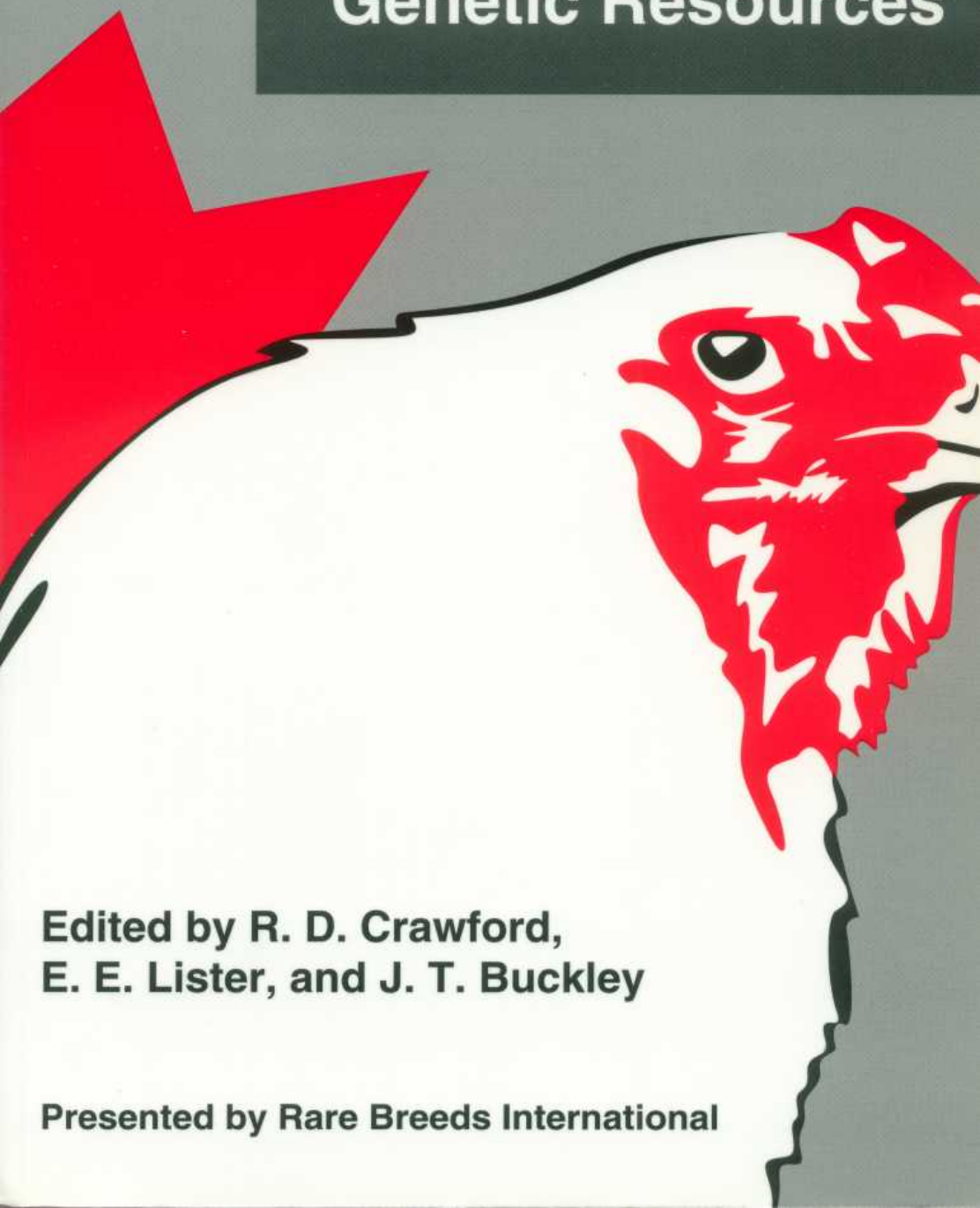


Proceedings of the Third Global Conference on

Conservation of Domestic Animal Genetic Resources



**Edited by R. D. Crawford,
E. E. Lister, and J. T. Buckley**

Presented by Rare Breeds International

Poster Presentation

Newfoundland Sheep: History and Conservation

C. Hansen,¹ J.N.B. Shrestha,¹ P.J. P. P.
M.H. Fahmy²

¹ Centre For Food and Animal Research
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Ottawa

² Sheep Research Farm, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
La Pocatière, PQ G0R 1Z0, Canada

Introduction

Newfoundland, Canada's easternmost province, covers 109,250 km² in the North Atlantic Ocean) and has a maritime climate is relatively harsh: foggy, windy, and cold.

History

The precise origin of the Newfoundland Sheep in Canada, remains a mystery. We know that the first sheep brought to the Isles to colonists in the new settlements. In the early 1800s, numbers of Border Cheviot sheep were introduced to Newfoundlanders recall that early in the 1800s, sheep on Mistaken Point near Cape Race. First introduced were sheep, which were all white, active, alert, and free from wool and covered with hard winter coats. It is generally believed that they originated from the Border Cheviot. At that time, the Oxford, Hampshire, Shropshire, and other breeds into distinct breeds (Hall and Clutton-Brock, 1970). Portuguese and French exploration and settlement led to the early settlements of the island.

Ewes mature sexually at 7-8 months of age and are believed to have a long breeding season. The sheep are aggressive, have a nervous temperament, and are difficult to handle. They tend to stay together except during lambing. Older ewes are known to lamb out of season. Ewes maintained with rams under a semi-intensive management system lambed year round at the Research Station in St John's. However, studies at the Agriculture Canada Research Station, Nappan, NS, have failed to confirm the long breeding season reported earlier (Fahmy et al. 1980). The age at first lambing is usually 2 years, although some ewe lambs conceive at 7 months. The average gestation length is 147 days. Fertility in these sheep is over 90%, with a prolificacy of 1.7 lambs. Ewe lambs produce singles, but older ewes produce twins or more. Ewes are good mothers and raise single or twin lambs on pasture. Some ewes are still productive at 17 years. Lamb mortality at birth and weaning are 7 and 13%, respectively. Lambs weigh 3.4 kg at birth and 18 kg at weaning (84 days). Lambs slaughtered at 120 days of age weighing 44 kg have a dressing percentage of 50% with 11% skin. As a ratio of chilled carcass weight, shoulder, loin and rack, and leg are 39, 21, and 39%, respectively. Kidney fat is 7%, length of leg is 77 cm, chest circumference is 76 cm, and leg circumference is 46 cm.

Comparison of the "DLS" breed (a newly developed breed in Canada) with Newfoundland sheep showed that the DLS breed had a higher productivity, although the latter have a higher lamb survival rate (Fahmy et al. 1980). Crossbreeding studies at the Sheep Breeding Station showed that offspring of the Suffolk and North Country Cheviot ewes sired by Newfoundland sheep were similar to the Cheviot breed in growth but produced lower lean muscle yield. Furthermore, the Suffolk, Cheviot and Dorset breeds, representative of modern breeds, were more productive than Newfoundland sheep. Only under conditions where the input and pasture costs are minimal can Newfoundland sheep exceed the modern sheep breeds in productivity.

Newfoundland sheep resemble some of the breeds brought to the Americas by the early settlers. They may represent a genetic resource which may have some economic merit in the future.

References

may have some economic merit in the future.

References

representative performance of Newfoundland red and white sheep
 intensive management in Nova Scotia, Canada

