

# Black Sheep Newsletter

*A magazine for shepherds and fiber enthusiasts*

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## Michigan Shepherding

*By Letty Klein*

*Pine Lane Farm Karakuls  
Kalamazoo, Michigan*

### Karakul Shepherds Alliance

I've been raising Karakul Sheep for a long time. We moved to the farm in 1979, and I purchased my first ewe with a lamb by her side in 1982. I was told that the Beulah was probably a Karakul. I had no idea what a Karakul was but because I have a scientifically trained mind, I started doing some research. At that time the American Karakul Sheep Registry (AKSR) was a privately owned registry founded in 1985 by Julie DeVlieg of Rice, Washington.

The registry was an open registry that welcomed individual sheep with the submission of several photos that showed some of the unique Karakul traits and fleece samples. So, knowing nothing about Beulah's background, I set about getting her registered. The more I learned the more I became enamored with the breed. Beulah did become registered and had 14 lambs during her life at our farm. In 2001 Julie sold the registry to Rey Perera in Missouri, and the books were closed, meaning that

only sheep from registered parents would be eligible for registry.

Over the years it has become more difficult to find unrelated registered breeding stock, even though there are pockets of unregistered purebred animals across the country. My last three rams have come from Colorado, New Mexico and Washington, all a long way from Michigan. A group of concerned Karakul breeders have gotten together to form The Karakul Shepherds Alliance; we hope to locate unregistered, purebred Karakuls — so please help spread the word by going to [www.karakulshepherds.org](http://www.karakulshepherds.org)

### Michigan summer

The summer here in Michigan was very hot, humid and busy. The Spinning Study group of the Kalamazoo Weavers Guild met here one day as did the Kalamazoo-Dunes Orchid Society. I sweated to keep up with the gardens and barn for a while, and then with the extremely hot weather I wilted.

The All American Junior Show (AJJS) was held again at Michigan State University over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. A record 389 youth from 25 states showed 1663 sheep and 158 fleeces.

Melanie Hall, an Oxford breeder from Moweaqua, Illinois, and I once again teamed up for the fleece show. As I judged a class, Melanie set up the next class and arranged finished ones in an attractive display. Fleeces were divided into 16 divisions by breed, and then each breed divided into ram and ewe classes.

One fleece really caught my eye, a silver Romney exhibited by a youth from Newell, South Dakota.

Some commented that this fleece resembled a bag of wooly-worms or crinkle fries. It was one of the nicest Romney fleeces that I have seen in a long time; it had beautiful crimp, consistent staples, perfect density (Romney fleeces are supposed to have just enough density to be able to shake out water, unlike a Corriedale fleece which has a denser, more closed fleece), and virtually no cross-hatching. (Romney fleece photo on page 2.)

The Michigan Fiber Festival in August was interesting as it was interrupted on Saturday by a



*A good crop of pumpkins were harvested and relished by our Karakul ewes.*

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## Michigan Shepherding

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*Here I'm examining a Rambouillet fleece for fineness at the AAJS.*



*A very nice Romney fleece at the AAJS.*

ing them, but they really should be divided into separate classes based on fleece types so that you aren't comparing apples to oranges, so to speak. A class for the shorter fine-wooled Shetlands and one for the longer-wooled style, plus one for the rooed fleece, would make things so much easier. A rooed Shetland fleece is one that has been shed or plucked instead of being shorn. Because of this, a rooed fleece will look different; it will lack cut-ends and could be less organized if it didn't come off in one piece.

On Sunday the first Obstacle Course event, open to sheep, goats and camelids, was held. While the goats dominated the teeter-totter, most sheep navigated the water hazard. I entered a yearling ewe; we were first to run the course, but as this was a timed event, we were too slow. My friend Jan, did win 2<sup>nd</sup> place with one of my ewe lambs. This proved to be an interesting, fun class.

tornado warning; festival goers were told to congregate in the restrooms, but here's the problem: they wouldn't all fit. A tornado did touch down a few miles away. After teaching a one-day rug braiding workshop, then bringing five Karakuls in for the sheep show, I judged the fleece competition. While I really enjoy judging in front of an audience, this proved difficult as I couldn't talk loud enough over the sound of the buildings' exhaust fans.

