

The Risk of Significant Injury from Rams and Buck Goats

Our topics for this week are:

- **Aggressive behaviors of rams and buck goats**
- **Proper management of aggressive rams**
- **Response to attacks by aggressive rams and buck goats**

Rams:

Rams are heavier and stronger than the average human and may butt with enough force to kill a handler. Injuries are similar to a car crash. Data on the number of injuries is sadly unavailable but are more common than most people think. In fact, one of my great grandmothers was killed by a ram sheep.

Bending over in a pen with a ram can be perceived as a challenge and can result in being charged. Handlers of sheep should never take their eyes off of a ram.

Ram lambs being raised for breeding should be minimally handled. Otherwise, the ram lamb may lose its inherent respect for humans and become dangerous as an adult. It should not be played with by patting it on its head, or otherwise encouraged to butt.

Rams will back up in preparation to charge with their head tucked low. Also, stotting or pronking is a stiff legged jump that is used by small ruminants to signal alarm to a perceived threat.

Management of Aggressive Rams should include:

- Moving a ram with one hand under its jaws to aid in controlling its attempts to be aggressive
- A side hobble (a strap from front to hind leg on the same side) can also be used to discourage ramming
- Attaching a clog (wood block) to a foreleg with a one leg hobble can discourage ramming (and jumping fences)
- A dangerous ram can be hooded with a leather “ram shield” to see only down and to the rear

Response to an Attack:

Stepping 90-degrees to the side, at the optimum time, when charged by a ram is an effective defense tactic when needed. Throwing water on a ram during a charge may discourage some from further attempts to ram a handler.

Rams that are not familiar with each other will butt one another with risk of serious injury. To allow a few days of acclimation, they should be put together in a small pen to eliminate the ability to run at each other.

Goats:

Goats can be very gentle, but they do not tolerate rough treatment and will butt when provoked. More than 6,000 people are injured by goats each year in the U.S. Fatalities are rare but do occur.

Bucks are particularly dangerous after they reach puberty at 5 to 10 months of age. Signs of puberty include urinating thin streams of urine on their legs, mouth, beard, bellies, and lower aspect of their chest. Scent glands near their horns become active and secrete a strong odor that they will try to smear on animals and people to mark them as their possessions.

Intermate rivalry or aggression becomes intense during the rutting season. Rutting season is fall to midwinter for some breeds, particularly dairy goats, but it can be year-round for other breeds, primarily meat goats. Aggression can also be directed at humans, especially men. Adult bucks are especially aggressive to each other during mating season and should be housed individually with aisles separating their pens.

Signs of aggression can be staring, ducking the chin to present horns forward, pressing horns or forehead against an opponent, and rearing with or without a following charge. No one should be allowed to play with or tease a buck. Scratching or pushing on its head must always be avoided.

A goat handler should never ignore a buck goat during rutting season. If threatened by a buck, a handler should not stomp his feet or stare at the buck's eyes because both of these actions are indications of a challenge to bucks. Bucks do not back up in preparation to charge as do rams. Handlers should never allow a rutting buck to get between the handler and the handler's route of exit.

A handler may get the buck to delay or abort a charge by spreading his arms out and standing in an erect position to look as large as possible. If close to the buck, the handler can grasp its beard and hold on to it while walking backwards to an exit. If working with horned goats, a small X-shaped incision can be cut into old tennis balls so that they can be jammed on the end of the horns until the handling procedure is finished.

Dangerous buck goats should be culled or a ring placed in their nasal septum, as with dairy bulls, for safer handling. Children should be forbidden to be around bucks.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Male sheep and goats, of all ages, should not be rubbed, patted, pushed, or otherwise handled on their head.**
- 2. When in a pen with a full grown ram or buck goat, do not bend over and never take your eyes off where they are and what they are doing.**
- 3. When handling a ram sheep, keeping a hand under its jaws to prevent it lowering its head can help prevent their attempts to become aggressive.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 325 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.