

The VET



Pastures New?

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Out of habit I usually peruse the Jobs Vacant columns in the Vet Record and this week the post of Vet in St Helena caught my eye. 50 square miles of tropical island 1200 miles from the nearest landfall in the South Atlantic – roughly the same size as Orkney except about 20 degrees warmer! Interestingly the challenge they are facing is biosecurity despite being so remote. A new and first ever airport has just opened and is expected to bring all sorts of incubating disease as well as insects carrying problems. Previously the 5-day boat journey acted as a kind of quarantine period. So putting in place protocols to keep the island disease free is one part of the job description.

The UK also needs to protect its “island” biosecurity. Recent outbreaks of Babesiosis in dogs (a protozoal disease) in Essex is thought to be due to ticks hitching a lift into the UK from Europe, and appears to be a direct consequence of relaxation of Pet Travel

Scheme rules which used to insist on pets being treated to kill any ticks before entering the UK – but not anymore and look what’s happened.

The threat of BlueTongue coming into South East England again is thought to be a real risk and so it would seem sensible to vaccinate sheep in those areas to act as a barrier – but guess what? The French own all available vaccine at the moment and there is none available in the UK.

So two recent examples where our national biosecurity looks a bit weak for keeping out diseases we previously have not had. A good reminder to look closer to home and at the biosecurity on your own farm – make your farm your fortress – as they say!

As for jobs in pastures new I think there is probably plenty to do keeping out the new on pastures old! However I did like one of the other vet tasks in St Helena – feeding Jonathon the 180 year old giant tortoise by hand once a week – honest, its in the job description!