



# Dick Vet Equine Practice Newsletter - *Summer 2009*

Ah, there is nothing like working with horses on a glorious summers day! Even the most cantankerous old mare seems to greet me with a lazy smile! Driving around the countryside just highlights what a beautiful country Scotland is. I think we all need to be reminded of this fact sometimes.

The foaling season went well this year with most (if not all foals) having a bonny start thanks to the warm weather (remember it?).

But the warm weather also makes the grass grow, so watch your horse carefully if he or she is prone to laminitis! Also remember that we always have a flush of grass in the Autumn so please don't relax just yet!

Our new *Flexi-Float* dental tool, that we introduced in May, is proving very useful. It is very easy to use and it's quiet motor makes it a hit with the horses. If your horse needs it's annual vaccination why not get one of us to check their teeth at the same time?

Finally if you do have to pop into the practice to pick something up or your horse is spending some time in our state-of-the-art hospital, then don't forget you can have some lunch in our lovely café called 'The View'.

Anyway, hope you enjoy this newsletter and if you have any comments or suggestions we would love to hear them.

## ***10% off Microchips with this Newsletter***

With the rules now stating that any horse (incl Foals more than 6 months of age) requiring a passport must be micro-chipped, we thought we would come to the party and offer a discount! So if you have a horse that needs a passport now is the time to do it!

Give Ali or Trish a call - 0131 445 4468.

What's in this months newsletter:

1. News
2. Microchip offer
3. Ragwort
4. Sweet Itch Treatment

## **CLIENT EVENING!!!!**

8th October at 7pm - put this date in your diary now as we are going to have another of the DVEP's almost legendary client talks!!

This one is going to be fantastic! The topics are:

1. Infections
2. Health Plans for your horse

You don't have to be a client to attend so tell your friends! Everyone is welcome.

## ***Evening Appointments Available!***

Don't forget that during the summer months we are offering evening appointments on a Tuesday night until 8pm for a 25% surcharge on top our normal visit fee These appointments are for routine calls such as vaccinations, dental treatments or bandage changes. simply give us a call and talk to Ali or Trish on **0131 4454468**

## **DVEP - Official Vets for the 2009 Royal Highland Show**



ROYAL  
HIGHLAND  
SHOW 2009

We had a great time looking after all the animals at the 2009 Royal Highland show!! With its record attendance of more than 175,000 people and a visit from Her Majesty The Queen and HRH The Princess Royal, this year was the best yet!

Don't forget that the date for next years show is 24th-27th June 2010. See you there!!!



## Ragwort Poisoning

Ragwort is a common weed that grows throughout the British Isles. Ragwort has always been a problem but recently it has become apparent that the weed may be getting out of control and potentially posing a real threat to the horse population

Most animals will avoid eating ragwort as long as they have an alternative source of good food. This can therefore be a problem on sparse, overgrazed pastures which ragwort thrives on. There are anecdotal reports that some horses can develop an acquired taste for the plant!

When cut or wilted (during hay or haylage making) ragwort loses its bitter taste and becomes more palatable to horses. Drying does not destroy the toxins and dried grass, hay and haylage are common sources of ragwort poisoning.

Ingestion of the Ragwort toxin typically results in the delayed onset of chronic, **progressive liver failure.**

The effects of ragwort toxins are cumulative, thus it is common for ragwort poisoning to occur following consumption of small quantities of the plant over a long period of time. Development of disease can be delayed from four weeks to six months after eating the plant.



The liver is able to function normally with a small amount of damage but eventually there are not enough functional liver cells left to conduct the essential functions of the liver and liver failure is inevitable.

The clinical signs (or symptoms) of ragwort poisoning tend to only become apparent when liver failure has occurred. There is often no warning of impending failure.

An important common clinical sign is inflammation of white, unpigmented areas of the skin when they have been exposed to sunlight, known as **photosensitization**. Other clinical signs of liver failure include jaundice, weight loss and diarrhoea.

Sometimes a horse with liver failure can show bizarre or depressed behaviour due to altered mental status (**hepatic encephalopathy**). This is thought to occur because the liver is no longer able to remove chemicals or toxins from the blood that have harmful effects on the brain

**If ragwort begins to grow in a paddock it must be immediately removed before it can spread new seed**

The control of Ragwort comes under two government acts the Weeds Act 1959 (for the whole of the UK) and the Ragwort Act 2003 (England and Wales only). Under these laws governmental authorities can serve clearance notices to prevent the weed from spreading.

If appropriate, in the first instance, approach the owner/occupier of the land on which ragwort is growing and request them to take steps to clear the weed.

### Ragwort on road verges:

If ragwort is growing on the verges of motorways or trunk roads the Highways Agency should be contacted.

Telephone: 08457 50 40 30  
Website: <http://www.highways.gov.uk>

### Ragwort on railway land:

Where ragwort is growing on land associated with the railways Network Rail should be contacted.

