



## FARM NEWSLETTER – September 2024

**North Park**  
Veterinary Group Limited



**EQUUS VETS**



**SHOWS OVER** Thank you all very much for coming along to say hello, drink tea and eat cakes at our new show trailer. The weather was great for **Chagford** but suboptimal for **Okehampton** and **Holsworthy** so it was commendable to see so many of you popping in to brighten our day. Special thank you to all those who bought raffle tickets; over the 3 shows, we raised **£688.14** for **Macmillan Cancer Support**.



**AUGUST BEEF GROUP MEETING** Jamie and Amy wanted to thank all the attendees and the brilliant hosts for their recent on-farm beef meeting. **Internal parasite treatments and management strategies** were covered, tying in nicely with our upcoming **SUSTAINABILITY THEMED MEETING**.

### PARASITE FORECAST: WEATHER WARNING

This year so far has given us **mild temperatures, plenty of water** and steady grass growth. While these conditions have reduced springtime cases of grass staggers, they have been very helpful to a number of parasites. We have had cases of **babesiosis** in cattle, **liver fluke** in cattle and sheep and **barber's pole worm (*Haemonchus*)** in sheep and goats.

>**BABESIOSIS/ REDWATER** Ectoparasite control plans should be carefully tailored according to the risk factors of the areas that livestock are grazing. **Ticks** may carry protozoa (or viruses affecting cattle and sheep) that are infectious transmitted when the ticks feed off livestock. Ticks move around every few years so redwater areas can change occasionally. Monitoring for **lethargic or depressed** animals can allow for prompt treatment and best chance of recovery.

>**LIVER FLUKE** has been thought of as an Autumn and winter disease in the past, but we have had confirmed cases in cattle and sheep recently. The wet spring has created an increase in the **mud snail** population, the intermediate host of the liver fluke *Fasciola hepatica*. Symptoms of fluke can range from sudden death to anaemia and bottlejaw.

>**HAEMONCHUS** or barber's pole worm **lay 100s of eggs per day** and can cause deaths in sheep flocks without obvious prior symptoms. **Worm egg counts** can monitor egg output and give a warning before clinical signs manifest. It should be carefully planned with veterinary input when deciding which product to use, there are available **treatments that target this worm** and can have minimal impact on the general **anthelmintic resistance** on the farm. Please contact the practice for more information.

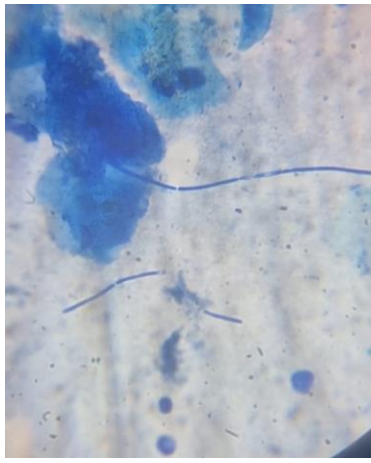


**BLUETONGUE UPDATE:** 13 premises affected in the east of England. Guidance available via [www.gov.uk/government/collections/bluetongue-information-and-guidance-for-livestock-keepers](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bluetongue-information-and-guidance-for-livestock-keepers)



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## CASE OF THE MONTH: WATER DROPWORT POISONING



This month, we received a call from a farmer that had just been out to check his yearling beef bullocks and found **6 animals dead in the field**. The bullocks had recently been moved into the field that had been ditched in the last year to improve drainage. The ditches along the perimeter had been electric fenced off, there were no immediately obvious causes of death. **Disturbed earth** raises suspicion of soil-borne pathogens such as *Bacillus anthracis* and *Clostridium chauvoei*, causing **anthrax and blackleg**. Anthrax is a serious and **fatal disease to animals and humans** so it must be ruled out by a veterinarian in the case of **unexplained sudden livestock deaths**. In the microscope image (left), chains of rod-shaped bacteria were seen but they did not fit the description of *Bacillus anthracis* and so it was deemed safe to proceed with post-mortem examination of the carcasses.

They were inspected for blackleg and Black's Disease (Clostridial disease affecting the liver, usually triggered by fluke) but the significant finding was in the rumen. Several pieces of **parsnip-like roots** (image right) were recovered and identified as **water dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*)**. This is one of the UK's **most poisonous plants**, needing only a small amount to kill cattle quickly after consumption. It lives in **wet ground** and near streams, the plants were likely disturbed by the ditching, exposing the "**dead man's fingers**" tubers. The tubers are palatable and all 6 dead bullocks are likely to have died **within hours** of consuming the plant, which is related to equally toxic hemlock (*Conium maculatum*). After **moving the cattle to the adjacent field**, a **7<sup>th</sup> bullock died during the visit**. This one also had the toxic tubers in its stomach. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing which of the remaining group of around 30 bullocks had eaten the poison, and **no treatment** even if it were possible to pick them out. As the plant is so deadly, the deaths would occur within 12 hours of consumption. Thankfully there were **no further deaths in the following days**. The field has been searched for the powerful poison and cattle will not graze there until it is known to be safe. When disturbing large amounts of soil, take care with livestock nearby as whether it is toxic material or infectious bacteria that may be unearthed, there is often limited or even no effective treatment.



**COCCI SPECIATION** We have carried out speciation on several farms with **on-going or repeating coccidiosis issues**. The testing gives a percentage of **pathogenic or harmful vs benign** cocci oocysts. Our results have varied from **9% pathogenic to more than 90%**. As coccidiosis is a disease of **balance between environmental infectious load and young animals mounting an immune response**, having an idea of how much of the cocci population on your farm is harmful is valuable to designing a management plan for current and future crops. If you have had issues with **cocci symptoms this year or in previous years**, please contact the practice to discuss if you are eligible for coccidiosis speciation at a discounted price. We have a limited number of discount offers and as the lambs/ calves/ kids **get older**, the **coccidia burden will naturally reduce** so diagnostic tests will be more reliable sooner rather than later.

**Sustainable farming meeting – how dung beetles help your farm + what are the benefits of parasitic wasps?** Vet **Rob Howe** and a rep for **Biowasps** (Bestico) will speak at a joint meeting between North Park Vets and Castle Vets. There are steps most farmers can take to be **less dependent on pesticides** and improve **biodiversity** of their land. This will be a practical afternoon of **farm walks** and discussion. Wellies required. 19th September 11am-3pm. Lunch will be provided. This meeting is free to all beef and sheep club members, and £25/farm otherwise. Please let us know if you would like to attend, so we can get enough food!



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