



Linda Belton  
BVSc MRCVS

# Equine News

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

MARCH 2010



Oscar Wain  
BVSc MRCVS



Sarah Hayes  
BVet Med MRCVS



Andy Richardson  
BVSc MRCVS



Ali Mead  
BVet Med MRCVS

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Welcome	2
Stop that itch!	2
First Aid Kits	4
Worm Egg Counts	3
Q & A	4

## HORSE OWNERS - YOU ARE INVITED TO

### Summer Horse Health



The George Veterinary Group Equine Clinic & Belmont House Equine Clinic are holding an informative equine evening aiming to help you get the best performance from your horse this summer.

- Successful return to fitness post injury
- Fly trouble? How to control
- Colic - why do some horses need surgery?
- Quiz with prizes!!
- Goodie bags!!

Wednesday 10th March 2010

Chippenham Golf Club, SN15 5LT at 7.30pm



01666 826456

or email

[horse@georgevetgroup.co.uk](mailto:horse@georgevetgroup.co.uk)

to reserve your free place, all are welcome





## Welcome...

...to the first edition of our redesigned quarterly publication with a new look and new title for 2010! We will be keeping you up to date with what's new and what works to help keep your horse fit and healthy. Each issue will be posted on our website for you to peruse at your leisure and we will continue to distribute copies to local tack stores and feed merchants for you to take away. If there are any subjects you would like to see covered or questions you have for our

Q&A page then please email them to [horse@georgevetgroup.co.uk](mailto:horse@georgevetgroup.co.uk)

The George Vet Group Equine Clinic has now been joined by Belmont House Equine Clinic in Pewsey thus extending the area we cover and enabling us to deliver veterinary care to more horses throughout Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The equine vets can be contacted either at Pewsey on 01672 563413 or at Malmesbury on 01666 826456. All administration is run via the equine office at Malmesbury helping to keep costs down. We are really en-

joying working around the beautiful Vale of Pewsey as well as around the Malmesbury, Wootton Bassett, Chippenham and Tetbury areas as we have done for many years.

On Wednesday 10th March, we would like to invite all interested horse owners to an evening talk on Summer Horse Health. This will be held at Chippenham Golf Club at 7.30pm.

Read on for a taster of the topics we will be covering. Come along to hear more and take part in our quiz with some great prizes.

**"Feeling pruritic (itchy) is not much fun for horse or human!"**

As spring and summer approaches we will start to see the flies and other insects reappearing. Many horses and ponies are bothered by flies becoming itchy and restless.

Some suffer from true sweet itch which is an allergy to the saliva of the *Culicoides* midge. When the midge bites a susceptible horse, it injects some saliva and this sets off a cascade reaction resulting in histamine release and intense itching. Other horses react in a similar way but to the bite of other insects.

Feeling pruritic (itchy) is not much fun for horse or human! Very often as well as itching and scratching with the self trauma that causes, affected horses show both behavioural

changes and a drop in performance. Itchy horses are often difficult to bridle, can be "short tempered", tense when ridden and difficult to settle.

Ponies with sweet itch that may have had a tendency to run off or buck when ridden often become completely different characters when their itchiness is brought under control. Thus we have two reasons to try and reduce pruritus, welfare and performance.

Horses which are bothered by the flies when being ridden tend to perform less well, losing concentration and showing signs of tension. Many of the things we use in the field or stable to reduce the bother of flies, such as fly rugs or fans are not appropriate when ridden.

Fly repellents are useful up to a point and now we have available *Cavalesse*. This is a liquid supplement you can feed to your horse once a day. It acts to stabilise mast cells. It is mast cells that contain histamine which when released into the body causes the horse to become itchy. Sadly, anti histamines in horses

are generally very ineffective so the key is to prevent the histamine being released in the first place.

This is the role of nicotinamide which is a B vitamin and the active ingredient in *Cavalesse*. Prevention is definitely the key for these itchy horses.

*Cavalesse* works best if given before horses start to itch, so early March is usually a good time to start. It does also work as a treatment when used at a higher dose. As well as the supplement, it also comes in a gel which can be used on areas of already broken skin. As well as preventing histamine release, *Cavalesse*, also improves the skin's fat barrier thus reducing the penetration of insect bites.

*Cavalesse* is available without a prescription. You do not need a veterinary examination prior to using it although it is well worth while having a chat with us before your start to use it to make sure it sounds suitable and beneficial for your horse.



