



Welcome to the March newsletter from the Farm Animal Practice. As spring approaches, Amy discusses care of the newborn calf, while Andy looks forward to turning out cattle and identifies some things to watch out for. I close the newsletter by considering how the weather at this time of year can affect the *Nematodirus* risk to your lambs in the coming months

*Dave Wilson*

## Martin Tomlinson joins the practice

Over the past few months you may have encountered our new cattle resident, Martin Tomlinson, either out on farm or at some of our meetings.

Martin grew up on the North Yorkshire moors and worked in farming since an early age. He graduated from the University of Glasgow in 2012 and went straight into a farm animal business-based internship in the south of England. He continued to practice in this area mainly involved with dairy medicine and herd health (with the odd pet pig and alpaca thrown in for good measure). He has a keen interest in youngstock management and mastitis. Martin joined the

R(D)SVS team in January 2014 and is studying towards his European Diploma in Bovine Health Management. As part of his residency he will be undertaking research into multiple aspects of dairy and beef production, as well as working as part of the Farm Animal Practice and DHHPS teams.

Away from work Martin can usually be found playing rugby or attempting to hunt down some snow for skiing.

Martin is happier out on the road and on farm than stuck in the office so hopefully you will come across him soon as he finds an excuse to meet you all.



## Healthy calves

The lengthening days are upon us and we are all bracing ourselves for a busy and successful spring calving season.

Prevention is key and ensuring cows calve in a clean environment will significantly reduce disease risk, as the infections that pose the most threat to calves are ubiquitous. Make it easy to maintain high levels of hygiene. Carry out any maintenance on taps, hoses and lights, treat yourself to some new brushes, line up the disinfectant, and make sure you have plenty of clean buckets.

Make sure that calves receive adequate colostrum: 7 per cent of their bodyweight in the first six hours of life and another 3.5 per cent by twelve hours. Pay

particular attention to calves that experience a difficult birth or are weak as they may be slow to suckle. Monitor cows to ensure they allow their calf to suckle and check the dam's udder and teats if you can.

Applying a disinfectant (such as iodine) to the navel can reduce the risk of bacteria entering via this route, but is no substitute to good hygiene! Keep naval dressing equipment clean, refill cups regularly and make sure to cover the navel from tip to abdomen. The key to the successful treatment of sick calves is a quick response. Antibiotics will not solve most cases of diarrhoea. If possible put the calf and the dam in a sick pen to allow safe and regular monitoring. Give oral fluids, but allow and encourage the calf to suckle.

If a calf has a weaker than normal suckle reflex please call the practice straight away as the calf may need intravenous fluids. If you experience several cases or if the presentation or response to treatments are not as you would expect please collect faecal samples from new cases before any treatment and get in contact with us. We are always happy to chat through cases.



# Cattle: getting ready for turnout

With spring approaching and the nights drawing out, it's time to start thinking about getting cattle ready for turnout. It is important to have the cows at the right body condition score (BCS) both for fertility and to maximise the benefit of their time at grass.

The aim in most suckler systems is for cows to be at BCS 2½ (out of 5) around April time. Body condition scoring now will allow action to be taken to achieve this. Spring calving cows can then put condition on over the summer to enter next winter at BCS 3½ to allow planned weight loss over the winter, while autumn calving cows can put condition on at grass to reach BCS 3 by 6 weeks pre-calving and maintain this condition until calving.

When autumn-born calves are turned out, remember that these animals will be susceptible to gut parasites in their first grazing season. Unless clean grazing is available at

turnout or all calves can be moved to aftermath by mid-summer, they are likely to need a suppressive wormer regime for at least the first half of the grazing season by bolus or injection/pour-on. Delaying the start of these programs, allowing some non-selected worm eggs onto the pasture, and treating in response to rising faecal worm egg counts will help to delay the development of wormer resistance, but will mean extra handling and may risk affecting growth rates. Yearling spring-born calves should be monitored and may also need treatment. Please contact the practice for advice.

Other problems to watch out for include grass staggers of cows (hypomagnesaemia) and white muscle disease of calves. Grass staggers is more common when the grass is growing fast and cases may occur after a stormy night. Signs include nervousness, aggression, twitching, fitting and death. White



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muscle disease is a deficiency of selenium/vitamin E and may be seen in calves aged 1-4 months at turnout. Swelling and stiffness of muscles may be seen and in some cases the muscles of respiration may be affected and confusion with pneumonia may occur. In milder cases animals may be unthrifty and prone to disease.

If you are concerned about selenium deficiency please contact the practice and blood testing can be arranged.

## Planning *Nematodirus* control

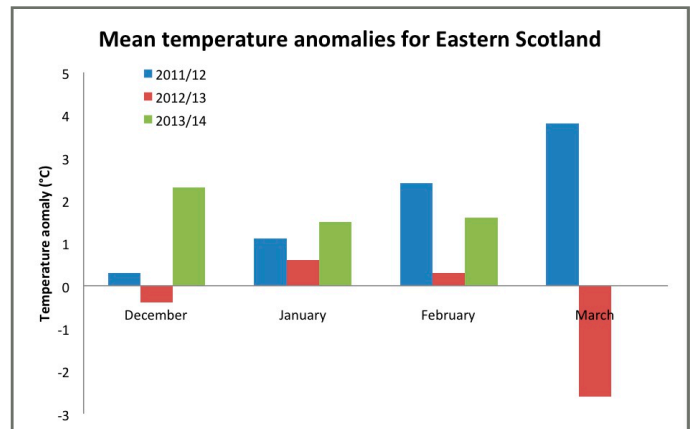
Temperatures in late winter/early spring have a large impact on the nematodiosis risk to lambs in late spring/early summer. The graph shows monthly average temperature differences from long-term average levels (temperature anomalies) for eastern Scotland, which shows that December, January and February this season have all been warmer than expected. This indicates there may be an early hatch of *Nematodirus* this year, which leads to a lower risk to lambs, as most of the infection has gone by the time they are grazing much grass. However, March is not forecast to be warmer than average and this could increase the risk to lambs.

Looking at the figures for the last couple of years, the colder conditions in 2013 were associated with more *Nematodirus* disease being reported in Scotland that year, compared with the lower levels of disease reported following the warmer spring of 2012.

The best control method is to graze lactating ewes and lambs on pastures that did not carry pre-weaning lambs

last year, as the nematodiosis risk on such pasture should be low. Otherwise, treatments are likely to be needed during the risk assessment. Using faecal egg-count monitoring to time *Nematodirus* treatments is risky, as the disease is mainly caused by worm larvae, and significant damage can occur before eggs appear in the faeces.

Lambs grazing significant amounts of grass (from 5-6 weeks old) are most at risk in the 6 week period following hatching, which occurs when temperatures have been above 10°C for about a week. In spring-born lambs this may result in a single treatment in low-risk years, and three or more treatments in high-risk years, usually given around three weeks apart. Benzimidazole (Group 1) wormers are usually recommended for *Nematodirus*



prophylaxis, although a case of benzimidazole resistance in a UK *Nematodirus battus* population has been reported.

Please contact the practice to discuss *Nematodirus* risk and control this spring.

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