



HAL
open science

Amplitude of the plasma melatonin nycthemeral rhythms is not associated with the dates of onset and offset of the seasonal ovulatory activity in the Ile-de-France ewe

Luis Zarazaga, Benoît Malpaux, Philippe Chemineau

► To cite this version:

Luis Zarazaga, Benoît Malpaux, Philippe Chemineau. Amplitude of the plasma melatonin nycthemeral rhythms is not associated with the dates of onset and offset of the seasonal ovulatory activity in the Ile-de-France ewe. *Reproduction Nutrition Development*, 2003, 43 (2), pp.167-177. 10.1051/rnd:2003015 . hal-00900442

HAL Id: hal-00900442

<https://hal.science/hal-00900442>

Submitted on 11 May 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Original article

Amplitude of the plasma melatonin nycthemeral rhythms is not associated with the dates of onset and offset of the seasonal ovulatory activity in the Ile-de-France ewe

Luis Ángel ZARAZAGA^{a,b}, Benoît MALPAUX^a, Philippe CHEMINEAU^{a*}

^aUMR INRA-CNRS-Université de Tours, Physiologie de la Reproduction et des Comportements, 37380 Nouzilly, France

^bPresent address: Universidad de Huelva, E.P.S., La Rábida, 21819 Huelva, Spain

(Received 23 October 2002; accepted 19 February 2003)

Abstract — We investigated if absolute (nocturnal) or relative (nocturnal/diurnal ratio) plasma melatonin concentrations were associated with the seasonal ovulatory activity in Ile-de-France ewes. Ninety-six and 121 ewes in two different groups of the same flock were used to determine the potential existence of a relationship between melatonin concentrations at the summer and winter solstices, and the dates of onset and offset of the ovulatory activity, respectively. The dates of the first and last ovulations were estimated by assaying progesterone in plasma samples taken once weekly. Mean \pm SEM (1) plasma melatonin concentrations at the summer solstice and at the winter solstice were 302.4 ± 19.4 and 412.0 ± 18.7 pg·mL⁻¹, respectively, (2) date of onset of the breeding season 29 Jul. \pm 1.6 days, (3) date of offset of the breeding season 24 Jan. \pm 2.2 days. In spite of a large variability in the different traits studied here, the analyses of correlation and regression indicated that neither the absolute nor relative melatonin concentrations were significantly related with the dates of onset or offset of ovulatory activity. Therefore, we concluded that absolute or relative plasma melatonin concentrations are not linked to the seasonal breeding activity, in Ile-de-France ewes.

sheep / melatonin / reproduction / seasonality / genetics

1. INTRODUCTION

Seasonality of reproduction is an important feature that limits productivity in small ruminants. In most breeds of sheep originating from high and mid latitudes, the onset of

breeding activity occurs in the late summer or autumn when day length is decreasing, while the breeding season stops in the late winter or beginning of spring with increasing day length. This seasonal breeding cycle of the ewe is not directly driven by the

* Correspondence and reprints
E-mail: Philippe.Chemineau@tours.inra.fr

photoperiod; rather it appears to be controlled by an endogenous circannual rhythm that is entrained by the photoperiod [1]. The reproductive response to photoperiod is mediated by the pineal gland via changes in the daily secretion of its main secretory product, melatonin [1–6]. In sheep, a sudden increase in melatonin release shortly after sunset and a decrease before sunrise, after a continuous nighttime secretion are observed, thus providing a permanently high plasma melatonin during the dark phase [7].

Two main alternative hypotheses have been proposed to explain how nycthemeral melatonin secretion controls the reproductive activity. In sheep and hamsters, the duration of the melatonin secretion versus the temporal position of this rise during the light:dark cycle has been considered [4, 8, 9 versus 10–12]. For each of them, the amplitude of the melatonin secretion (i.e. ratio or difference night/day) may play a specific role in modulating the response. It has been suggested, in sheep, that the nocturnal/diurnal melatonin ratio after implant insertion [13] or in natural conditions [14] could be related to the speed of the resumption of ovulatory activity. In the female Italian Buffalo a significant relationship between the mean nocturnal melatonin concentration and seasonal breeding activity has also been described: animals that show low seasonality, show reduced levels of melatonin concentrations at night [15]. However, whatever the mammalian species and especially in sheep, it is well established that nocturnal melatonin concentrations are highly variable among individuals [16–18], and highly repeatable within individuals [19], a large part of the between-individual variability being under a strong genetic control [20].