There were lots of Shetland fleeces and I have always enjoyed judg-

## Fall festivals

At the Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival, held the weekend after Labor Day, another tornado warning momentarily halted the festivities. I taught a two-day rug braiding class on Thursday and Friday, and then judged fleeces on Saturday.



*My rug braiding class had 15 students at this year's Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival.*



*That's me judging the Shetland fleeces at the Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival with the amazing Debbie Powers of Colorado, scribing. Photo: Garret Ramsey.*

The fleece competitions proved interesting. Last year Penny Swearingen of Hillsdale, Michigan, asked if she could shadow me to learn the ropes as I judged the fleece show, so she stuck by my side for the entire 10 hours. This year the show superintendents decided to use two judges instead of one and limit the number of entries per exhibitor. As a result, there were fewer fleeces entered and the quality improved. But first I had the honor of judging the Midwest Shetland Sheep Breeders Asso-



Here I'm with Co-Open Fleece Show judge, Penny Swearingen, and the Supreme Show Champion fleece, a black Leicester Longwool.

ciation fleeces; this normally has been judged by judges from the United Kingdom and is sponsored by the Fine Fleece Shetland Sheep Association. As I judged the 88 Shetland fleeces, Penny began judging Junior and cross-bred fleeces entered in the Open Fleece Show. When finished with the Shetland fleeces, I took over judging the rest of the open show fleeces, and then together we selected the Supreme Show fleece, a black Leicester Longwool.

And now the preparations for winter begin. We had our first fall lamb born on September 1<sup>st</sup>, a handsome brown ram lamb, whose mother had also lambed in February.



Cletus, a brown September ram lamb. See his Mom's fat tail?



Photos: Letty Klein unless noted.

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## The Shepherd's Rug

— A braided wool rug from roving —

by Letty Klein and Ann Brown

illustrated by Diane Howell

[www.shepherdsrug.etsy.com](http://www.shepherdsrug.etsy.com)

[www.plfkarakuls.com](http://www.plfkarakuls.com)

[www.theshepherdsrug.blogspot.com](http://www.theshepherdsrug.blogspot.com)

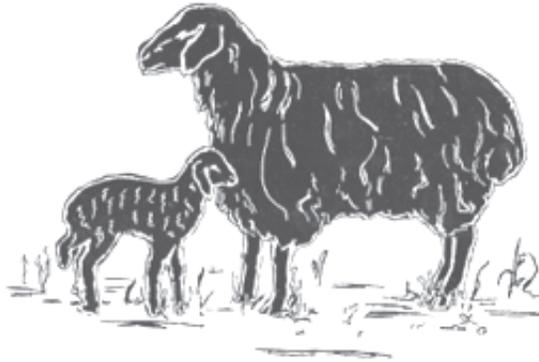
[www.hiddenvallyfarmwoolenmill.com](http://www.hiddenvallyfarmwoolenmill.com)

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# KARAKUL SHEPHERDS ALLIANCE

*~ where the flocks gather*

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The Karakul Shepherds Alliance is looking for Karakul Sheep breeders.

*“After 15 years with closed books, isolated, unregistered flocks will be a source of unique and valuable genetics for the American Karakul” Julia DeVlieg, Founder*

The mission of the **Karakul Shepherds Alliance** is to collect and disseminate information about Karakul Sheep for the benefit of current and future breeders, while acknowledging and honoring past pioneers and leaders of the breed.

The establishment of the **Karakul Shepherds Alliance** is to provide a tool for shepherds to communicate and locate lost or isolated Karakul sheep breeders and their purebred flocks. The Alliance will include a roster of flocks and a registry service. The original American Karakul Sheep Registry was established in 1985 by Julia DeVlieg as an open registry for this ancient breed. In 2001 the registry was sold and the books prematurely closed to unregistered individuals. With the advent of this **Alliance**, books will be open to unregistered flocks.

If you know of any Karakul breeders please help spread the word and tell them about the **Karakul Shepherds Alliance**. If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Deborah Hunter, Registrar at [info@karakulshepherds.org](mailto:info@karakulshepherds.org)



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