

GOOD HUSBANDRY
Care of The Breeding Doe by Tony Kent,
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One continually hears talk of small litters and the blame is normally put on 'the season'. Typically British, isn't it? When in doubt, blame the weather. Just for once let us forget the weather and look at the real culprit.

Human error is one of the factors which must be considered. This covers a very wide field. It might even be better called human ignorance for this is what much of it is. A small but important point. Before putting the doe to the buck, did you remove his feeding and drinking pots? Upset the buck and you upset his fertility. The same thing applies to the doe. Handle her gently, if she is snappy, do not hit her. Put her back in her own hutch after mating. Familiar smells will help her to keep calm during the ovulation period. This is the make or break period when the division between fertility and infertility is extremely thin.

Another mistake commonly made, is to mate the doe at the wrong point in the heat period. An animal will stand on heat for a period of 24 to 72 hours. This applies to most animals. Ovulation normally occurs half to two thirds of the way through the period. If mating occurs too early, many of the sperm will die before ovulation and litter numbers and vigor may well suffer. To prevent this, I mate my does twice at a gap of 23 hours. Experiments on pigs have proved that this normally produce bigger litters. If you use someone else's buck and can only mate your doe once do it in the second half of the heat i.e. when the foot is stamping and dashing about has stopped.

Assuming the mating has been a success, what can go wrong now? The main danger now is from absorption or foetal re-absorption.

Abortion could be caused by a fright, a blow or a germ. The first two we all know how to guard against, the third one although extremely rare is as hard to combat as the common cold. When you discover it, it is too late.

Foetal re-absorption is a natural function that gets out of control. What happens is as follows. The female conceives far more young than it can safely carry. This is a natural precaution against accidents. During the foetal stage the excess young are killed off by being

reabsorbed into the body of the mother. Sometimes this process goes too far and too many young are killed off thereby causing those litters of 2 to 3. So don't blame the season, reason out what went wrong.