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Office Hours:

Monday to Friday 8am til 5pm
24 hours emergency care and
access to urgent advice.
Please ring the office number
in the first instance.

Contact Details:

Dawes Farm
Bognor Road
Warnham, Horsham
West Sussex RH12 3SH
tel 01306 628222
fax 01306 628379
office@equinevetpractice.co.uk
www.equinevetpractice.co.uk



Editorial

Finally spring is in the air. It has been a long hard winter, and when it hasn't been very cold it has been very wet. Both these conditions have lead to equine veterinary problems. We have seen severe recurrent bouts of laminitis, usually in animals that have had it before, without warning. There have been an increased number of colics, mud fevers, thrush, housing-associated respiratory issues, diarrhoeas and stomach ulcers. Roll on summer.

The *credit crunch*, or recession as it is now known, has yet to affect the practice's workload, although I don't anticipate growth in 2009. I suspect there will be less breeding and vettings than previous years. Luckily many of our patients are insured. If you are claiming for a condition, please be proactive with the insurance companies, some of them (even the bigger ones) have been slow to payout of late! Despite my declared intention to increase prices in the November 2008 Newsletter, we have frozen our prices for 2009.

We are sad to see the recent departure of one of our vets, Frank Low. Frank had been with the practice for two and a half years and we will miss his banter, humour and exceptional veterinary skills. He has taken up a post at the Hong Kong Jockey Club, his birth place and nearer his home in Australia. We may or may not replace Frank with a new vet, depending on the aforementioned crunch. The setting up of the free zones (also a declared intent in Issue 12), where certain areas will get free pre-arranged visits on certain days, would be dependent on the appointment of a fifth vet.

Everyone at the practice has settled in to the new offices, *next to the old ones*, at Dawes Farm. If visiting, as you enter the farm please turn left and go through the electric, push-button gate. Reception is now in the middle of the first building you come to, where our stables are, opposite the ménage. We now just have to settle into the rest of the building, especially the rooms upstairs. The operating theatre is being revamped as I write. We are all enthusiastic about carrying out more surgery at the practice and reducing referral of some cases.

I'm looking forward to seeing you all at the Spring Talk at the end of the month. Take care and happy equitation.

Ben Mayes



Spring Talk: All welcome

The Autumn Talk was a huge success once more. Many thanks to the Hurtwood Park Polo Club for kindly hosting our client evenings. The food was outstanding and the bar flowed. The Spring Talks will take place at **Hurtwood Park Polo Club, Ewhurst on Wednesday 1st April at 7:45pm**. Finger food will be provided and the bar will be open.

John Little BA BSc BVM&S MRCVS will present on **Equine Skin Conditions**. Guy Prest of KBIS equine insurers will present and answer questions on all matters relating to horse insurance. Ben Mayes MA VetMB MRCVS will present on **Buying a Horse, the Pre-Purchase Examination**.

Hurtwood Park Polo Club, GU6 7SW, is at the Ewhurst Green end of Horsham Lane in Ewhurst This is five miles from the Ewhurst turning off the A29 just north of the Clemsfold A281/A29 junction west of Horsham (one mile south of the practice), do not turn off and the club will be on the right.



Anna writes... Pudgy Ponies

Anna Hammond BVM&S CertEM(IntMed) MRCVS rejoined the practice in summer 2008. She has over 10 years experience in equine practice and, in addition, spent 3 years specializing in Equine Medicine at the Royal Veterinary College.

Obesity in children is recognised as a growing (literally) problem in many western countries with the U.K. being no exception. Alongside this is the feeling, among vets, that obese ponies are a more common sight in the U.K.

A recent survey of pleasure horses in Scotland found 45% of horses surveyed were in a body condition score of 5 to 6 out of 6 i.e. obese, and they don't have the excuse of deep fried mars bars. The other notable finding was that only 50% of the owner estimates for fat horses were in agreement with the vet-derived body condition score. The Blue Cross charity reported that 45% of last year's intake was obese, with 4 animals being put down due to obesity related illness. Many people with horses underestimate their horses' weight. This is a considerable welfare issue with many people literally killing their animals with kindness. Obese horses are at a dramatically increased risk of various diseases including laminitis, hyperlipaemia (a metabolic disorder often ending in liver failure) and colic (resulting from fatty tumours

called lipomas). Overweight horses are also putting more strain on their joints so are theoretically more likely to suffer from arthritis in later years.

In a more "natural" environment (whatever that might mean) horses put on fat during summer and live on their fat stores over winter so become considerably leaner for the next spring. The trouble is, in this country, we don't let them live off the fat. We feed them more over winter so there is a creeping obesity problem and each year they get fatter. The fat stores are laid down, preferentially, in the abdomen and were originally thought to be benign sources of energy. However this fat has been discovered to be metabolically active and produce some hormones which inhibits the action of insulin which is vital in maintain the body's glucose balance. The biggest problem we are aware of, is increasing the risk of laminitis. Many native type ponies (and donkeys) are already at increased risk due to their inherent metabolism differences, compared to their thoroughbred cousins. The exact mechanism



has not been fully worked out but these ponies are very insulin resistant and this resistance becomes worse with increasing abdominal fat stores. This makes them very prone to the problems associated with a high sugar (fructose) load found in rapidly growing grass, and hence the ensuing laminitis. There is a considerable amount of research done in this area showing that insulin resistance decreases with daily moderate exercise of only 2 weeks duration, so only small changes can make a difference. There is a human drug called metformin that has been shown to reduce insulin resistance which can be a useful tool until the new diet and exercise regime can do the same thing. It is very hard to underfeed a pony or native breed as they are the Labradors of the horse world, but other studies have shown that underweight people and horses live longer and have fewer health problems than "normal" or fat ones do.