Thus, on the one hand, melatonin is a highly repeatable and heritable characteristic and, on the other hand, the dates of (a) the onset of the annual breeding season [21–23] and of (b) the offset of the annual breeding season are very variable among ewes but very repeatable within individuals [23].

Since these last two events (onset and offset of the breeding season) are controlled by changes in the photoperiod via the daily rhythm of melatonin, we tested here the hypothesis that the variability of these two traits (amplitude of melatonin and dates of breeding season) were linked.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. General

This experiment was carried out at the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Research Center of Nouzilly, France (45° North) around the onset of the breeding season (1 June until 30 September, $n = 96$ ewes) and around the offset of the breeding season (1 December until 30 April, $n = 121$ ewes). The whole Ile-de-France flock from which the two separate groups of ewes which were subjected to the experimental measurements were obtained, is a large flock of about 600 animals divided into 6 different families. At regular intervals, sires are purchased from various private external flocks and are introduced to prevent inbreeding and maintain genetic connections with the national French scheme of genetic improvement of the Ile-de-France breed.

The experimental ewes were obtained from 399 ewes that had been used in a previous experiment in which the endogenous melatonin plasma concentration was determined at the June and December solstices [20]. The ewes were maintained under a natural photoperiod, were fed daily with hay, straw, and corn, and had free access to water and mineral licks. In order to obtain data which would eventually be useful for animal production purposes, we chose to use productive animals and, thus, we identified two separate groups of ewes, each group lambing once a year, after estrous synchronization. The first group (96 ewes) lambed in March and was used to measure the date of onset of the breeding season,

while the second group (121 ewes) lambed in October and was used to determine the date of offset of the breeding season. At both lambing seasons, weaning was performed after 2.5 months of suckling. More generally, the two groups were conducted under the same management conditions and were not subjected to any difference in selection procedures. No selection on seasonality was performed in the flock and melatonin measurements were performed in both cases after weaning.

2.2. Blood sampling

Blood samples were taken weekly at the same time of day (between 9:00 am and 11:00 am) by jugular venepuncture and they were assayed for progesterone during the two experimental periods (1 June until 30 September 1995 and 1 December until 30 April 1996). Confirmation of the ovulatory activity was obtained when two consecutive plasma samples showed higher progesterone concentration than the baseline ($1 \text{ ng}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$) with a consecutive cyclicality. Cessation of ovulatory activity was considered when 3 or more consecutive plasma samples showed lower concentrations than the baseline. For each ewe, the date of the last plasma progesterone value below the baseline that was part of an extended cyclic pattern, was taken as the onset of ovulatory activity. The date of the last plasma progesterone value above the baseline at the completion of an extended cyclic progesterone pattern was taken as the offset of cyclicality.

Mean nocturnal melatonin plasma concentration of ewes was assessed on 4 plasma samples per ewe, taken at hourly intervals during the night (23:00–2:00 in June 1995, 22:00–1:00 in December 1995). Blood samples were obtained by venipuncture of jugular veins and were collected under dim-red light (less than 1 lux at 20 cm) avoiding any direct illumination of the eyes. Plasma was immediately separated by centrifugation and stored at -20°C until assay (see explanations

in [20]). Mean diurnal melatonin plasma concentrations of the ewes were assessed on four plasma samples per ewe used to determine the progesterone concentrations.

2.3. Radioimmunoassays

Plasma melatonin concentrations were estimated in duplicate aliquots of 100 microliters of blood plasma by radioimmunoassay using the technique described by Fraser et al. [24], with antibody first raised by Tillet et al. [25]. The sensitivity of the assay was $4 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$. The intra and inter assay coefficients of variation were 12.1% and 2.7%, respectively.

Plasma progesterone concentrations were assayed by radioimmunoassay using the technique described by Terqui and Thimonier [26]. The sensitivity of the assay was $0.125 \text{ ng}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$. The intra and inter assay coefficients of variation were 3.4% and 16.6%, respectively.