# Swamp Fever—what’s the risk??

The announcement in January that Swamp Fever or Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA) has been found in two horses in Wiltshire caused understandable alarm.

EIA is a viral infection transmitted by transfer of blood. Thus biting flies are often involved in its transmission. We are therefore perhaps lucky that this outbreak occurred not only during winter time but during one of the coldest spells of winter when the risk of insect transmission is at its lowest.

**“Disease surveillance is important to protect the health of our horses in the UK”**

The most important way that this virus is transmitted normally is through large biting flies such as horseflies or stable flies. The adult flies are only active between May and September, with activity peaking in July-August.

The flies over winter as larvae and the larvae cannot transmit the disease.

In addition, the flies normally travel no more than 200m to feed and are not likely to be moved

long distances by wind. Therefore we would not expect infected flies to spread far from the location of an infected horse.

EIA is not spread by small flying insects such as midges and mosquitoes under normal conditions.

The two affected horses were imported from Romania, which is an area of Europe where the virus has been identified. They were tested as part of standard post import test procedures in the UK when Defra noted their true country of origin.

Disease surveillance is important to protect the health of our horses in the UK. Whilst it can make travelling horses abroad more complicated and expensive, the risks of introducing disease should not be forgotten. Ensuring that people follow the rules at all times is crucial.

The signs of EIA are very variable and it presents in acute, chronic and sub clinical forms.

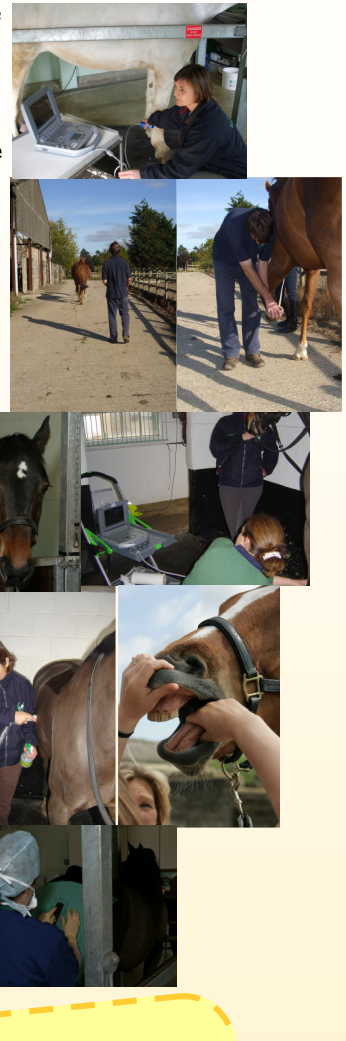
The disease is characterized by recurring fever, anaemia, oedema (fluid swelling), severe weight loss and death.

However, many horses have very

mild or no signs on first exposure. As owners of such horses, you are unlikely to realize that they are infected unless serological testing is carried out.

All infected horses, including those that are asymptomatic, become carriers and are infected for life. Thus all horses which test positive in the UK are required by law to be “put to sleep”.

There is no specific treatment and no vaccine is available as a preventative. EIA is a disease the UK is free from and we should work to keep it that way.



## Worm Egg Counts - when to do them?

Monitoring your horse’s faecal worm egg count is an extremely useful tool to establish the level of worm burden in your horse. A small amount (tablespoon size!) of fresh dropping can be taken and put into a clean bag/container. This can be dropped into any of our surgeries during the week. The sample should be clearly labeled with your name, horse’s name, date, address and EQUINE SAMPLE. The test takes approximately 24 hours to run and it takes into account worm eggs and not adult worms in your horse’s body.

Strategic worming is a sensible and logical

way to approach worming your horse. It involves monitor-

ing the worm egg count on a regular basis to enable you to reduce the number of times that you have to “worm” your horse. The rationale behind this is because resistance to the active ingredient in some wormers is a known and ever-increasing problem in the UK. There are currently no new wormers being developed and once more widespread resistance occurs, we really will be in trouble protecting our horses from some of these deadly parasites.

The individual management of your horse will depend on whether such a strategy will work effectively. Regular (daily!) poo-

picking from the paddock is crucial to minimize the number of worms able to hatch onto the paddock and be subsequently eaten by your horse.

If you have your own land this is very straightforward; however it clearly becomes more challenging when your horse is on a larger yard and turned out with others. The large areas must be undertaken by everyone and this doesn’t always happen!

