

Fellowship Report Mary Ann Buckley 2019: The Versatility of a Single Shetland Fleece

I attended this 2019 MAFA spinning workshop, taught by Judi Lehrhaupt. I chose this workshop because I had recently purchased two Shetland wethers and discovered that their fleeces appeared to be double-coated. I had not worked with double-coated fleeces before, so I hoped this workshop would assist me in processing my own first Shetland fleeces.

We first learned about the breed and its characteristics, including what type of wool was most likely to be found on which part of the body, and then split into groups of three or four. Each group was given a fleece to sort into three types: fine, medium, and coarse. It was at this point that I realized that all the fleeces were single-coated! Judi explained to me that there is a vigorous discussion in the Shetland community about whether true Shetlands can be double-coated. The compromise: the concept of “transitional” fleeces! I chose then to refer to my own fleeces as “transitional” and planned to separate the parts of their locks by combing. We then washed the workshop fleeces and did our best to remove as much of the rinse water as possible manually in order to work with it the next day.

Once dry, half of each type was then split into equal parts for each member of the group to take home. The other half was similarly split for us to work with during the workshop. The goal was to spin enough of each of the three types to give us a small plied sample skein of each type of wool spun woolen and worsted. An additional goal was to spin enough of one of the types to knit a small sample as well. We were provided with sample cards on which to mount the sample skeins. In order to accomplish the workshop goals, the instructors reviewed with us the techniques of carding with hand cards, drumcarding, and combing. Once we began spinning, members of the class who had not previously practiced Andean plying were taught the technique for our small sample skeins.

By the end of the workshop, we had completed and mounted the sample skeins but most of us had run out of time before completing the knitted sample.

At this point, the question for me was, “How do I translate what I learned in this workshop into working with my own “transitional” fleeces, and how can I most clearly present what I learned when I give my fellowship presentation to my guild?” I began by spinning enough of each of the three types of wool from my workshop fleece to create knitted samples of each type. Each sample was knitted on the same set of knitting needles, with 30 stitches cast on. Next, I decided that my best approach for my own fleeces was to sort by length within each lock rather than by where on the body it came from, in part due to the fact that I had washed parts of the fleeces prior to the workshop without noting where they came from! This approach worked well for the first fleece: there was a dramatic difference in the level of softness/coarseness from the longer to the shorter fibers within the lock. I then knitted samples of the skeins made from the three lengths. The second fleece showed less difference in texture from the longest to the shortest fibers within the locks, so in addition to samples knitted from the separated locks, I also drumcarded some whole locks and knitted an additional sample for comparison’s sake. Since then, I have discovered that parts of my second fleece is single-coated and is on the finer side; I am looking forward to completing this fleece to see how much more variety is to be found within this fleece. In addition, I now wonder whether my other fleece will have similar variability in the texture based on location on the sheep’s body as well as within the locks.

My guild requested that I do a presentation for the Montpelier Fall Fiber Festival and Sheep Dog Trials in addition to a guild presentation, so I mounted all my sample skeins and knitted samples on a tri-fold and set it up for visitors to the festival to view and touch during the two-day festival, with specified times when I would be there and available to answer questions.



I used the same display during my presentation to the guild at our monthly craft-in in November.



The attendees were attentive and interested!



I reviewed what I had learned in class – and since - and provided additional touch samples, including some of one of my Shetland fleeces blended with angora.



After the “didactic” portion of my presentation, participants were encouraged to touch the various samples.



There was a lively discussion after the presentation!

2019 MAFA Fellowship Report: Mary Ann Buckley



This has been a valuable learning experience for me and has forced me to be much more organized in my recordkeeping than my norm – I highly recommend applying for fellowships to future MAFA conference attendees.