2.4. Data analysis

Mean \pm SEM were calculated for the dates of the onset and offset of the breeding season (beginning and end of ovulatory activity), absolute levels of plasma melatonin concentrations during the night and day period and relative plasma melatonin concentrations per ewe (night/day ratio). The variances were compared by an F test to detect the differences between seasons regarding the variability in the dates of the onset and offset of ovulatory activity [27]. Analysis of variance was used to test the existence of a difference in absolute or relative melatonin concentrations between solstices and between dates and animals within solstices. A χ^2 test was performed to determine the potential existence of a non-uniform distribution in the cumulative percentage of animals that started their breeding season and those which ended it. A correlation coefficient was calculated by the Spearman test, between the dates of onset and offset of the

breeding season and the night, day and relative plasma melatonin concentrations. Regression analysis was used to evaluate if the absolute or relative plasma melatonin concentrations could be a predictor of the dates of the onset and offset of the breeding season. Statistical analyses of data were performed using the SPSS package [28].

3. RESULTS

The mean date of the first ovulation of the breeding season was the 29 July \pm 1.6 days ranging individually from 10 July until 18 September. The mean date of the offset of the ovulatory activity was the

24 January \pm 2.2 days, ranging from 8 December until 12 March. The onset of the ovulatory activity was significantly less variable than the offset of the ovulatory activity ($P < 0.001$). Figure 1 shows the cumulative percentage of animals that started the breeding season or stopped it. The changes in the cumulative percentage of ewes starting their breeding season occurred significantly faster than a uniform distribution ($P < 0.001$). The distribution of the offset of the breeding season was not different from a uniform one.

The mean nocturnal plasma melatonin concentration was significantly lower at the summer than at the winter solstice and

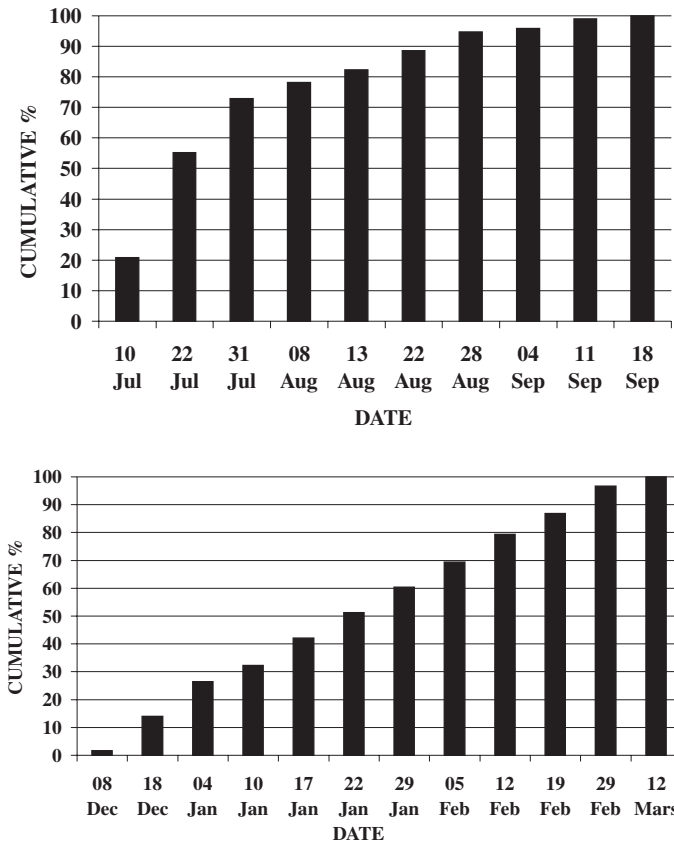


Figure 1. Distribution of the cumulative percentage of animals starting the breeding season (up; 95 ewes) and stopping it (down; 121 ewes).

