

1,000 knowledge-hungry cattle vets enjoy Cairns congress

THE World Buiatrics Congress is the highlight of the cattle veterinarian calendar. Since the first congress in 1960 in Hanover, it has been located in a different country every two years.

This year's host was the Australian Cattle Veterinary Association (ACVA), which chose the beautiful setting of Cairns, on the coast of the north-eastern tropical state of Queensland. The city has a very young and exciting feel, hosting many young travellers backpacking their way around the world. This rural, rugged and tranquil area of Queensland attracts the adventurous and athletic alongside those looking to drift care-free.

This beautiful gateway to the Great Barrier Reef and Queensland tropics was the ideal setting for the knowledge-hungry cattle vet to bask in an intellectual relaxing soak.

The congress opened amid traditional Aboriginal dancing and Australian ballads sung by the ACVA president's family. The party atmosphere got under way at the champagne reception, where some of Australia's wildlife, including crocodiles, koalas and kangaroos, mingled with the assembled veterinary crowd. Winter weather, with lows of 25°C and absence of any cyclonic fronts, provided ideal conditions to welcome almost 1,000 large animal vets from throughout the world.

350 presentations

The scientific programme was presented in five lecture halls and translated into Spanish, German and French. There were 350 presentations, 69 keynote lectures and 250 poster presentations, from which the vets could choose their favourite specialised field.

The inclusion of a small ruminants programme ensured all large animal vets were amply catered for. Included were papers covering sheep, goats, camels and buffaloes. A number of papers covering animal welfare and pain management, a growing field of interest where benefits are now well recognised, presented new avenues for their use.

Delegates from more than 50 countries attended. The parabolic 10,500-mile journey restricted the numbers attending from Europe. The UK was represented by an exclusive 18 veterinarians who were both learning and presenting on the world buiatric platform. The World Association for Bui-

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reports on the world congress for cattle vets, which this year was held in Australia, and drew a worldwide audience for a packed scientific programme

atrics' (WAB) mission statement - "to promote goodwill and knowledge transfer within the international veterinary community by exchanging and discussing scientific, cultural and personal experiences within the framework of the WAB" - was taken advantage of outside the full-on lecture sessions with poster presentations, formal discussions, informal talks and the inevitable bar discussions, where groups of vets from different countries met and mingled, creating lively exchanges of international knowledge.

The scientific content included a diversity of interests, and a sample of the interesting facts presented are discussed briefly. This is by no means an exhaustive list and you are advised to read the proceedings for further knowledge.

There was a comprehensive bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) session, with one paper highlighting the occurrence of cross-species transmission of BVD virus into a sheep population. Reproductive performance in pregnant ewes experimentally infected with BVD virus and transmission rates in sheep conjoined with persistently infected (PI) BVD virus calves was investigated in Australia. Cross-species transmission from PI calves to naive sheep occurred in four out of nine wethers after four weeks of conjoining. There were severe reproductive losses, including high numbers of abortions and early lamb deaths. One PI lamb was produced.

Anthelmintic-resistant *Ostertagia* species on dairy farms in the Victoria district of Australia is common. One paper presented a study that showed a higher prevalence than previous reports. The presence of multiple resistant *Ostertagia* species is of great concern given there are no alternative anthelmintic classes or combination products registered for use in dairy cattle in Australia. Widespread resistance to benzimidazoles suggests use without prior testing carries a considerable risk for ineffective treatment. The results of the study highlighted the need for dairy farmers to be more aware of

anthelmintic resistance, particularly given the high pathogenicity of *Ostertagia* species.

Stressful situations arise for veterinarians throughout the world and this was highlighted in a paper of an overwhelming scenario where on arrival 28 cows were down and several had already died. The cows were all on the feed pad where they had just started eating their daily ration of corn silage after milking. This occurred on an Australian farm where they had been fed corn silage that had been incorrectly prepared, with twice the amount of urea inclusion that day. The cows were dying of urea poisoning. It was an extremely stressful situation of multiple animal deaths and led to a very distressed client.

Reproduction

The reproductive sessions included favourites such as synchronisation programmes, chemical pregnancy diagnosis, electronic motion detectors and ultrasonography. As reproduction is one of the ongoing major influences on the economic outcome of herds it will always remain a hot bed of research papers.

