

# Farm Animal Practice Newsletter: Small Holders Edition—Summer/Autumn 2011

## Ram and Ewe MOT

It is that time of the year again! In a few weeks (or less for some people) the sheep breeding season will start and rams will be put in with the ewes. Before you do this there are a couple of things to think about in order to have a successful lambing.

Things to check that are important for ewes and rams alike are the following:

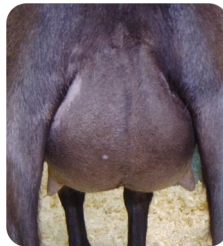
- History
- Body Condition Score (BCS)
- Teeth and jaws
- Feet
- Eyes
- Obvious clinical problems

For ewes, the ideal BCS before tupping is between **2.5 and 3** and for rams it is a BCS between **3.5 and 4**. It will take time for thin animals to put on weight so doing the checks **at least 8 weeks** before tupping allows time for the animals to get to their ideal weight.

It is also very important that the animals' teeth are sound and there are no abscesses related to any of the molars on the jaws. Animals that have a low BCS and are missing teeth will probably **not be able to sustain a full pregnancy and lactation!**

Check the whole animal over to see if it has any problems breathing, if it has any wounds or abscesses. Again, doing this check on time will give you time to deal with problems in time!

Check the ewes **udder** to make sure that she has **two full working halves**. A ewe that is in otherwise good condition will still have problems raising twins on one half!



Every ram, whether newly purchased or one that has lived on your farm for a number of years, should be checked before being put in with the ewes;

### Testicles

These should be equal in **size, moveable** in the scrotum and feeling firm and smooth. Rams should not resent you palpating them and there should be no heat or redness. For rams, size really does matter and the bigger the testicles the more fertile the animal is!



### Epididymis

You can feel the epididymis most clearly on the bottom of the testicle, going up along the side and then joins the testicle as it goes into the body. Both should again feel firm and smooth.

### Penis

Feel from in front of the testicles along the abdomen to the tip of the penis. This should again be smooth and the skin should be able to move freely over the penis.

Very important for the ram is that **stress**, sickness or lameness could have negative effects on the fertility up to 8 weeks after the incident! Make sure these last weeks prior to tupping are stressless and deal quickly with any signs of illness or lameness arising.

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## Farm Essentials Training Courses £60 per course

Lameness in sheep and goats 9th November	An update on new developments in the control and prevention of lameness in sheep and goats.
Lambing essentials 5th December	An extremely popular practical workshop, covering all aspects of lambing to get you ready for the 2012 season.

These courses are aimed at equipping owners with knowledge and practical skills to manage commonly occurring issues in their stock. They run over an afternoon and include some background theory and then a practical session. They are open to everyone, of any experience, please call the practice for further information.

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### Itchy Camelids

We have seen a few cases of skin disease in camelids this summer, the most common problem is **mange mites** but there are a few other conditions that may present with similar signs. In this article we will cover the symptoms and treatment options for mites, and also look at some of the other skin diseases alpacas are prone too.

Alpacas and llamas are affected by a few different species of mites, they present slightly differently and respond to different treatments so it is worth knowing what you are dealing with.

**Sarcoptes** mites cause the **most intense irritation**, these are the same mites causing fox mange; which can also affect dogs and people. The mites are passed by **close contact**, so are a risk in flocks where animals may come into contact with unknown animals through stud work or showing. Closed groups should be able to eradicate the problem, however the mite can survive in the environment for 30 days.

Lesions are normally seen on the tops of limbs and under the belly, but can occur anywhere on the body. The skin will be **red, thickened and crusty**.

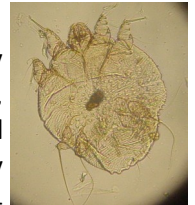


Sarcoptes does not respond well to treatments on the skin and **injections are necessary**; we normally recommend 4 treatments 7 days apart with Ivermectin, and the whole group will require treatment. Some people also recommend balms and skin treatments to help hair regrowth.

**PREVENTION** : It is possible to prevent mites entering a group. The drugs involved are the same as some of those used to treat worms, and so may lead to worm resistance if overused. We would recommend use of these drugs on a case by case basis depending on the risks to your group; please feel free to ring to discuss this aspect of control further.

Other mites that can affect alpacas include **chorioptes** and **psoroptes** mites. These both affect similar regions on the body but cause only a reddening of the skin with **much less irritation** than the sarcoptes mites. These mites will respond to insecticidal shampoos.

The mites can often be identified by the symptoms that are caused, if not, it is easy for us to **take samples and look under a microscope** to identify the type, and direct you to an appropriate treatment. This is often worthwhile, particularly as the sarcoptes treatment is intensive.



Alpacas can suffer from **ringworm**, of the species that cause the disease in cattle and sheep, and is transferable to people, the lesions look very similar, often circular lesions around the head. These cause little discomfort but will spread through the group through close contact. Once on a holding the spores can **remain for up to 5 years** so will continue to affect future generations.

Two issues to mention in crias are **orf** and **facial excema**. Orf is a viral disease that is highly infectious once in a group. Wart like lesions will be seen around the muzzle of the cria and may also affect the udder of the dam. The discomfort to both can reduce milk intakes. Orf will heal by itself but will remain present in the herd. It is a disease that is worth considering if you are bringing in stock, find out if it has been a problem in the herd you are purchasing from. Facial excema is a bacterial infection around the muzzle and eyes, the lesions are scabs that fall off leaving bald patches, it may cause some mild discomfort but is normally self healing or easily treated with antibiotics.

