

# Hermaphrodites - Pros and Cons

by  
Fred C. Homeyer

Many years ago I had a beautiful polled (hornless) kid born on the ranch. She (at least I thought it was a she) grew impressively. One day I took her to the vet for a check up. After the examination the vet said, "I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that this goat is not a female and the good news is that it is the ultimate marker billy." The goat was what is called an intersex goat or a hermaphrodite or double sexed goat. I named the goat "Heshe" as it was both a he and a she. As Heshe matured the goat took on a harsh look that looked more like a buck than a doe. The muscling became very impressive. Heshe looking like nothing I had ever seen before.

It turns out that the hermaphrodite gene is similar to the polled gene in that usually only polled or hornless goats can be hermaphrodites. This is not always true as I had one Hermaphrodite that had huge horns (that were really weird shaped).

In most cases the sex organs of an hermaphrodite look strange. The vagina will be protruding or cupped at the bottom and if you peel back the skin at the cup you will see a small penis. Their rear ends are usually pretty nasty and discolored as the pee all over their rear end. These goats cannot breed but will exhibit characteristics of both bucks and does.

I have had as many as ten hermaphrodites in my herd over time, one at a time. You can have a lot of fun with naming them. Such names as Sheboyken, Wishywashy, and Heshe come to mind. The hermaphrodite can actually play a very important function in your herd acting like a marker billy that identifies does when they come into heat. They can play the buck function bringing the does into heat and they can play the female function getting the bucks worked up and ready to breed.

Early on I had a partner in the Boer goat business. It was very hot in the middle of August and my partner called me to ask if I was getting any goats bred. He told me that his bucks were so lazy all they wanted to do was lay in the shade of a tree all day. I told him that I was using Heshe, my hermaphrodite, to get my bucks worked up and then Heshe would go over to doe that was coming into heat and get her worked up. I would lead the hot doe over to the buck and he would breed her as he had been worked up by Heshe and was ready to breed. My partner said that I should make a video of Heshe working and me taking the doe over to the buck to breed. I told him that I would be glad to make the video but that he could be the movie star in the video. Ultimately we did not make a video but my partner and I became aware of the value of hermaphrodites in a Boer goat herd to get goats to breed in the hot summer time and at other times of the year.

That is the "pro" of hermaphrodites. The only "con" that I can see is dealing with how nasty and smelly they can become. If they do a good job for you getting goats to breed that may not otherwise do so I think you can deal with the con of stinking. "Just my story and I am sticking to it"

For the record I have seen several young does in the show ring there were unusually heavy muscled at a very young age. I several of these cases I noticed the cupped vagina mention above and with the owner's permission I would roll the cup back to reveal the small penis that confirmed this goat was in fact an hermaphrodite.