

# farm news



Fay Pooley BVMEdSci BVM BVS MRCVS



If you saw Countryfile on 26<sup>th</sup> February, you may be aware that earlier in the month

we held a slightly unusual event at Markeaton. Four farmers brought their alpacas to us to donate blood!

When baby alpacas (known as cria) are born they require colostrum to transfer immunity from mum to cria. If the cria doesn't get this

colostrum in the first 6 hours, they are left open to life threatening infections. Treatment of cria who have had failure of passive transfer involves a plasma transfusion, and this was the reason for the event.

Adult male alpacas came to the clinic to donate blood, which then went off to Pet Blood Bank to be processed. The blood was separated into its two components, red blood cells and plasma. It's the plasma we require for the poorly cria. The plasma is frozen and defrosted to use as required, lasting 5 years when frozen if properly stored.

In the event of a cria failing to receive enough colostrum, the plasma can be given intravenously here at the clinic or on farm to help the cria begin to fight infection. These cria are often very weak and can benefit from fluids as well as intravenous antibiotics and anti-inflammatories.

We hope this is the first of many events like this, since anyone breeding alpacas should have some plasma saved in case of problems.

## Is Internet best?

With Arla dropping their milk price again recently, times continue to be tough for all farmers but particularly for dairy farmers. We recognise that veterinary medicines are going to be a major cost at times like these. To ensure we are giving you the best service we run the price of our top 70 farm drugs against one of the main internet drug suppliers every month. On our most recent comparison (2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2018)

Scarsdale Vets was cheaper on 54 out of the top 70 best-selling farm drugs.

You may also notice that occasionally your expected drugs are substituted with generic alternatives. This will always be done to save you money and the original products will always be available if you prefer them.

### Cheaper on 54 out of the top 70 best-selling farm drugs

Finally a lot of you will be under pressure from your dairies to reduce the use of certain categories of antibiotics on farm particularly CIA's (critically important antibiotics). We now have a computer programme that can fully split

## Goodbye Oli!

As many of you will know, Oli left us last month to explore pastures new in Kent and Sussex.

Oli was with us for nearly six years, first as a resident and then as a full-time assistant. We are sad to see him go but wish him all the best in his new venture!

and analyse your antibiotic use on farm and present the data in a form acceptable to the most stringent of dairy inspectors.

If you would like further information on this or any aspect of best practice for antibiotic use; just contact one of the team.

# Poisonous plant of the month

Over the next few months, we'll be looking at a range of poisonous plants and the problems they can cause in livestock. Vicki kicks us off with ergot. Ergot is a fungus rather than a plant, but we've included it because it's a common and important toxin...

## Ergot poisoning



Vicky Rhodes BVSc MRCVS

Ergot is a fungus that is found on the seed heads of cereal grains and grasses, such as rye, triticale, wheat, barley and occasionally oats. Cool, wet weather followed by hotter temperatures are ideal for ergot fungus growth, as is delayed harvesting of late cut hay after periods of rainfall.

Ergot can be identified by looking at the seed heads for dark brown, purple or black fungal bodies (sclerotia) that are usually larger than the seeds. These sclerotia can fall to the ground over winter. There is no practical way to eliminate the fungus from the pastures and outbreaks will depend on the climate.

The fungus produces toxins called ergot alkaloids. The type and quantity of toxin depends on the species of fungus, the type of plant and the environmental conditions. This means that the



clinical signs and severity of the poisoning will vary from farm to farm.

Ergot causes constriction of small arteries, preventing thermoregulation. Affected cattle may stand in water or shade to try and cool down. This can then progress into gangrene of the extremities – feet, tails or ears. Cattle may go lame and a swelling of the coronary band can be observed, after which the whole hoof may slough off. Nervous signs have also been reported due to constriction of blood vessels in the brain, causing hyperexcitability and tremors.

