) a tattoo, or 3) a collar tag. If you use an ear tag, it can be a regular numbered farm tag, or a scrapie tag. This permanent identification should always be with the sheep, so that anyone who looks at your sheep can verify which animal they are looking at. This permanent ID tag (or tattoo) number will be listed on your sheep registration certificate along with the sheep's BBSAI registration number.

Even though the BBSAI does not require that the scrapie tag be used, the USDA requires that before animals leave your farm for any reason, they must have a scrapie tag in their ear. So it is good to have a supply of these scrapie tags ready, even if you do not plan to use them until you are getting ready to sell the animals. When you apply for a farm premise ID number in the state where you live, your state vet will send you a free supply of scrapie tags and an applicator.

**Q:** I want to register some of my sheep and plan to tattoo them for ID purposes. With their black ears what ink do I use?

**A:** I don't recommend tattooing ears. It is painful to the sheep and it is impossible to read the numbers. Many years ago I tattooed some of my sheep using green ink and I still have to use a flashlight to find the numbers.

Instead, I recommend ear tagging. Because blackbelly lamb ears are so tiny, many breeders favor using Premier's mini tag. Although Premier can imprint your farm's scrapie number on their tags, these tags are not free, unlike the ones that your state vet will give you. Regardless of what kind of tag you use, this video will help teach you where and how to apply the tags: "Mini Tag Instructions and Mini Applicator " at <http://www.premier1supplies.com/videos/index.php>

You may want to wait to apply the scrapie tags until just before it is time to move the lamb off your farm or get its health certificate (which requires a scrapie tag). That will give the lamb's ears time to grow before tagging.

However, some shepherds always apply a small brass tag on 2-day-old lambs and THAT tag bears the lamb's permanent number that is recorded in the flock records. Premier also sells these small brass tags and applicator at [http://www.premier1supplies.com/detail.php?prod\\_id=53&cat\\_id=103](http://www.premier1supplies.com/detail.php?prod_id=53&cat_id=103) They are impossible to read from any distance, but they rarely fall out (unlike many of the other kinds of tags). Thus they may prove invaluable when a blackbelly sheep (who looks just like every other blackbelly sheep on your farm) loses its scrapie tag and the only way to identify it is by its small brass tag. ☒