

# Lamb Crop 2022

## Maximise lamb survival in hill lambing



### Research Focus: Blackloss in Extensive Hill Grazing

The Lamb Crop webinar series focussed on highlighting methods to maximise lamb survival for indoor, outdoor and hill systems. The second in the series focussed on hill lambing where we heard from Poppy Frater, SAC Consulting Sheep and Grassland Specialist, Bobby Lennox of Shantron & Shemore Farms and Davy McCracken, Head of SRUC's Department of Integrated Land Management and Head of SRUC's Hill & Mountain Research Centre.

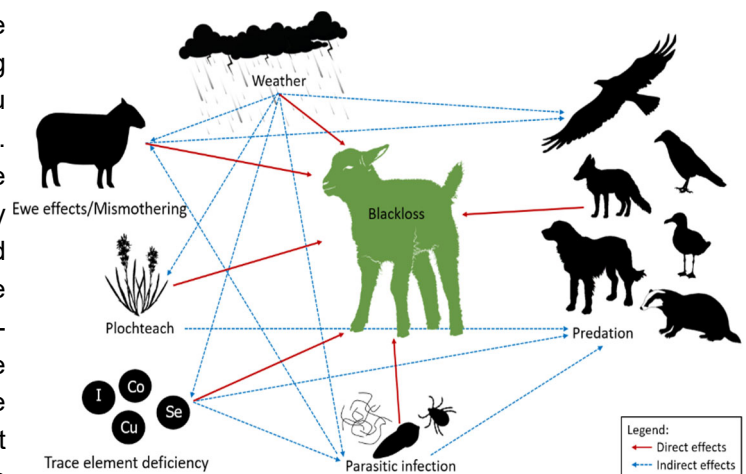
Davy presented information from Fiona McAuliffe's on-going PhD project. It is a collaborative PhD project between SRUC, Edinburgh University and NatureScot, looking in more detail into what Blackloss is and quantifying factors that lead to Blackloss. It also involves some consideration of the role that Sea Eagles may play in losses in some parts of Scotland. The project is focussing on losses between marking (6 - 8 weeks) to weaning (4 - 6 months).

**What is Blackloss?** Blackloss is unexplained lamb losses on extensive hill grazings in the Highlands of Scotland. Average mark-wean Blackloss is 18.6% with a range of 8 - 23% (*Tongue et al, 2016*). Lambs in extensive hill grazings are not regularly observed and this results in a lack of information on when and why they disappear

#### Predation of Lambs

Lambs suffering from underlying health issues are more likely to be targeted by predators. By checking and treating lambs for common health issues you may be able to prevent a portion of predation. Predators can and will take healthy lambs if the opportunity arises. Legally controlling predatory species (foxes and crows) in hill grazing areas could reduce this predation pressure. If damage is severe from protected predators, such as ravens or black-backed gulls, a licence from NatureScot can be applied for to control them. The Sea Eagle Management Scheme can provide support to prevent or reduce the impact of white-tailed sea eagles on lambs.

#### Potential Direct and Indirect Factors for Blackloss



#### Key points to help understand, reduce and prevent blackloss on your farm

Scan ewes to gauge how many lambs are expected and use this information to manage ewe feeding to ensure the best survival and health of ewes and lambs. Use handling times to record and check for losses and health of lambs that may cause concern (lambing, marking, clipping, weaning and post weaning sales) to find out where issues lie.

After weaning reflect on when, where and how lambs are lost:

- When are most lambs lost, before or after marking?
- Where are lambs lost, in-bye, in hill parks or on the open hill?
- Did any of the lambs you recorded as showing signs of ill health (plochteach/yellowsees, tick burdens, infections, etc.) disappear between gathers?
- If any lamb carcasses were found what was the cause of death in these?
- Did you see signs of predation or scavenging where the lambs were kept?

**Only by understanding when, where and how losses are occurring can actions be taken to prevent these losses.**