

SECTION B

B-15

CHARACTERIZATION AND EVALUATION OF INDIGENOUS BREEDS OF LIVESTOCK—I. SHEEP

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Almost 90 per cent of the estimated sheep population in Sri Lanka belongs to the indigenous type. However, no real attempts have hitherto been made to identify these sheep as a part of our animal genetic resources. The data used in this study was collected from a survey conducted among 39 flocks in Northern Sri Lanka during 1979-80.

The indigenous sheep is without exception hairy and small in size. Height at withers for adult males and females were 52.4 ± 3.3 and 49.2 ± 2.4 cm respectively. The adult body weights of males and females were 24.45 and 18.73 kg respectively. The breed is believed to be a retrograde South Indian breed. The sheep are of mixed colour. The mean weight at birth was 1.80 kg. The daily weight gains up to 12 months of age were 47.9 g for males and 37.6 g for females.

Peak lambing occurred between November and January. This is a deliberate rather than natural phenomenon, as ewes are bred in July-August so that the lambing season coincides with increased forage availability following North East monsoonal rains. The mean lambing percentage was 75.7. Lamb mortality up to six months of age was high ranging from 14 to 36%, the major cause being pneumonia resulting from exposure to dampness. The results suggest that the potential of indigenous sheep as a meat producer in Sri Lanka may have been underestimated.