Spring and autumn are the key times of the year when cyathostomes (small round worms) are at their most active and can cause serious illness in horses and even death if they build up in your horse and go unchecked.



# Q & A

**Q:** *I am planning to breed from my mare this season and am unclear on whether I should use AI or not. What are the advantages?*

**A;** The first thing you need to decide is your choice of stallion. Not all stallions are available by AI whilst others are only available by AI! In addition some stallions, usually competing ones or obviously overseas based ones, are only available by frozen AI.

There are not usually nowadays any disadvantages to AI versus natural service in terms of conception rates. Do not go into AI on the basis of economics alone. Sometimes it will work out cheaper but not always. We do offer a "home" based AI service for your mare. This avoids the need to send your mare away either to a stud or an AI centre which are the other options. Some owners of mares with a foal at foot are particularly reluctant to send the horses away but equally not everyone has the time available to be involved with their mare's AI at home. Whilst covering injuries are relatively rare,



AI obviously negates this risk and providing all procedures are followed correctly there is less risk of disease transmission. AI is likely to involve more ultrasound scanning of the mare's uterus and ovaries to ensure the timing of insemination is correct than is required using natural service.

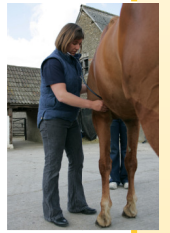
**Q:** *I use faecal worm egg counts to monitor my horse's worm burden. At what count should I worm him?*

**A;** Rather than having a simple answer there are individual factors about the horse to be taken into account. These include age, previous worm count history, concurrent health problems and the grazing management system employed. In general in an adult but not geriatric horse on well managed grazing a worm egg count below 200 eggs per gram of faeces is not considered dangerous and thus routine use of a wormer is not required. To confidently follow this then ideally all horses grazing together should be being monitored for worm eggs or being wormed with the correct amount of the correct product at the correct time! Unnecessary use of wormers should be avoided so you are very definitely on the

right lines for your horse's health. You should get advice from your vet as well as the worm egg count result to enable you to take the best course of action after each test.

**Q:** *When would you advise have a vetting carried out on a horse that is on trial prior to purchase?*

**A;** This is a difficult one. The advantage of getting the vetting done first is that you have an accurate up to date picture of the horse's health status with a written report as soon as s/he comes under your care. Thus if anything transpires during the trial period there is no debate as to whether or not it was a pre existing condition. However if the horse turns out not to be suitable and is returned, money has been spent on a vetting on a horse you subsequently don't want! There are advantages and disadvantages both ways. Which way you jump is down to your own personal attitude to risk, your relationship with the vendor and perhaps the value of the horse involved.



## Updating your first-aid kit



Everyone owning a horse or pony should have some form of an equine first aid kit. Some kit lists can be exhaustive and very expensive, but there are certainly some essential items.

A strong clearly labeled plastic container is ideal to put your kit in. It should have a lid to keep it clean and prevent either mice or the damp getting in! A smaller plastic container is useful to hold warm water for cleaning a wound; an old 2 litre ice-cream tub would be a good size. The list detailed below is our suggested essential items for your first-aid kit.

- Cotton wool quilted roll
- Sterile saline 1 litre - used to flush wounds with a syringe and needle
- 50ml syringe and 16g needle
- Hibiscrub surgical scrub -

use diluted with warm water (1:50)

- Animalintex poultice - primarily only used on the foot for abscesses
- Duck tape - is also useful to have for taping on a poultice
- Nu-gel - this is an aqueous gel to be used on a wound
- Scissors
- Dressings - to include melolin which is non-absorbent for minor wounds and Allevyn - which is an absorbent dressing used for any open wound
- Selection of bandages such as Coplus

There are other items that also form a useful part of your kit including;

- Vaseline

- Thermometer (normal range between 37 & 38°C)
- Surgical Spirit

Few owners have a first aid kit readily

available, but once you have had the misfortune of an injured horse, you do tend to think ahead of what you may need the next time! Most of

the items do not have a "sell by date" and they will keep for a number of years if you are lucky enough not to have used them!

We have a ready stocked first-aid kit complete within a protective box available for purchase. It is competitively priced and contains everything you need. It makes a great birthday gift for any horse or pony owner. Check our website for the comprehensive list of contents and cost.

