

Farm Animal Practice Newsletter:

Small holders edition—Spring/Summer 2011

Welcome to the first edition of our small holders newsletter.

We hope to provide you with a quarterly newsletter, with articles on a range of issues that you may come across whether you are keeping a flock of lambing ewes, laying hens, alpacas or a few pigs.

Further to this we would like to set up a 'small holders club' which will be based around some evening meetings where you can discuss areas which may interest yourselves and current topics of interest.

We have enjoyed seeing more of you over the last few months, as the lambing period has thrown up its normal selection of challenges. Some of you were lambing back in January and had to face sub zero temperatures in a prolonged cold spell. Luckily the conditions of March were much more spring like and we have seen a promising flush of grass.

Remember these warmer, wetter conditions are also favourable conditions for worm proliferation, the parasite forecast has shown high burdens on pas-



Small holder's club

We are hoping to start regular meetings on topics of interest to you, we hope this would be on informative topics but also allow time for discussion on how people manage their own stock. We hope to run these on the 3rd Wednesday of every month. They were be an evening meeting, with time for discussion and refreshments!

Please let us know if there are any topics you would like covered.

We have a stand at the North Somerset show, opposite the showing rings, please come and say hello!

tures and we have already diagnosed worms as the cause of scour in some lambs. John has written an article this month to update you on our recommendations for parasite control. Now is the ideal time to start getting faecal samples in to ensure your animals stay healthy.

Also in this new style newsletter, we hope to include some case studies, cases we have seen over the past few months that may be something to look out for in your own stock. This month David discusses a case of rhododendrum poisoning that he saw over the winter.

For those of you that may be interested we have also included some details of the courses we will be running this year, and hope to see as many of you as possible at these!

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Upcoming meetings...

Wednesday 25th May

7pm Evening talk, with time for refreshments and discussion!

Vaccination in sheep and goats

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Are you controlling worms correctly?

Many livestock, including sheep, goats and alpacas, can be infested with worms. As vets we broadly group sheep worms into two groups: 'Gutworms' and 'Fluke'.

Gutworms

Gut worms are the typical worms that people refer to. Most of them live in the stomach or intestines. There are a few different families of round worm; they include *Teladorsagia* spp., *Cooperia* spp., *Nematodirus* spp., and *Haemonchus* spp.. Despite their differences, the methods for prevention are very similar between these types of worm.

Symptoms of gutworms

- Often the symptoms may be scour or some weight loss.
- They can also cause slightly different symptoms, such as *Haemonchus* causing anaemia as the worms feed on blood and *Nematodirus* causing sudden death as all the worms all develop at once.

Most sheep will **cope with low numbers of worms**; the problem comes when the numbers get to high. This happens over the **spring and summer** when warm conditions mean that worm eggs from the sheep can hatch in the ground. These hatched worm larvae are eaten by the sheep and go on to lay more eggs and so the problem cycles up.

Resistance to worming products

Traditionally farmers used anti-worm drugs (anthelmintics) on a regular base to keep the numbers down. Whilst this works initially cases have been developing where worms do not respond to treatment because resistance has developed. For this reason alternative measures and **minimal use of anthelmintics is a good idea**.

We would recommend adhering to **SCOPS (Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep)** principles available online. One of the key steps is to mini-

mise treatment by **only treating when you need to**. The best way to do this is by **bringing in a dung sample regularly throughout the summer** to see when worm levels are getting to a unacceptable level.



Fluke

Fluke behaves differently to gut worms. Fluke infects the **liver** of sheep, but causes **similar signs of weight loss or poor doers**. Fluke need to develop in water snails to survive and so are more of a problem in **wet ground** and in wet years. If you have wetter pastures regular testing and treating will be even more important to prevent any problems. Like gutworms fluke numbers increase in warmer temperatures and tend to build up over the summer, particularly if there is a lot of rain.

The disease can occur in two ways: in the autumn the high number of fluke can damage the liver causing weight loss and a chronic disease in sheep; the other possibility is that in the spring as the weather improves there is a sudden rush of fluke development and this is enough to kill the sheep.

Control is based around avoiding the fluke in the first place but also by treating sheep at two risk times;

- At the **end of the summer** to kill any fluke the sheep have picked up in the warm.
- Also in **spring** before they are turned out to kill off any fluke that may have survived in the sheep over winter.

The best way to decide if this is necessary is to test a dung sample for fluke towards the end of summer. If there is no fluke there is no need to treat, particularly not the spring treatment.

Please call us if you would like any further advice or think your sheep are already infested with worms and remember – **Prevention is Better than Cure**, so act now and develop a plan before the summer.