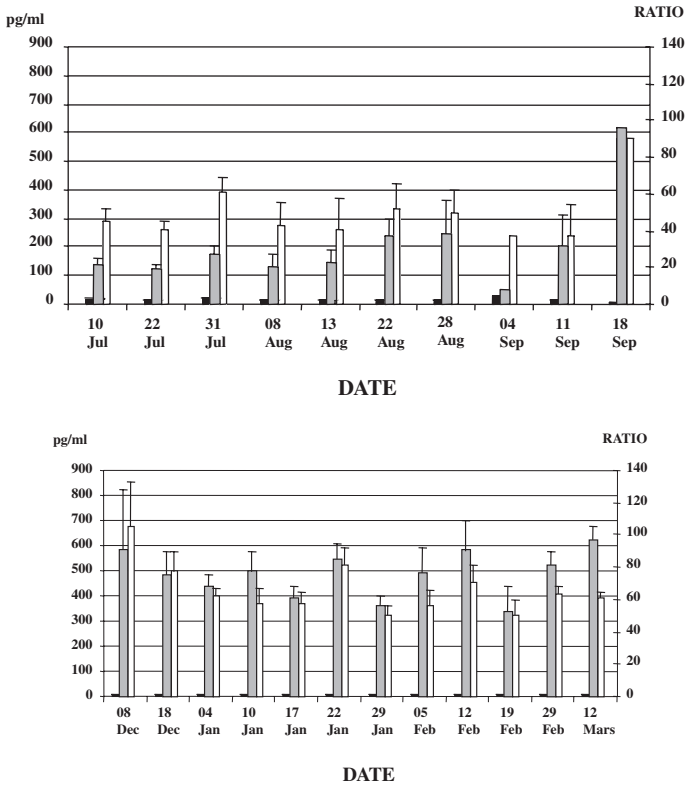


Figure 2. Mean (\pm standard error) plasma melatonin concentrations ($\text{pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$) during the day (solid bar), during the night (shaded bar) and the ratio between night/day plasma melatonin concentrations (open bar) depending on the date that showed the first (up) or the last (down) elevation of plasma progesterone concentrations.

showed a very high variability among individuals (summer solstice $302.4 \pm 19.4 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$, range 35 to $842 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$ vs. winter solstice $412.0 \pm 18.7 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$, range 61 to $981 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$, $P < 0.001$). The mean diurnal plasma melatonin concentration was low compared to nocturnal concentrations, and was significantly higher at the summer than at the winter solstice (summer solstice $14.5 \pm 0.7 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$, range 4 to $27 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$ vs. winter solstice $6.5 \pm 0.4 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$, range 4 to $23 \text{ pg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$, $P < 0.001$).

Figure 2 shows the mean plasma melatonin concentrations during the day,

during the night and the ratio between mean night and day plasma melatonin concentrations ranked according to the different dates that the ewes started or finished their breeding season. No differences in absolute or relative melatonin concentrations were observed between the dates of the first or last ovulatory activity.

Table I shows the Spearman coefficients of correlation between the interval between 1st June and the first ovulation, the interval between 1st December and the last ovulation, and the melatonin parameters at each solstice. All but one correlation coefficient

Table I. Spearman correlations between the onset of the breeding season (interval 1 June to date of the first ovulation; 95 ewes), the offset of the breeding season (interval 1 December to last ovulation; 121 ewes) and the mean night melatonin concentrations, mean day melatonin concentrations and ratio between night/day melatonin concentrations in the Ile-de-France ewe.

	Onset	Offset
Night Melatonin	0.097	-0.086
Day Melatonin	-0.101	-0.226*
Ratio N/D	0.182	0.072

* $P < 0.05$.

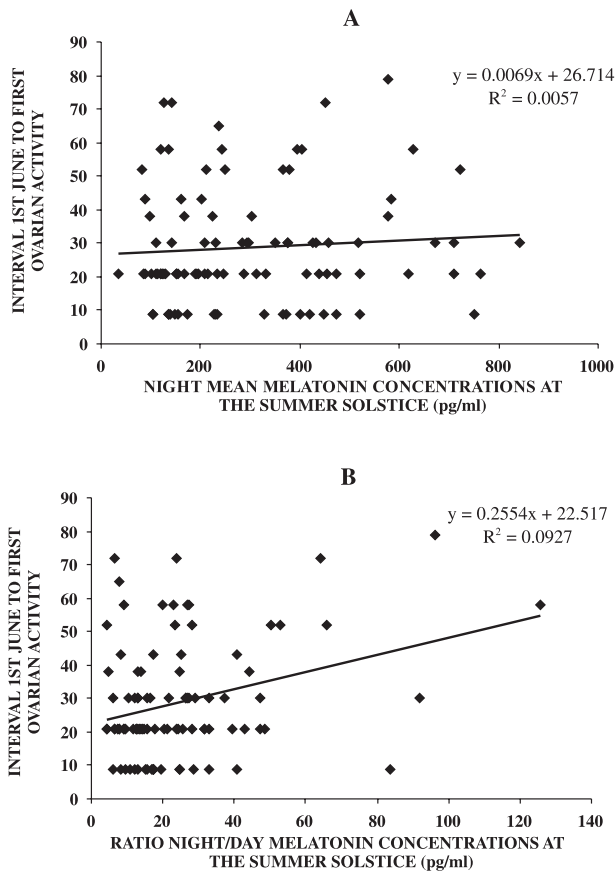


Figure 3. Analyses of regression between the interval from 1st June to first ovulation and the mean nocturnal melatonin concentrations (up) and the ratio between night/day plasma melatonin concentrations (down) at the summer solstice.