#### Causes of hair loss in camelids

- **Sarcoptes mites**
- **Psoroptes or chorioptes mites**
- **Lice**
- **Ringworm**
- **Orf**
- **Facial excema**

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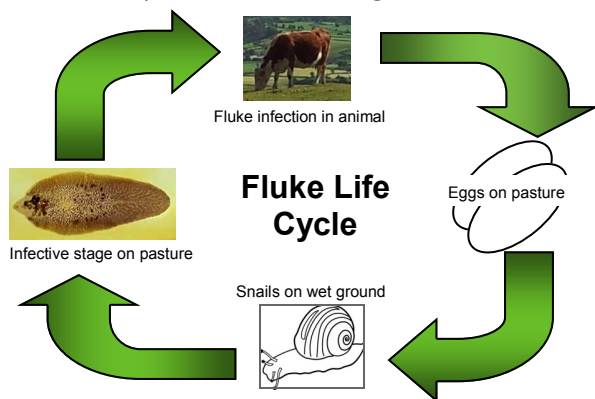
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### Liver Fluke

The liver fluke, (*Fasciola hepatica*), is a very common parasite of ruminants, including camelids, sheep, goats and cattle. It is similar to worms in that animals are infected whilst grazing, but it has several unique characteristics which mean it must be considered separately. In other words, **keeping animals "wormed" will not prevent fluke** from being an issue.

The fluke life cycle involves *Lymnaeid* snails, which thrive in wet conditions, e.g. puddles and streams. The snail population reaches peak numbers in late summer, meaning **this time of year is when most fluke infections occur**.

Once an animal is infected, *immature* fluke migrate through its liver, causing damage to liver tissue, before becoming adults and laying eggs in the bile ducts, which pass out in the dung.



Symptoms range from mild to very severe. Chronic (i.e. mild, grumbling infections), which are common in cattle, lead to **reduced growth rates, poor coat condition and poor recovery from other illnesses**. More acute infections (i.e. sudden, severe illness), which are more common in sheep, often result in **abdominal pain, diarrhoea and even sudden death**.

**PREVENTION** : In theory this disease can be controlled by preventing animals from grazing waterlogged ground, which is always advisable, but complete control with this method is often impossible. In

**problem areas most farmers use flukicide treatments**. There are various products available, but the timing of treatment is crucial (see below).

**Tests for fluke are available**, so if you are in any doubt whether fluke is a problem in your herd or flock, please speak to any of the vets who will be happy to give you some further advice.

#### Should you treat routinely for fluke?

Fluke is a *potential* risk on all farms where animals are allowed to graze, but some farms are not affected whilst others see problems year after year. If in doubt it is probably better to treat — prevention is always better than cure!

Tests are also available to monitor the situation in your herd or flock. Just ask any of the vets for more information.

#### When should fluke treatments be given?

Flukicides are often used at three different times:

- ◆ **Late summer whilst grazing** - This will help prevent severe illness in herds or flocks with a history of fluke problems.
- ◆ **At housing** - This will kill any fluke present in animals at the end of grazing. Beware that some flukicides do not kill immature fluke, so with these products it is best to wait two months following housing before treating.
- ◆ **In the New Year** - In groups that are outwintered, some flukes will continue to infect animals over the winter months.

#### Key Points

- **Normal wormers will not be effective.**
- **Most fluke infections are seen in late summer.**
- **Symptoms range from a mild reduction in growth rates to sudden death.**
- **Avoid grazing waterlogged areas.**
- **Fluke infections can occur in areas that previously have been unaffected.**

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### Practice update...

#### Small Holder's Club

Thank you to all those who have been along to our small holders meetings. They have been very well attended, and with a variety of farms and small holdings represented we have had an interesting insight into the problems people have experienced and solutions people have discovered!

So far we have covered a range of topics relating to sheep and goats from vaccinations to pre breeding checks, and had an introduction to poultry.

Please let us know if there are any topics you would like covered, and don't forget we also run practical courses including "Lambing essentials" and "lameness in small ruminants". Please ring the practice for further details and dates.

Every 3rd Thursday  
7pm  
At the Farm Practice

### Case update : Hank's broken leg

Hank was presented to the practice on a Friday afternoon after her owner Sarah found her severely lame on a front leg. On first examination of the leg there didn't appear to be any instability such as a fracture in the limb. But when she was still very uncomfortable despite pain relief xrays were taken. The xrays showed a small chip fracture close to the joint of her fetlock. Fractures such as these can be difficult to mend, the chip can become infected, affect the mobility of the joint or just be resorbed.



### Next Small Holders Club Meeting...

Thursday 20th October

#### Skin and gut parasites in Alpacas

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

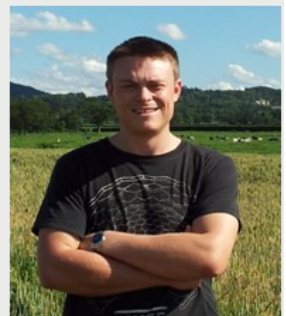
### Meet Ian!

Ian Glover joined the practice in July. Many of you will have met him already but for those who haven't here is an introduction.

Ian qualified here at Langford in 2004 and began his career as a farm vet in rural mid-Devon, where he stayed until 2010. He then worked for a year as a dairy vet in Cheshire, picking up some valuable extra experience.

He enjoys all aspects of being a farm vet, but is especially interested in the health of beef and dairy herds.

In his spare time he enjoys being outdoors walking or running, and devotes much of his time off to his wife and two dogs.



Hank had her leg splinted rigidly in a heavy bandage. Regular changes were required every week to prevent sores under the splint and like many goats she wasn't keen to walk to the leg while bandaged.

After 6 weeks the xrays were repeated to check the progress of the fracture, the chip did reattach and the joint regained very good mobility. Sometimes full use of the limb takes a while longer due to the muscle loss but a few months down the line you would never know what had happened.