There is no antidote, so treatment involves removing the animals from the source of the ergot and alleviating the symptoms. If found early enough and before severe clinical signs develop, animals can recover, but once gangrene has started, there is little treatment. It's best to avoid consumption of ergot in the first place – looking for sclerotia and discarding contaminated feed is important.

## Nematodirus in lambs



Bobby Hyde  
BVMedSci BVM BVSc  
(Hons) MRCVS

*Nematodirus battus* is a roundworm that causes diarrhoea in young lambs during late spring and early summer.

The development of the eggs on pasture into infective larvae depends on a very specific environmental temperature change (a cold snap of weather followed by a period of warmer weather). When conditions are right, huge numbers of eggs can all develop into infective larvae on the pasture at once, exposing lambs to an enormous number of larvae. Because of this, there can be absolutely no delay in treatment if *Nematodirus* is suspected. Your regular vet should be contacted to discuss the best course of action before any more damage occurs.

Because the parasite is so dependent on weather patterns in order to become infectious, it is possible to forecast the level of *Nematodirus* risk from year to year. The NADIS parasite forecast ([www.nadis.co.uk](http://www.nadis.co.uk)) is an excellent service which is freely available online, and provides a monthly, weather-based estimate of risk levels for *Nematodirus*, as well as other parasites. This forecast is now complemented by a new interac-

tive SCOPS map ([www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk)) that allows greater precision in predicting risk by giving very localised data that is updated daily.

The main risk factors for lambs being affected by *Nematodirus* include:

- A sudden cold snap followed by a period of warm weather.
- Young lambs that are eating a lot of grass (e.g. 6-12 weeks old. Adult sheep are very resistant to infection).
- Lambs grazing pasture that was used for lambs the previous year.
- Lambs under other stresses, or under challenge for coccidiosis (if a high-risk *Nematodirus* period coincides with a high-risk coccidiosis period, i.e. when lambs are 4-8 weeks old, very severe mixed infections can result).

Prevention of *Nematodirus* problems involves avoiding contaminated pastures which might have been grazed by infected lambs the previous season. Targeted treatments with a white drench can also be used and are usually given three weeks apart during May in normal risk years. As always with worming animals, it is vital that it is performed correctly in order to reduce the increasing levels of resistance in worms.

Treatment plans are hugely dependent on the risk forecast, and higher-risk years will require very different protocols to a low-risk year. Keep up-to-date with the latest parasite forecasts to make sure your management practices are appropriate for the risk.

## Contact us:

FARM & EQUINE CENTRE  
Markeaton Lane, Markeaton,  
Derby DE22 4NH  
Tel: (01332) 294929

MAIN HOSPITAL  
Pride Veterinary Centre,  
Riverside Road, Derby  
DE24 8HX  
Tel: (01332) 678333

PARK FARM  
Park Farm Centre, Allestree,  
Derby DE22 2QQ  
Tel: (01332) 554422

DUFFIELD  
15 Town Street, Duffield  
Derby DE56 4EH  
Tel: (01332) 841700

MICKLEOVER  
73 Devonshire Drive,  
Mickleover  
Derby DE3 9HD  
Tel: (01332) 518585

HILTON  
6 Witham Close  
Egginton Road, Hilton  
Derby DE65 5JR  
Tel: (01283) 732999

OAKWOOD  
Unit 9, Oakwood District  
Centre, Oakwood,  
Derby DE21 2HT  
Tel: (01332) 666500

SHELTON LOCK  
247 Chellaston Road,  
Shelton Lock  
Derby DE24 9EG  
Tel: (01332) 700321

SCARSDALE VETS  
STAPENHILL  
90 Spring Terrace Road  
Stapenhill, Burton-on-Trent  
DE15 9DX  
Tel: (01283) 568162

SCARSDALE VETS STRETTON  
36 The Green, Stretton,  
Burton-on-Trent  
DE13 0EQ  
Tel: (01283) 565333

[post@scarsdalevets.com](mailto:post@scarsdalevets.com)

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