Telephone: 0845711 41 41  
Website: <http://www.networkrail.co.uk>

## Horse Diary September

### SNEC

- 02/09/2009 - Showjumping Schooling Night
- 04/09/2009 - BHS Stage 2
- 06/09/2009 - Unaffiliated Dressage inc VHS Regional Dressage Final
- 06/09/2009 - VHS Regional Final
- 07/09/2009 - Andrew Hamilton Training Clinic
- 07/09/2009 - Linda Lucey Training Clinic
- 09/09/2009 - Showjumping Schooling Night
- 11/09/2009 - BHS Stage 2
- 11/09/2009 - BHS Stage 1
- 12/09/2009 - Affiliated & Unaffiliated Dressage
- 13/09/2009 - Affiliated & Unaffiliated Dressage
- 14/09/2009 - David Gatherer Training Clinic

### Gleneagles

- 10/09/2009 - Summer Unaffiliated Dressage
- 17/09/2009 - John Ledingham SJ Clinic
- 18/09/2009 - Erik MacKechnie Dressage Training clinic.

### Musselburgh Racourse

- 14/09/2009 - Edinburgh Holiday Raceday
- 27/09/2009 - Royal Scots Family Day

## *Cavallese – A new weapon against sweet itch, and other Summer allergies.*

### Summer Skin Allergies in Horses:

It is thought that over 50,000 horses in the U.K. suffer from skin allergies in the summer each year. The symptoms usually start to appear after turn – out in the Spring.



Some breeds of horse are genetically more prone to allergies than others, for example, Icelandic and cob type ponies are much more likely to suffer from allergic skin diseases than Thoroughbred type horses.

There are a number of causes of these allergies, for example: feed hypersensitivity, nettle stings, and most commonly saliva from insect bites – especially from the Culicoides fly (midges)

After being exposed to the allergen (e.g. saliva from the midge bite) allergic horses will develop a Type I hypersensitivity reaction, resulting in histamine being produced by the body's immune system, exactly the same as happens to people who suffer from hay fever. This is an “over the top” immune reaction to the bite,

resulting in swelling, and intense itching of the skin.

Just like with people suffering an allergic skin reaction, the desire to itch and rub at the site of the allergy is intense, and usually the horse will start to rub, and chew at the area, which can then become infected, making the problem even worse. The more often that a horse is bitten, the worse the reaction becomes. Some horses can become very debilitated throughout the Spring and Summer months, and subsequently have a really miserable time.



### Management Options:

Depending on the cause of the allergy, it is always best to remove your horse from the source of the allergy, but this is not always easy.

#### 1. Adapt to the environment.

- Midges like to breed on wet land, near water sources, and near woodland. Susceptible horses should be removed from these conditions where possible.
- Midges usually feed early evening. Keeping horses away from midges at these times is important.

#### 2. Keeping midges away from the horse.

- Putting a full body blanket on your horse when out at grass will prevent the midges from biting.
- Stable your horse from 4pm – 8am in the summer months (avoid dusk till dawn grazing).
- Fitting a fly screen on the stable door can protect horses against midges entering the stable.
- Putting a fan in the stable, will create air movement – midges cannot fly against a wind stronger than 5mph.

#### 3. Fly repellents.

- There are many types of fly repellents available from vets and saddlers – some are more effective than others. You should find one that suits you and your horse best. The one we find effective is *Deosect*, which provides protection against most biting flies for around 14 days following application.



4. Antihistamines.

- Antihistamine tablets have been used, but their effects are very variable.

5. Veterinary “rescue” therapy.

- Despite all the best efforts at prevention some horses still succumb to sweet itch and require “rescue” therapy from the vet. This is usually in the form of a drug called, prednisolone (a type of steroid). Prednisolone is very effective at preventing the itching associated with sweet itch. It acts by “dampening down” the immune system slightly in order to prevent this hyper-reactivity reaction towards the midge saliva. We try to use it at the lowest possible dose, and only when necessary to prevent the occurrence of sweet itch, because in some instances, usually at very high doses, it has associated with an increased risk of laminitis.

6. Fidavet Cavalesse.

- *Fidavet Cavalesse* (produced by Janssen Animal Health) is a natural food supplement containing the active ingredient Nicotinamide (a type of Vitamin B3), which is known to have a specific effect on the immune system within the skin. It is useful for all types of allergic skin disease in the horse, in particular sweet itch.

*Cavalesse* has a number of beneficial actions on the skin, mainly:

- Reduces the production of histamine – the substance which causes the itch.
- Improves the skin lipid (oil barrier) by increasing the amount of natural fats in the skin’s surface – acting almost like a natural “barrier protection”.



- Cavalesse comes in both an oral form, for once a day administration, and a topical (cream) form.
- While Cavalesse can be used as a treatment for sweet itch and other allergies it works best if given a month or so before the allergy season starts for your horse, and it should be continued throughout the risk period.
- While Cavalesse has been shown to produce good results against sweet itch, good midge avoidance and prevention techniques should still be practised.
- For more information regarding *Fidavet Cavalesse* please contact the surgery: 0131 445 4468.

Normal opening hours are:

Monday to Friday 8.30am-5pm

During these times please phone:

**0131 445 4468**

At all other times please phone:

**01223 849 835**

If you call during after hours, you will be asked for your name, contact details and the nature of the problem.

This information will be passed to the duty vet who will contact you directly.