Vale Frank... Frank's last case, even a broken jaw can't keep him quiet!

Frank, his partner Kelly, and the mad English pointer Dim Sum, have just departed for Hong Kong, where Frank is taking up a position at the Hong Kong Jockey Club's saddle club. We will sorely miss Frank, his humour, joie de vivre, enthusiasm and unfinished sentences. As for his grammar, this is the edited version... !?*

Hello readers, this will be my last article in our regular newsletter as I am leaving for tropical Hong-Kong. However I am glad to be able to bring you another equine story that will hopefully have a good outcome.

One crisp winter morning, Sam in the office received a call regarding a stabled horse that had injured his jaw. When I arrived at the stables I found a big dressage gelding named Ralph with blood dripping from his lower jaw. Ralph's owner noticed some blood on his lower lip and was shocked when she opened his jaw (see picture). When I arrived Ralph was his usual happy self and trying to eat despite having a fractured jaw! Lucky for Ralph, we were able to rush him into our newly updated surgery facility where he had his jaw successfully wired back together under general anaesthetic. How Ralph managed to fracture his jaw in his nice stable is a mystery! It is



likely that he managed to catch his lower jaw on a fixed object and then pulled back - thus fracturing his jaw to the extent that one could scissor the jaw between the front teeth. A fine example of how horses are able to get themselves into all sorts of bother no matter how hard you try to prevent these injuries.

Currently Ralph is over half way through his recovery and his wires will be removed in early March. He will then be able to show his new smile to all the girls!

I wish you all the best and thank you all for being patient when I was running late. If you are ever visiting Hong Kong, be sure to catch up for a beer or chinese tea!

PS some of you may know that Frank has a titanium implant in his lower jaw after a horse kick injury whilst working as a vet in Australia. This is frighteningly common, recently a Sussex equine vet received severe facial injuries in the line of duty!

Ed.



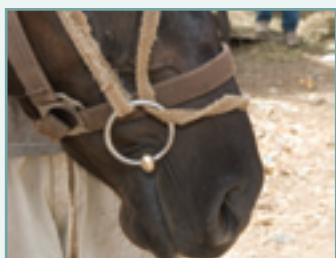
Judy's Trip to Gambia: third world horses first hand

Nearly exactly a year ago now (how time flies!) I headed off for Gambia to try and help out at the Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust. This charity was co-founded by and is now run by Heather Armstrong, who has worked tirelessly to improve the lot of horses and donkeys in The Gambia.

The ambitious aim of the charity is to try and reverse the suffering of the equid population and therefore improve the lot of their owners who rely on the horses and donkeys to make their living. Most of the suffering is due to ignorance and poverty rather than any malicious intent, so a significant part of the charity's work is education. My remit was to try and teach the staff of the Trust, rather than just treat animals for two weeks. Luckily I have worked in Africa before, otherwise it would have been a bit of a culture shock. I did enjoy being back out there hopefully doing something useful, but it would have been better had we had access to a fridge that would actually cool the beer below blood-warm. Unfortunately I made the mistake of taking a very capable professional photographer, Tony Souter, with me so there is a comprehensive photographic record of all my endeavours.



The charity's main base is well inland – a fairly long day's drive from the coast – at a village called Sambel Kunda. After a very pleasant day and half spent at the Chimpanzee Rehabilitation Association, it was "in at the deep end" with a trip to one of the busier markets. The Trust has a "clinic" at several markets (actually just a designated spot with occasionally a roof!), and the locals bring sick animals in. It is obviously not ideal for some of the horses and donkeys to be transported, but the charity is just too short staffed to make home visits in most situations. Many of the horses are suffering from malnutrition, often due to parasites or inappropriate or insufficient feeding. Lameness, infectious disease and wounds are also common. Getting the staff of the Trust to actually carry out a clinical examination rather than just assume every horse had worms or trypanosomiasis was a bit of a challenge. Also, the temperature added unforeseen complications – it was impossible to shake down a mercury thermometer and insert it into a rectum quickly enough before the reading went off the scale. If there was a shelter, it would be full of locals chewing the fat with the Trust team whilst the vet and the patient would be out in the full sun.



Harnesses and tack are a real problem – most are Heath Robinson efforts ranging from ineffective to extremely cruel. Bits are often homemade from concrete reinforcing rod, or rope knotted through the mouth is used instead. Tony actually forgot his job as photographer on many occasions and became "Bit Mafia" instead – prowling round the market dragging owners of horses and donkeys with unsuitable bits in and selling them much more suitable livery (or giving bits to children paid for out of his own pocket).



