

Winter Threats

An A to Z guide to the threats facing lambs and breeding sheep

From coccidiosis to urolithiasis, there are plenty of things to look out for during the winter months, says vet Ian Gill of the Thrums Veterinary Group.

Coccidiosis

This can arise in away-wintered ewe lambs that have come off hill grazing, as they have no immunity to coccidia and can become heavily infected when fed intensively on low ground farms. Dung samples are useful to differentiate this from Nematodiosis which can also occur in this class of sheep at this time of year and requires a different treatment.

Condition Score

It is important to maintain body condition score for the month following mating in order to maximise embryo survival.

Footrot

The footrot bacteria – *Dichelobacter nodosus* – thrives in the warm moist environment of indoor lambing pens, so it is important that all sheep are sound when they are housed. Footbathing in 10 per cent zinc sulphate and separation and treatment of any affected sheep pre-housing helps avoid a build up of the bacteria in the sheep house. This will also reduce navel ill problems at lambing.

If you have a problem with footrot in your flock discuss with your vet whether antibiotic or vaccination is the most effective solution.



Any itching sheep should be investigated, for both lice and scab



Vet Ian Gill of the Thrums Veterinary Group

Forage

The rising price of concentrate feed mean a forage analysis to maximise its use in the ration will be even more cost effective this winter.

Infectious Keratoconjunctivitis

Also known as 'pink eye' or 'snow blindness', this condition can affect all ages of sheep. It is caused by a mycoplasma resulting in outbreaks of watering inflamed red eyes and, if left untreated, can lead to ulceration and blindness. Trough feeding, cold winds and housing can exacerbate the disease. Isolation of affected sheep and antibiotic treatment helps control an outbreak, and snacker feeding reduces spread of this disease.

Lice

Numbers of lice can increase ten-fold before spring, so investigate any itching sheep and be aware that scab might be involved instead/as well. Treatment is by OP dip or a pyrethroid pour-on, but a second treatment is often required after shearing next summer to eradicate the problem from a flock.

Listeria

Silage feeding brings with it the risk of listeria infection. This bacterial disease can cause neurological disease and abortion in pregnant ewes. It is classically seen seven to 10 days after feeding poorly conserved silage with affected sheep going off feed and becoming disorientated often being found stuck in

fences or behind gates.

To reduce the risk of listeriosis, spoiled silage should be avoided and the use of additives to produce a more acid pH used in future years. Yearlings are more prone to this disease, so they should be fed hay or the better quality silage.

Moredun

This November there are 10 Moredun roadshows around the country. Full details at www.moredun.org.uk/events.

Pasteurellosis

The stress of wet and cold weather along with increased growth rates and change of diet, such as rape or turnip feeding, can result in sudden deaths and high morbidity of infection in hoggs.

Prevention should have been by via vaccination, completed at least two weeks before the risk period of October to December, but if this hasn't been done post mortems can confirm the cause and antibiotics may reduce losses.



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Rhododendron poisoning

This can occur when sheep are short of feed or the ground is snow covered and the nearest green bite they can see is the rhododendron bushes lining the drive to the local stately home. One night's feeding can result in high mortality with treatment often futile. Make sure the sheep never go hungry, gates are closed and rhododendron bushes well fenced to avoid losses.

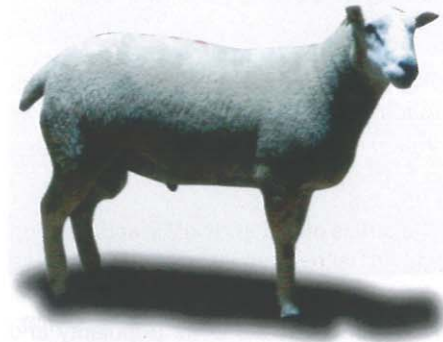
Schmallenberg

With SBV now being found in many parts of the UK, we must all remain vigilant. Scotland is offering free (for a limited time) post-movement serology testing for up to four sheep per unit to check livestock that have moved from areas of

England that have been affected by the virus. Other areas should report any birth deformities in lambs, especially bent limbs and blindness.

Scab

Winter is the time when this disease commonly rears its ugly head. Autumn is the major time of sheep movements and the scab mite can be imported on breeding sheep or store lambs. Ideally they should have been treated in quarantine with an OP dip or avermectin



Ram lambs and wethers can be contract urolithiasis or 'gravel' when fed concentrate during the winter.

injections. However any sheep seen scratching should be investigated.

Scab is a notifiable disease in Scotland and elsewhere, if the disease is found, neighbouring sheep farmers should be informed so that the disease can be prevented from spreading.

Trichostrongylosis

'Black scour' in hogs in early winter is caused by the intestinal *Trichostrongylus* worm infection. Worm egg counts can be used to confirm disease before treatment, and after to check that your wormer has been effective.

Urolithiasis

Concentrate feeding in-wintered wether and ram lambs can cause 'gravel', which is where the urinary tract is blocked by 'stones' formed from calcium, magnesium, ammonium and phosphate crystals.

Affected sheep strain to pass small amounts of blood stained urine and often the blockage leads to bladder rupture and death. This can be prevented by always ensuring access to clean water. Freezing can be avoided by providing

constantly flowing water in gutters or electrically heated pipes.

Provision of roughage and a gradual introduction of concentrates with addition of 2% ammonium chloride to the feed also helps avoid the build up of these crystals.

Vet

Your local vet is in the best position to advise on the health and welfare of your flock – and remember that XLVets offers FarmSkills courses through the winter months.

Ian Gill is at vet at Thrums Veterinary Group, a XLVets practice. XLVets is a group of farm animal committed vet practices that work together, alongside commercial research and manufacturing companies. They aim to share best practice on advice and disease-prevention initiatives and also offer FarmSkills training - See www.farmskills.co.uk or www.agritrain.com.

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