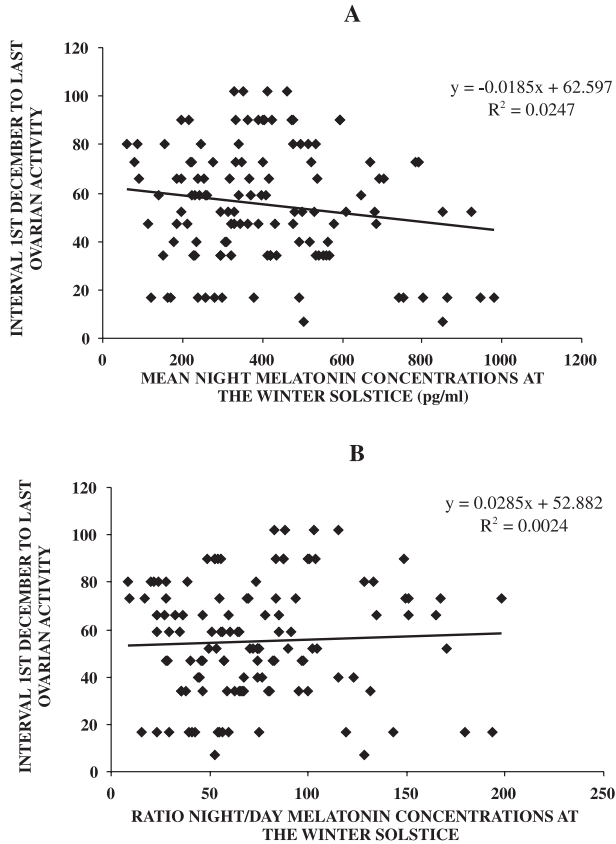


Figure 4. Analyses of regression between the interval from 1st December to last ovulation and the mean nocturnal melatonin concentrations (up) and the ratio between night/day plasma melatonin concentrations (down) at the winter solstice.

were not significantly different from zero; only a negative coefficient of correlation was observed between the plasma melatonin concentrations during the day period and the offset of the breeding season ($r = -0.226$, $P < 0.05$).

Figures 3 and 4 show the absence of a relationship between the interval 1st June–day of the first ovulation, or between the interval 1st December–day of the last ovulation, and the nocturnal melatonin concentrations or the night/day melatonin concentrations ratio at the June and December solstices, respectively.

4. DISCUSSION

In the present study, no relationship was observed between the variability in the onset and the offset of the annual breeding season and the variability in the plasma melatonin concentrations, either absolute or relative to the summer or the winter solstices, respectively.

The mean dates of onset and offset of the ovulatory activity and their range observed in this large set of Ile-de-France ewes are comparable to those found in previous studies performed in the same breed [29]. The

mean duration of the seasonal anestrus was 186 days. These variations of the reproductive activity were described for all breeds outside of the tropics showing increasing seasonality with latitude. In northern Europe, the duration of anestrus can last up to 260 days [30], while in southern Europe (Greece [31]; Spain [32]) or North Africa (Morocco [33]; Tunisia [34]), the mean duration of anestrus is limited to 50–130 days, and they could be considered like reduced seasonality breeds. As stated earlier, the onset of the breeding season appeared to be a less variable trait than its offset, probably because of the synchronization of the first ovulations among ewes due to entrainment among them [23, 29].

The mean plasma melatonin concentrations and their range, such as the change observed in the amplitude of the melatonin rhythm between seasons, with higher concentrations in December than in June, were also very comparable to those found in previous studies in the same breed [20]. These results are in agreement with those obtained by Malpaux et al. [17] suggesting that the seasonal change in amplitude reflects the action of non-photoperiodic environmental variables such as temperature. An alternative hypothesis is that light would exert a stronger inhibitory influence because of its probably higher intensity around the summer solstice; however, this possibility is not supported by the observation that diurnal melatonin concentrations were higher at the summer than at the winter solstice. This difference between solstices, could also be explained by the fact that different animals were studied at the two solstices. Because of the high variability between individuals, it could be possible that the difference between solstices originated in a difference between individuals. Thus, in spite of these minor differences, the two sets of ewes studied here could be considered as being representative, regarding the variability in

plasma melatonin concentrations, of the general population of Ile-de-France ewes.

