

## CHAPTER 5

# Reproductive management

In order to understand how reproduction in sheep flocks can be managed and improved, this chapter covers:

- the reproductive cycle of the ewe
- the factors affecting reproduction
- some strategies to increase lambing percentage.

Many factors influence reproductive performance, including nutrition, live weight, breed, season and disease. An investigation into the cause of poor reproductive performance must consider all these factors.

### **Reproductive performance**

Flock reproductive performance is measured by lamb marking percentage, which can be improved in many flocks. The extent to which lamb marking percentage can be improved must be balanced with overall profitability. In wool enterprises, raising the reproductive performance above the industry average may not be profitable unless the returns from stock trading are significant or the cost of improving reproductive performance is small. The marginal return from increasing fertility will be greater in flocks when all progeny are sold, particularly prime lamb flocks where wool value is low. When meat, surplus store stock or individual animal product value is high (as with studs) the financial return from increasing reproduction performance will be greater.

Other benefits of increasing reproductive performance include assisting the rate of genetic gain by increasing the selection potential and the opportunity to run a younger flock.

### **Lamb marking percentage**

Average lamb marking percentage is shown in Table 5.1. The potential for improvement is shown by the low averages and the wide range of lamb marking percentages.