

Dear Farmer,

Welcome to our December edition of our farm animal newsletter. May we take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas. What a year it has been! Who would have guessed that this time last year we were at the start of a global pandemic? This year has been a challenging year for many of us and we will be pleased to welcome 2021.

Our team has continued to provide care to your animals 24 hours a day 7 days a week throughout the pandemic and we faced many different challenges, like you all. Our vets and the rest of the team have shown such hard work and dedication throughout the year but particularly through the first lockdown. During which time they had to adapt quickly to ever changing protocols and many worked around the clock to ensure animals were always cared for without the safety of their colleagues or clients being compromised.

In early August this year our Practice Manager of 12 years, Lottie Bowden sadly left the practice. Lottie made the incredibly difficult decision to leave after a particularly hard few years and now focuses on having an improved work/home life balance. Shortly afterwards we welcomed Heather Gibbs to the team to become our new Practice Manager. Heather has plenty of managerial and business experience outside of the Veterinary sector as well as having had her own smallholding and pets and we very much look forward to working with her. We also welcomed Claire Fleming BVSc MRCVS, Claire joined us on 10th August after graduating from the University of Bristol. She has a keen interest in both small and farm animal work and is enjoying exploring Devon in her spare time after moving down from Scotland. We hope you will join us in giving Claire and Heather a warm welcome to the practice.

## AVIAN INFLUENZA

At the time of writing this newsletter there have been six confirmed cases on Avian Influenza (bird flu) in poultry and other captive birds in England since early November. If you keep poultry, whether commercially on a farm, as pets in your garden, or rearing game birds, you should keep a close watch on them for signs of disease. All bird keepers in England are now required by law to take a range of biosecurity precautions. For further advice on these biosecurity measures visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu#biosecurity-advice>

Remember you should register your poultry, even if only kept as pets, so that the Animal Plant Health Agency can contact you during an outbreak with advice and regulations. This is a legal requirement if you have 50 or more birds.

The main clinical signs to look out for are:

- swollen head
- blue discolouration of neck and throat
- loss of appetite
- respiratory distress such as gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling
- diarrhoea
- fewer eggs laid
- increased mortality

These clinical signs can vary between species, with some species (for example ducks and geese) showing minimal signs. So remain vigilant and if you have any concerns about the health of your birds, we ask that you seek prompt advice from our team.

If you suspect any type of avian influenza you must report it immediately by calling the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301.



## SHEEP SCAB

Sheep scab caused by the mite *Psoroptes ovis* is becoming more and more common in the area and causes significant economic losses. Were you aware that in England and Wales, it is a legal requirement to treat infected animals and all others in the flock?

Sheep scab is spread by any contact with live mites. This is usually through direct sheep-to-sheep contact on commons, via break-ins, at markets or in livestock lorries. Adult mites can survive for up to 17 days in the environment enabling indirect spread via rubbing posts, trees, hedges and fences. Shearing combs and cutters, contaminated clothing, tags of wool or scabs can also harbour and spread mites. In rare cases, scab can infect cattle.

What you should look out for:

- Frequent rubbing against fences
- Nibbling the flanks (an early sign of scab and lice)
- Later stages of sheep scab cause intense itching and biting
- As the disease progresses, wool is lost and the skin becomes thickened.
- Areas of wool loss with thickened skin become covered with scabs.

Sheep infested with scab often lose weight rapidly and you will see lower birthweights and higher lamb mortality occurs when ewes are affected. The loss of fleece and poor nutrition can lead to death through pneumonia or hypothermia. In serious cases, animals will start fitting, particularly when moved.

It is important to investigate further if you suspect scab in your flock as it is hard to differentiate the clinical signs of scab with the clinical signs of a louse infestation. To confirm sheep scab a vet will take skin scrapes from the edge of a crusting lesion which can then be examined under a microscope to identify the mite.

There are only two types of treatment available to treat or prevent sheep scab. They are plunge dipping with organophosphate Diazinon or injecting with one of the macrocyclic lactones – moxidectin, doramectin or ivermectin. When using injectable treatments it is vital that data sheet instructions are followed and many of these products will have a specific dose for treating scab. Some require a course of injections 7-10 days apart.

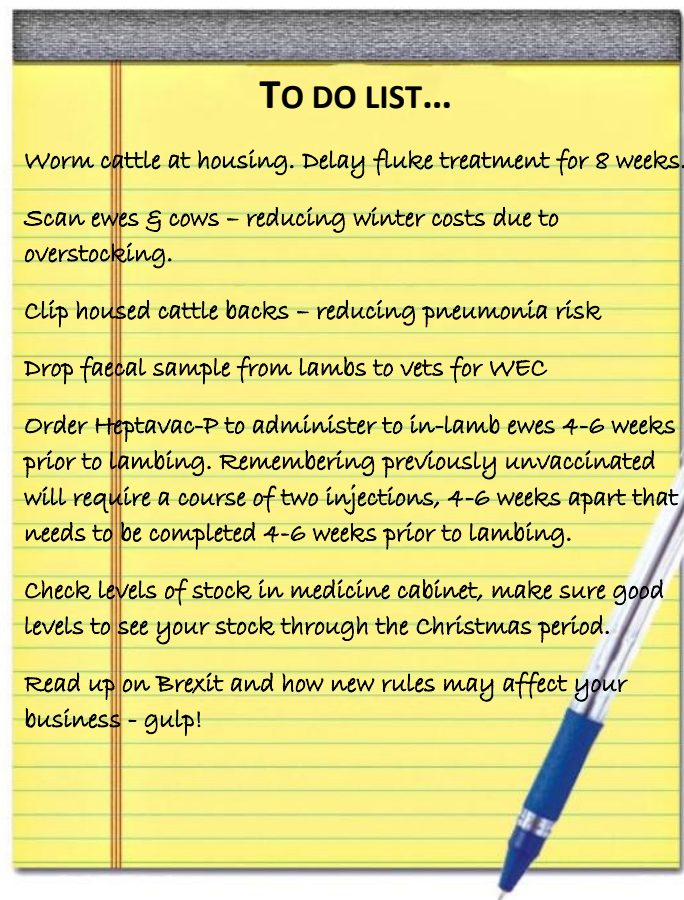
It should be noted that all these injectable drugs are very valuable wormers in the 3-ML class and reliance on them for sheep scab control increases the risk of worm resistance developing, so they should be used correctly and only once sheep scab has been confirmed. If possible dipping is the best solution.

To reduce the risks of your flock contracting scab, as always good biosecurity measures are key.

- Maintain a closed flock where possible or ensure effective quarantine and treatment for incoming animals.
- Ensure all boundaries are stock-proof and be aware of the risks of entry on people, clothing and equipment.

Common grazers have the highest risk of scab and to gain control all graziers with animals on the same common must cooperate. "Off-days" should be established where it is essential to round up all sheep from the common for treatment. Local authorities have legal powers to ensure animals on affected commons are treated – farmers can report to the local authority if other keepers are failing to control infection.

As always if you have any questions or are concerned about scab in your flock contact one of our vets for a friendly chat.



## CHRISTMAS OPENING

As always our vets will be available 24 hours a day 7 days a week for EMERGENCIES, but please be aware our surgeries will be closed for routine enquires, orders and appointments from 5pm on Christmas Eve and will reopen on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> December. Closing again for New Year's Day. In line with our Covid-19 guidelines please continue to call into the practice in the very first instance by telephone on either 01647 440441 or 01626 833023.