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Red mites in hens

A distressing problem for both hen and owner, mites can be a challenging issue to get on top of.

So what types of mites affect chickens?

- Red mite
- Northern fowl mite
- Scaley leg mite

There are several types of mites affecting chickens, **red mites being the most common**. The species differ in where on the body they may be found and the severity of the disease. However it is often possible to treat the disease caused in a similar way.

Red mites are so named because of their colour and at 1mm in size may be visible by eye, they are often found on the legs and around the vent. They are actually white or grey until they feed and then become engorged with blood. Red mites **live in cracks and crevices in the housing during the day and move on to the hens by night**. In warm weather their numbers quickly multiply up. They can cause significant disease to a hen through the amount of **blood that can be lost** when the mites feed. Hens may become weak and inactive and if left untreated could die.

Northern fowl mites causes similar signs to red mites but live on the hens all the time, as opposed to in the housing. Scaley leg mites burrow under the scales of the leg, a white or yellow discharge may be seen and they cause intense irritation.

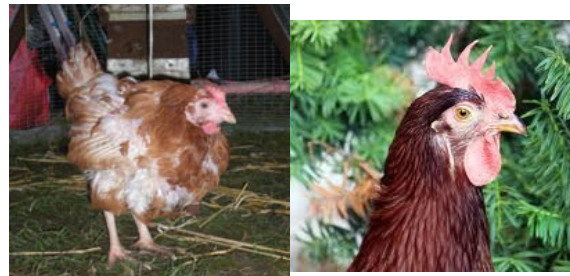
All of these mites spread easily from hen to hen, they



can also be **transfer from wild birds** so free range hens are always at risk.

What signs might you see?

Signs may be as subtle as a chicken presenting as more **quiet than normal or a drop in egg production**. It is a good idea to have a closer look at any hens causing concern and **lift feathers** to check for the presence of mites. You may also notice a pale colour to the comb and wattle and occasionally red spots on the eggs. More specific signs may be seen if mites are present on the legs such as scratching and a discharge. The mites are not always immediately visible, so any hens causing concern should be presented to a vet.



What can be done?

If mites are suspected an **ectoparasitic treatment** will be necessary, there are no licensed products for this purpose so the treatment we use carries a 7 day withdrawal period for eating their eggs. The mites are very infectious so it is usually necessary to treat all the hens in the group.

However it is just as important to **treat the housing** as it is the hens, especially for red mites as they will remain in crevices in the housing during the day. Disinfectants should be used on the housing, ensuring this is not toxic to the chickens, Jeyes fluid is appropriate, powders are also available for dusting on the housing, to directly kill the mites.

Don't forget that we offer single doses of some worming and skin parasite treatments, feel free to give us a ring to discuss.

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Case update : Rhododendrum poisoning in a sheep

In February "Popcorn" came into the practice as an emergency, having been found collapsed and panting. There was the possibility that there had been access to Rhododendrum bushes, and poisoning was thought to be likely.

Rhododendrum plants are highly toxic to grazing animals, all parts of the plant contain toxins and only a very small amount has to be digested to cause severe and even fatal signs. There is no specific antitoxin and our only options for treatment are to treat the symptoms shown and giving nursing support.

Popcorn was unable to stand, and seemed unaware of her surroundings, she was salivating slightly and had an extremely high heart and respiratory rate.

Other signs that are reported with this poisoning include; vomiting (something that is very rare in ruminants), bloat, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and tremors.

Popcorn was placed on intravenous fluids at high rate to try and flush the toxins through, additional drugs were used to try and speed the passage of the toxin. After a night on a drip she started to look more comfortable and was panting a little less. By that evening she had regained some strength in her limbs and we were able to reduce the fluids.

She was discharged 2 days later having made a full recovery. Hopefully she'll be staying away from rhododendron bushes in the future!



For more articles and advice on common issues please visit our website
www.langfordvets.co.uk/farm_animal_practice.htm

Farming Essentials Training Courses

2011 Training Diary

An introduction to keeping Pigs Weds 11th May	Getting to grips with the key health and husbandry requirements of pigs in a small holding setting.
An introduction to keeping Poultry Weds 8th June	Understanding essential health and husbandry needs of domestic poultry and how these can be practically met.
An introduction to keeping Sheep & Goats Weds 6th July	A comprehensive introduction to keeping sheep and goats; providing you with core health and husbandry knowledge and essential practical skills.
Lameness control & prevention in Sheep & Goats Weds 17th August	An update on new developments in the control and prevention of lameness in sheep and goats.
Lambing Essentials Mon 5th December	An extremely popular practical workshop, covering all aspects of lambing to get you ready for the 2012 season.

Call us today to book your place or to find out more