As exposed earlier, the individual dates of the onset and offset of the breeding season and the mean plasma melatonin concentrations are repeatable traits; it was thus interesting to know if these two types of traits were phenotypically linked or not. The present data clearly showed that these two types of traits are not linked and that the variability in plasma melatonin concentrations is independent from the variability in the dates of the onset or offset of the breeding season.

The absence of a correlation between the absolute or relative melatonin concentrations and the onset of the reproductive activity contrasts with three previous experiments in sheep and one in Buffaloes. In the first experiment done in sheep, using melatonin-treated Ile-de-France ewes after long day exposure, the interval between the insertion of melatonin implants and the onset of the ovulatory activity was positively correlated with the relative melatonin concentrations [13]. In the second one, performed in non-implanted ewes of a low seasonal breed (Rasa Aragonesa, which starts earlier and stops its breeding activity later compared to Ile-de-France sheep), maintained under a natural photoperiod, a high correlation ($r = 0.84$) between the night/day ratio and the date of the first estrous activity in non implanted ewes was found [14]. In the third experiment, selection for fertility following mating in the spring affects nocturnal melatonin secretion with lower melatonin plasma concentrations in ewes selected for higher spring fertility [35]. Altogether, these data suggest that ewes with reduced seasonality present a lower night/day plasma melatonin concentration ratio. Similarly, in Italian Buffaloes, low amplitude of night/day plasma melatonin concentrations is associated with a low seasonal ovulatory activity [15].

These three results seemed to associate an early onset or a low seasonality of the breeding activity to relatively low nocturnal

concentrations of endogenous melatonin; this constituted the rationale for the present experiment.

However this was not the case in the present study in which ewes which stopped their breeding season late, did not have reduced melatonin concentrations. This divergence with the results obtained in the initial studies [13, 14] may be attributable to the low number of animals generally used, which differed strongly with the present study. The large number of ewes used here at each solstice reinforces the idea that the variability in plasma melatonin and the dates of onset/offset of the breeding season are not linked.

On the contrary, the present results confirmed previous results obtained in mares in which melatonin amplitude varies, although not significantly, across seasons [36] without any association between this variability in amplitude and reproductive activity during the nonbreeding season [37].

The major influence of melatonin on the reproductive axis is exerted on the pulsatile secretion of LHRH/LH and this effect could be sufficient itself to explain the regulation of seasonality [4, 8]. One explanation of the absence of a relationship between the variability in plasma melatonin concentrations and variability in dates of the breeding season may be found in the route taken by pineal melatonin to control LHRH/LH pulsatility. Melatonin synthesized in the pineal gland is secreted directly into the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) of the III Ventricle [38], from which it may diffuse to reach the premammillary hypothalamus where melatonin receptors controlling the LH pulsatile secretion are located [39]. According to this, the rest of the pineal melatonin flowing into the general circulation via the Galen vein would not be the one which controls the central effects of melatonin. Therefore it is possible that the main role of CSF melatonin may be the control of seasonality of reproduction, whereas the role of melatonin in the peripheral circulation may

be to control other traits like moult, thermoregulation [16] and/or embryo survival [40], depending on the action of melatonin on peripheral rather than central receptors.

In conclusion, relative or absolute blood melatonin concentrations are not related with the onset or offset of the ovulatory activity in Ile-de France ewes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank A. Daveau for advice in the technical procedures, the breeders of the INRA Research Center of Nouzilly for the supply and care of the animals and S. Canepa, C. Fagu, P. Vanbecelaere and C. Gauthier of the RIA laboratory in Nouzilly for performing the progesterone assays. L.A. Zarazaga was supported by a postdoctoral grant from INRA-DSPA.

REFERENCES

- [1] Lincoln GA. Photoperiodic control of seasonal breeding in the ram: Participation of the cranial sympathetic nervous system. *J Endocrinol* 1979, 82: 135–147.
- [2] Arendt J, Symons AM, Laud CA. Pineal function in the sheep: evidence for a possible mechanism mediating seasonal reproductive activity. *Experientia* 1981, 37: 584–586.
- [3] Barrell GK, Thrun LA, Brown ME, Viguié C, Karsch FJ. Importance of photoperiodic signal quality to entrainment of the circannual reproductive rhythm of the ewe. *Biol Reprod* 2000, 63: 769–774.
- [4] Bittman EL, Dempsey RJ, Karsch FJ. Pineal melatonin secretion drives the reproductive response to daylength in the ewe. *Endocrinology* 1983, 113: 2276–2283.
- [5] Foster DL, Ebling FJ, Claypool LE, Wood RI, Adel TE, Schramm W. Amplitude modulation of the nightly melatonin rise in the neonatal lamb and the subsequent timing of puberty. *Biol Reprod* 1989, 40: 920–928.
- [6] Kennaway DJ, Sanford LM, Godfrey B, Friesen HG. Patterns of progesterone, melatonin and prolactin secretion in ewes maintained in four different photoperiods. *J Endocrinol* 1983, 97: 229–242.
- [7] Malpoux B, Wayne NL, Karsch FJ. Termination of the breeding season in the Suffolk ewe:

