

Catching Sheep and Goats

Our topics for this week are::

- **Approaches to catching sheep compared to goats**
- **Restraints to avoid with sheep and with goats**
- **Proper use of crooks and neck straps or chains with sheep and with goats**

Approaching and Catching Sheep

Sheep are extremely herd bound. Catching a sheep requires using their desire to group together to your advantage. To catch an individual sheep, it is necessary to herd the desired individual with the flock into a small catch pen with 10 to 15 other sheep. Temporary corrals can be created using welded wire at least 40 inches high and steel T posts, or similar fencing. Herding flocks into the pen can be facilitated with a properly trained, herding-breed dog.

Once the flock is in the pen, the handler should quietly approach the desired sheep straight from behind staying in their blind spot. The capture is done by placing one arm under the sheep's neck and the other arm behind the rump. If needed, the sheep may be briefly immobilized by grasping a thigh just above the stifle. This may give time enough to get the other hand beneath the jaws. Handlers should never grab or pull the wool.

If 90 degree corners are present in the pen, the handler can move the desired sheep toward a corner. Cornered sheep will face the handler, who grasps its head and neck with both hands and moves the sheep's front end to the side. The sheep will try to move forward and the handler grasps the loose skin of both flanks to slow or stop it and then the handler grasps the neck and rump.

Shepherd crooks are either neck (about 4 fingers wide at the bend) or for the hock (less than 2 inches wide at the bend). Neck crooks are safer for sheep, but leg crooks may be more useful for horned sheep. Leg crooks have the potential to injure legs if used roughly or if the sheep strongly resists.

Approaching and Catching Goats

Goats are much more independent minded than sheep and a group may scatter if approached. Some goats may feel threatened and become defensive. Approach and capture should be done gently or the goat will become aggressive and try to butt. Signs of aggression in bucks are curled tail over back, raised hair on the back, sneezing and snorting, stamping the forefeet, and rearing up on its hindlegs. Goats do not bite or kick.

Domestic goats are curious and will come to a handler if he does another task in their pen. The handler should pet the goat, then gently restrain it by holding at the base of the skull with both hands or grasp its collar, if it has one. A shepherd's neck crook can be used if the goat is evasive. Leg crooks should not be used due to the risk of leg injury.

Catch Pens

A catch pen is advisable, particularly for meat goats that are not frequently handled. The pen should be used to feed and water to desensitize goats to the catch pen for future captures and handling. To accustom them to a catch pen and handler presence, the handler should feed grain in a small pile for each goat and kneel down near them and talk to them. If a buck is in the group, the handler must be watchful of his actions. Practice captures should be performed at a regular time when the goats are in the catch pen.

Neck Chains or Collars and Halters

Goats should not be caught by grasping their horns. Dairy goats often have neck chains or collars for handling and identification. Colored plastic chains or flat web collars can be used to identify groups of goats by age, family, productivity, or other criteria. Dog collars are hazardous because of the metal buckles which can become caught and cause strangulation. Collars that lace together or plastic chain collars are safer than buckled collars. Other goats will often chew off a herdmate's leather collar. Leather collars also trap moisture and will lead to bacterial or fungal infections. Nylon web or plastic chain collars permit better air circulation to skin and drying than leather.

Plastic chains should break under moderate strain to prevent entrapment on a fence, by another goat's horns, or on other objects. Goats can be led by their collar or a separate leading collar with a leash can be used for leading and tying them for restraint.

Aggressive bucks should always wear a neck chain. This allows them to be captured with a bullstaff. A halter with a lead rope can then be placed on their head and control exerted by the dual use of the staff and lead rope.

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. Capture of a sheep is best done while it is in a catch pen with a small group of sheep.**
- 2. Dairy goat capture can be facilitated by the use of neck nylon straps or plastic chains.**

3. Rams and bucks can be very dangerous when catching them or any other sheep or goat in their flock or herd.

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 250 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.