

Cassiar Stone's Sheep Project – Health Sampling and Ewe Collaring/VIT – Year 2

Yr 2 Round 2 Checklist and timeline:

Issue: *Of the 8 Ewes collared in 2018, 1 was predated by a grizzly; 1 was caught in a landslide heading to lambing habitat; 3 expelled their VITs prematurely - there is a need for more VIT data & 1 ewe went off-air...?... in Oct 2018.*

February 2019

✓ *A combination of weather and sheep resulted in a limited effort with: 5 ewes confirmed pregnant with ultrasound, sampled, collared/VIT and released (this will be the first lamb for one ewe); one ewe not pregnant but sampled, collared and released; 2 ewe-like rams captured and both sampled and released (1 collared).*

March 2019

✓ *Provide project update to stakeholders and funders.*
✓ *Review health sample results from capture efforts - No M.ovil!*
✓ *Other test results still pending.*
✓ *Finalize budget year-end reports & direct invoicing to funding partners.*

April

✓ *Prep and redeploy crew to Dease Lake to complete collaring.*
✓ *Captured 5 ewes on April 2nd (4 of 5 pregnant). All sampled and 4 pregnant ones were collared/VIT outfitted and released. One ewe was a recapture from 2018 - not pregnant then, but was this year! And we saw two ewes collared last year that still had their lambs at heel. Boy did it ever feel warm at -5°C!*
✓ *Plan project summer work schedule.*

May

✓ *Monitor ewe/VITs and await lambing events.*
✓ *First Lambing event of the year confirmed via collar/VIT notification on May 8th at 4:22 AM!*
✓ *Wait for remaining lambing events and hope the ewes make out okay...so far, employing lessons learned from year one, we've had better luck with our VIT retention.*

✓ *Report out to funders & partners.*

June - November

✓ *Develop new proposals and apply for final grant funding.*
✓ *Outreach findings to date and next steps to Communities, First Nations, Stakeholders & Academia.*
✓ *Cross-Fingers.... & Wait...*

Hope for good things!

Following up on the first Year 2 update from back in March, I wanted to let you all know that we successfully deployed our remaining collars and VITs. Skeena regional wild sheep lead Bill Jex, Dr. Caeley Thacker, Fraser Macdonald (netgunner), Bill Oestreich (pilot) & Krystal Kriss (safety monitor) deployed from Dease Lake on April 2nd to complete collaring and VIT deployment work on Stone's sheep in the Cassiar Mountains.



Krystal Kriss Photo: Stone's sheep ewe and lamb (not one of our collared ewes) – summer 2018.

This effort continues to build on support from: University of Alberta; the Wild Sheep Foundation & Outer Circle Bunch, Wild Sheep Society of BC & the Jurassic Classic fundraiser; the Abbotsford Rod & Gun Club; the Alberta Chapter of Safari Club International; Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation; the Northwest Guide Outfitter Association; the Tahltan Guide Outfitters Association; and the Province, as well as assistance and support from the Dease River First Nation in Good Hope Lake. This collective commitment to help with project delivery and try to find answers as to the 'whys' of the apparent declines is an amazing example of synergy and valuing our natural capital.

Work this year and in February 2018 continues to expand our understanding of body measurements and baseline health conditions. These data and experiences have allowed us to provide feedback to the VIT manufacturer that will support improved design for other VIT studies involving thinhorn sheep. Our recapture of a 2018 captured ewe who was pregnant this year, and the capture of a ewe who will reach her 4th birthday this summer carrying her first lamb, will both provide informative data we currently do not have.

Caeley Thacker Photo:

(L-R) Bill Oestreich, Bill Jex, Fraser Macdonald. April 2, 2019.



As of early May 2019:

- we have 5 ewe collars still reporting from the 2018 effort (we deployed 8 and captured in 12 total, 2 have died and 1 collar simply stopped reporting);
- in February and April 2019 we deployed another 11 collars (and 9 VITs) onto 10 ewes (1 ewe was collared but not pregnant) and 1 young ram, in preparation for another upcoming project. We captured sampled a total of 13 sheep.

This summer's Cassiar project includes finding and recovering the collars that are off-air and monitoring the existing ewes and lambs, doing some community outreach and updating the Good Hope people about the project that is happening in their back yard, and looking more closely at trail and mineral lick use by the collared sheep by installing trail cameras at key locations.

The land in the northwest of our province, in the traditional territories of the 3 Nations' peoples, is something you can't fully appreciate until you've been there... conducting a wildlife project there tests every aspect of delivery because of its remoteness, ruggedness and climate, but it's so special because this geography is the everyday home to what we now know is the part of the global range of Stone's sheep.

As you have heard me say before and speaking as a biologist and mountain conservationist...

... and there's no place that you'd rather be!

*Written by Bill Jex, RPBio.
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Krystal Kriss Photo: Stone's sheep
ewe and lamb (not one of our
collared ewes) – summer 2018.