- Involvement of an endogenous rhythm of reproduction. *Biol Reprod* 1988, 39: 254–263.
- [8] Bittman EL, Karsch FJ, Hopkins JW. Role of the pineal gland in ovine photoperiodism: Regulation of seasonal breeding and the negative feedback effects of estradiol upon luteinizing hormone secretion. *Endocrinology* 1983, 113: 329–336.
- [9] Wayne NL, Malpaux B, Karsch FJ. How does melatonin code for day length in the ewe: Duration of nocturnal melatonin release or coincidence of melatonin with a light-entrained sensitive period? *Biol Reprod* 1988, 39: 66–75.
- [10] Almeida OFX, Lincoln GA. Photoperiod regulation of reproductive activity in the ram: Evidence for the involvement of circadian rhythms in melatonin and prolactin secretion. *Biol Reprod* 1982, 27: 1062–1075.
- [11] Guerin MV, Deed JR, Matthews CD. The coincidence of light and melatonin with specific phase of the circadian pacemaker is important for the timing of seasonal breeding in the ewe. *J Biol Rhythms* 2000, 15: 514–523.
- [12] Lincoln GA, Almeida OFX, Arendt J. Role of melatonin and circadian rhythms in seasonal reproduction in rams. *J Reprod Fertil* 1981, 30 (Suppl): 23–31.
- [13] Chemineau P, Maurice F, Daveau A. Re-initiation of ovulatory activity by melatonin given as a constant release implant long-day treated Ile-de-France ewes, depends on endogenous secretion of melatonin. In: Touitou Y, Arendt J, Pévet P (Eds), *Melatonin and the Pineal Gland-From Basic Science to Clinical Application*, Elsevier, Paris, 1993. p 247–250.
- [14] Zarazaga LA, Forcada F, Abecia JA, Lozano JM. Date of reinitiation of the breeding season could be related with relative changes in plasma melatonin amplitude in ewes. In: Webb SM, Puig-Domingo M, Moller M, Pévet P (Eds), *Pineal update: From molecular mechanisms to clinical implications*, PJD Publications, New York, 1996. p 295–300.
- [15] Parmeggiani A, Di Palo R, Zicarelli L, Campanile G, Esposito L, Seren E, Accorsi PA, Soffai SM. Melatonina e stagionalità riproduttiva della bufala. *Agricoltura Ricerca* 1994, 153: 41–48.
- [16] Arendt J. Physiology of the pineal: Role in photoperiodic seasonal functions. In: Arendt J. (Ed), *Melatonin and the Mammalian Pineal Gland*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1995. p 110–158.
- [17] Malpaux B, Moenter SM, Wayne NL, Woodfill CJI, Karsch FJ. Reproductive refractoriness of the ewe to inhibitory photoperiod is not caused by alteration of the circadian secretion of melatonin. *Neuroendocrinology* 1988, 48: 264–270.
- [18] Malpaux B, Robinson J, Brown MB, Karsch FJ. Reproductive refractoriness of the ewe to inductive photoperiod is not caused by inappropriate secretion of melatonin. *Biol Reprod* 1987, 36: 1033–1341.
- [19] Chemineau P, Beltrán de Heredia I, Daveau A, Bodin L. High repeatability of the amplitude and duration of the nycthemeral rhythm of the plasma melatonin concentrations in Ile-de-France ewes. *J Pineal Res* 1996, 21: 1–6.
- [20] Zarazaga LA, Malpaux B, Bodin L, Chemineau P. The large variability in melatonin blood levels in ewes is under strong genetic influence. *Am J Physiol* 1998, 274: E607–E610.
- [21] Hanrahan JP. Genetic variation in seasonal reproduction in sheep. Proc. 38th Annual Meeting of European Association of European Association for Animal Production, Sheep and Goat Commission, Lisbon, 1987. p 14.
- [22] Tchamitchian L. Choix du moment et du rythme de reproduction: possibilités de la génétique. Proc. 3rd World Congress on Sheep and Beef Cattle Breeding, Paris. 1988, 2: 529–546.
- [23] Thimonier J. Contrôle photopériodique de l'activité ovulatoire chez la brebis. Existence de rythmes endogènes. Doctoral thesis, Univ. Tours, 1989. 112 p.
- [24] Fraser SP, Cowen P, Franklin M, Franey C, Arendt J. Direct radioimmunoassay for melatonin in plasma. *Clinical Chemistry* 1983, 20: 396–397.
- [25] Tillet Y, Ravault JP, Selve C, Evin G, Castro B, Dubois MP. Conditions d'utilisation d'anticorps spécifiques pour la visualisation immunohistochimique de la sérotonine et de la mélatonine dans la glande pinéale du mouton, *CR Acad Sci Paris Sér III* 1986, 303: 77–82.
- [26] Terqui M, Thimonier J. Nouvelle méthode radioimmunologique rapide pour l'estimation du niveau de progestérone plasmatique. Application pour le diagnostic précoce de la gestation chez la brebis et la chèvre, *CR Acad Sci Paris Serie D* 1974, 279: 1109–1112.
- [27] Dagnelie P. Théorie et méthodes statistiques. Vol. II. Presses agron. Gembloux (Belgique), 1970. 451 p.
- [28] SPSS, The SPSS System for Windows, Release 10.0. 2001. SPSS Inc. Headquarters, 233 S. Wacker Drive, 11th floor, Chicago, Illinois 60606, USA.
- [29] Thimonier J, Mauléon P. Variations saisonnières du comportement d'œstrus et des activités ovarienne et hypophysaire chez les ovins. *Ann Biol Anim Biochim Biophys* 1969, 49: 80–87.
- [30] Hafez ESE. Studies on the breeding season and reproduction of the ewe. *J Agric Sci* 1952, 42: 189–265.