Equine chorionic gonadotropin (eCG) has been reported to improve conception rates in beef animals and one paper from New Zealand set out to investigate whether eCG improved pregnancy outcomes in New Zealand dairy cows. A total of 1,906 cows not detected in oestrus were selected and assigned to four groups. The group with eCG given at progesterone device removal had seven per cent higher first service conception and 28-day pregnancy rates. Additional results showed first service conception rates and 28-day pregnancy rates were lower in Friesians than non-Friesians and were lower in cows with a body condition score less than four, compared to those more than four.

When I first saw the heading "phantom cow syndrome" I thought someone was going to describe the ultrasound findings of a bovine pregnancy without placentomes or calf. However, once the New Zealand presentation unfolded it became clear the phantom cow was defined



A herd of Atherton Plain Brahman cattle.

as the cow that had been inseminated, did not return to service in the following 35 to 49 days and was not pregnant 35 to 49 days after this service. Approximately 10 per cent of non-return cows were identified as phantom cows at the initial pregnancy diagnosis. All the phantom cows were treated with a seven-day progesterone programme, which included gonadotropin-releasing hormone at insertion and day nine, eCG at day of removal, prostaglandin on day seven and insemination on day 10.

This synchronised protocol significantly improved pregnancy rates and was calculated to give an economic return of between NZ\$660 (£331) and NZ\$5,600 (£2,812) on 100 cows scanned. An interesting finding was that low BSC cows benefited significantly from the treatment in terms of improved pregnancy rates.

Sixteen headline topics were covered, dominated by southern hemisphere contributors with their local research topics well covered.

Chairman of the WBC Robert Rheinberger and his committee put on a congress second to none and made the assembled veterinarian herd very welcome, satisfying their quest for knowledge.

Atmosphere

Having spent a week together the vets dispersed to either extend their visit by travelling or returned home to put their newly acquired knowledge into action. However, just before they all left most took the chance to soak up a little of the city's atmosphere.

The city of Cairns was founded in 1876 and was named after William Wellington Cairns, the governor of Queensland. It was formed to serve miners heading for the Hodgkinson River goldfield, but experienced a decline



The delegate list was truly international.

Cape Tribulation, is the point where Captain Cook was shipwrecked, and has a spectacular beach and good crocodile spotting country.

when an easier route was discovered from Port Douglas. It later developed into a railhead and major port for exporting sugar cane, gold and other metals, minerals and agricultural products from surrounding coastal areas and the Atherton Tableland region.

Cairns sits on a beautiful coast with attractions on all sides. The wide streets are flanked by huge storm drains - evidence of the three-metre rainfall and tropical cyclone storms the area gets during the wet season. The furthest point north accessible by car, Cape Tribulation, is the point where Captain Cook was shipwrecked, and has a spectacular beach and good crocodile-spotting country. If time permits, you can take the mountain walk to the top of Mount Sorrow. Only to be attempted by the reasonably fit, your arrival at the top may be rewarded with its "Moving Sorrowful Mountain face".

The harbour is the gateway to the Barrier Reef where a multitude of vessels and hosts wait to take you diving on the coral. For the brave there is a jet-ski trip up the Barron River where crocodiles can be spotted.

Land lovers can enjoy the great walks in parks around Cairns - just watch out for the black snakes - or for the more energetic there is the Smithfield Bike Park where the 2014 Mountain Bike World Cup championships were held. To the south you can continue your trip to Brisbane, the next hub of civilisation, through 1,056km of Australian scenery. To the west you climb 1,000m steeply to the spectacular Atherton Plain, home to the district's dairy industry. The twisty climb through hairpin bends reminded me of the mountain climbs to the ski areas of Europe. The spectacular beaches, curtained fig trees and Australian hospitality, mingled with the quest for knowledge, made Cairns the ideal setting for the congress.

Dublin is the next congress host and it has a lot to keep up with in 2016.

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graduated from the University of Glasgow and after a short time in a large animal practice in Devon settled in the Willows Veterinary Group, Cheshire. He is a senior partner and was responsible for setting up Embryonics, which specialises in bovine embryo transfer and practical training courses for both vets and farmers. John has a special interest in cattle ultrasound, having delivered workshops for many years in many different countries. The most exciting was Iran.