I did spend a lot of time trying to encourage the Trust staff to keep things tidy and organized – too much time was spent trying to find things lost at the bottom of the vet boxes or somewhere in the drug cupboard. By the end of two weeks, all the staff members were excellent dental technicians and all the horses and donkeys at the Trust base had lovely rasped teeth, we'd been through all the available drugs and listed what they were for, and all the equipment and drugs were thoroughly tidied up. I suspect the tidiness lasted about until I got on the plane to come home. I lost my voice teaching, and even had to overcome my childphobia and spend a morning talking to the kids at the local school. The final ignominy was lecturing, without any visual aid equipment, to what seemed a very large number of university students.

I did see individual cases too – a donkey that had been trying to foal for two and half days and was full of mud where everyone in the village had had a go at getting the foal out before the owner resorted to calling us. Tough animals these donkeys – I would never have dreamt that she would make it, but survive she did, and was almost clinically normally by twelve hours after I saw her. There was the valuable bull with a fractured tibia, a young bull with a ruptured eyeball from being hit with a stick with a nail protruding from it, a donkey with a false foot...



All in all, it was a great experience. I certainly benefited from it, and I really hope the Trust did too.

For more information on the charity, and if you'd like to help raise money or donate unwanted tack etc., please visit their website: www.gambiahorseanddonkey.org.uk

Who's who of Mayes and Scrine...

Practice Staff, Office



Jane Best, Practice Manager, has been with the practice, initially as Colin Bond's secretary, for over 25 years. Recently inspired by a practice management course, and the delegation of some key tasks, Jane is busy sorting out client account details, diary management and generally chasing everybody...from slow-payers to insurance companies, from vets running late to yours truly. Jane lives with Phoebe, her yellow lab, has an ageing active thoroughbred, Shadow and an old Shetland, Trigger. Despite this, Jane sails, plays tennis and frequently spends weekends with her family on the Isle of Wight.



Sam France Sam brought administrative experience and equine empathy to the office atmosphere when she joined last year. She manages in-patient bookings, mucks in on the yard and takes on a significant chunk of the administrative burden. Sam loves her horse Bertie, who occupies much of her spare time.



Vikki Cunningham recently joined us in the burgeoning office. She has a wealth of administrative experience and has thrown herself into her new role. Vikki recently got married and is busy doing up her new home.



Catherine Mayes long suffering wife of Ben (has it really been 10 years?) Catherine joined the team on a more formal basis in 2007, working two days a week, school hours, although the hours are likely to increase as Darcey gets older. Catherine has a wealth of experience in customer care, client management, human resources and recruitment. She has been heavily involved in the recent office move, and is the practice bookkeeper.

Practice Staff, Clinic



Claire Jeffs joined the practice in 1997. She is the senior "lay nurse" at the clinic and knows where to get things and (usually) where she's put them. Luckily these skills have remained after her return from maternity leave. Claire currently works Monday to Wednesday, but as she lives nearby she's happy to be involved in night-patient watch.



Kate Tyrell has now been with us a year, having previously managed a large livery yard. Veterinary nursing has been a steep learning curve, particularly as Claire went away soon after her arrival, but Kate has excelled and is destined to be a star Equine Veterinary Nurse in the future. Meantime, Kate competes and jumps her talented horse, Piglet.



Livery Yard Survey... please participate at www.liveryyardsurvey.co.uk

Some of you may now that I am a council member of the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA). This involves going to a couple of meetings a month and trying to help our profession, our clients and, above all, equine welfare. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 was brought in to help safeguard all animals in the UK. An Equine Welfare Code is currently under consultation through DEFRA (the government). The Act also paved the way for licensing and inspection of livery yards. This would require secondary legislation and is unlikely to happen for several years, if at all. Currently, only riding establishments that hire out horses to the public for teaching (riding schools), hacking or demonstration are required to be inspected by a vet annually and licensed by the local authority.

Several equine organisations, including BEVA, BHS, World Horse Welfare (ILPH), ABRS, Equine Insurance Forum, RSPCA and National Equine Welfare Council, have got together to look into the prospect of Equine Establishment Inspection and Licensing. This is likely to include livery yards, competition yards, dealers, vets and so on. Some of these yards may already be inspected e.g. BHS approved livery yards, racehorse trainers, some vets and sanctuaries. The approved, trained inspectors are likely to be experienced horsepersons and will be looking at stabling, fencing, water supply, access, facilities, staff safety, health plans as well as the animals' direct welfare. A vet would be involved from time to time to check on health planning, worming, disease prevention, isolation etc.

We are currently determining how many establishments would be involved and whether there is a need or public desire for inspection and licensing. A suggested working definition is a property with three horses or more with more than one owner, where livery or rent is paid. The licence will obviously cost money to cover the inspection, administration and enforcement. About 80 pence per horse per week has been suggested.

All of this is only in the discussion stage. We are very keen to find out what you think about livery yards and possibly inspecting them. A website survey has been set up. The survey closes at the end of March. So, please spare 10 minutes of your time and go to www.liveryyardsurvey.co.uk.

Ben Mayes