- [31] Avdi M, Driancourt MA, Chemineau P. Variations saisonnières du comportement d'œstrus et de l'activité ovulatoire chez les brebis Chios et Serres en Grèce. *Reprod Nutr Develop* 1993, 33: 15–24.
- [32] Forcada F, Abecia JA, Sierra I. Seasonal changes in oestrus activity and ovulation rate in Rasa Aragonesa ewes maintained at two different body condition levels. *Small Rum Res* 1992 8: 313–324.
- [33] Lahlou-Kassi A, Marie M. Sexual and ovarian function of the D'Man ewe. In: Land RB, Robinson DW (Eds), *Genetics of reproduction in sheep*, Publ Butterworths, London, 1985. p 245–260.
- [34] Khaldi G. Variations saisonnières de l'activité ovarienne du comportement d'œstrus et de la durée de l'anestrus post-partum des femelles ovines de la race Barbarine: influences du niveau alimentaire et de la présence du mâle. Thèse Doctorat d'État, Univ. Sci. Tech. Languedoc, Montpellier, 1984. 168 p.
- [35] Notter DR, Chemineau P. Nocturnal melatonin and prolactin plasma concentrations in sheep selected for fertility in autumn lambing. *J Anim Sci* 2001 79: 2895–2901.
- [36] Guerin MV, Deed JR, Kennaway DJ, Matthews CD. Plasma melatonin in the horse: measurements in natural photoperiod and in acutely extended darkness throughout the year. *J Pineal Res* 1995, 19: 7–15.
- [37] Fitzgerald BP, Schmidt MJ. Absence of association between melatonin and reproductive activity in mares during the nonbreeding season. *Biol Reprod* 1995 Mono1: 425–434.
- [38] Tricoire H, Locatelli A, Chemineau P, Malpoux B. Melatonin enters the cerebrospinal fluid through the pineal recess. *Endocrinology* 2002, 143: 84–90.
- [39] Malpoux B, Daveau A, Maurice-Mandon F, Duarte G, Chemineau P. Evidence that melatonin acts in the pre-mammillary hypothalamic area to control reproduction in the ewe: Presence of binding sites and stimulation of LH secretion by in situ microimplant delivery. *Endocrinology* 1998, 139: 1508–1516.
- [40] Abecia JA, Forcada F, Zúñiga O. The effect of melatonin on the secretion of progesterone in sheep and on the development of ovine embryos in vitro. *Vet Res Commun* 2002, 26: 151–158.

