

# Is She Or Isn't She? False Pregnancy in Goats

by Dr. B. Holleman

Is your doe acting 80% pregnant? Is there something about this pregnancy that just doesn't seem quite right but you can't put your finger on it? Maybe her udder isn't filling up like it does at four months, or maybe she doesn't have that tight-belly appearance that she usually does and, come to think of it, you haven't seen any kids kicking at all like you sometimes do. An observant goat person may be able to pick up on these oblique clues, but maybe not. False pregnancy is a condition that is almost impossible to determine without an ultrasound.

A false pregnancy or pseudopregnancy is created when a doe's reproductive hormone system gets short circuited. A brief description of ovulation may be helpful. A follicle on the doe's ovary starts developing and producing estrogen. Increased estrogen triggers the release of follicle-stimulating hormones (FSH) and luteinizing hor-

mone (LH) which matures the follicle. The follicle, similar in appearance to a water blister, grows until it finally ruptures, releasing the egg. The egg then floats down toward the oviduct. After ovulation, the collapsed follicle transforms into a new endocrine structure called the corpus luteum (CL), which produces progesterone to prepare the uterus for pregnancy and to maintain pregnancy. The corpus luteum (sometimes called the yellow body) fills the hole where the follicle ruptured. If the egg meets healthy sperm in the oviduct/fallopian tube and fertilization takes place, the fertilized egg then implants itself. If the doe conceives, the corpus luteum will remain throughout the pregnancy, secreting both estrogenic and progestational steroids. If the doe does not conceive, the uterus produces prostaglandin that dissolves the CL, leaving a small scar where the follicle

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once was, and a new cycle begins.

Once in a while things get a little confused and the corpus luteum does not dissolve and continues to produce progesterone, preparing the doe for a pregnancy that

does not exist. Some does that experience a false pregnancy may have never been exposed to a buck, while others may have been bred and conceived when the corpus luteum first developed. Whatever the situation, hormones are indicating pregnancy when one does not really exist. A urine or

blood pregnancy test would test positive and the doe no longer comes into heat. Her body is telling her she is pregnant and all the typical symptoms occur - enlargement of mammary glands, milk production, the instinct to mother things, even uterine cramps. Some does may correct a pseudopregnancy early and show a bloody discharge but the majority go to term. At term, the doe may experience what is called a "cloud burst" where she delivers fluid but no placenta or fetus. When the "pregnancy" is terminated, the CL once again dissolves and a new cycle begins.

There is no known predisposition to false pregnancy and it is not genetic. There is no way to predict when this will happen but you can verify a true pregnancy by ultrasound. At around two months the fetus can be seen, and if there is nothing other than a small amount of fluid in the uterus, a false pregnancy is probable. A shot of prostaglandins (Lutalyse) will alleviate the problem. Hormones will cause regression of the corpus luteum and emptying of the uterus. But, be cautious, if your doe is truly pregnant, the shot will terminate her pregnancy. Repeated doses of oxytocin will induce emptying of the uterus.

False pregnancy is not uncommon in goats and is very common in dogs and other livestock. Although it is a seemingly harmless problem that corrects itself there are several risks. One is risk of wasting five months on your favorite doe. The other is more serious. The uterus, while it is under the influence of progesterone, is highly susceptible to infection. This may occur during the false pregnancy. Watching for discharge, a high fever or depression may help avoid a toxic situation.

After termination of the false pregnancy, your doe should come back into estrus right away and can be bred within a month or two. False pregnancies are rarely ever back-to-back and may be, in small part, the doe's way of resting her body, particularly after a fairly stressful time. False pregnancy can also occur in old does who are no longer being bred. Perhaps the doe had quads the year before and had undergone a highly stressful year. There is also some indication that does who are extremely heavy milk producers can be more predisposed to a false pregnancy. But the fact is, it could happen to any doe and the law of averages says if you raise goats long enough, you'll get to see the phenomena first hand.

## Give prompt attention to udder sores

Do you have does with "black spots" on the udder where it attaches to the belly? The sores can be runny and form heavy scabs around it, often with a putrid odor. These udder sores are quite common in fresh does and first fresheners, especially those that have had excessive udder edema. The problem can be more common during cold weather because long hair holds moisture and dirt in the cleft between the edematous halves of the fore udder, between the fore udder attachment and abdomen, or both. With moisture, dirt, swelling and limited oxygen supply, skin defense mechanisms break down, and opportunistic bacteria or parasites can invade the tissue. The

## ADGA Convention Reflections



Decisions, decisions. (Left to right) Stephen Considine (popular UCN columnist); Pete Snyder and Mary Beth Andreson, local New York ADGA Convention co-chairs; and ADGA Director Daniel Considine, review the list of karaoke options during a tribute to the late Lelia Berry held during the ADGA Convention in Buffalo, New York last October. Lelia was a past president of ADGA and Director Emeritus who passed away unexpectedly shortly after the 2008 Convention in California. Her trademark feather boas were the impetus behind the neckwear at her celebration of life.

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### HYONAHILL OBERHASLI

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Just arrived from the hospital with a brand new hip and now