

Sandhill Veterinary Services

Veterinary Care for Game Birds, Poultry and Pigeons



NEWSLETTER – GAME BIRD CLIENTS

SPRING 2017

ADDITIONAL SERVICES AT DUNNINGTON (From 8th May 2017)

Over the past two seasons, clients have been able to collect drugs from Bishopton Vets at Dunnington, York by prior arrangement with the practice office at Topcliffe. This facility has become available since Dan King from Bishopton Vets has been working with me in the PM room at Topcliffe.

This season we intend to extend the service at Dunnington by offering some limited post mortem facilities to our game bird clients.

The default position will be that birds will still need to be taken to Topcliffe for examination if Dan is not available to see them at Dunnington.

The Dunnington service is effectively a ‘branch’ which aims to improve the service to clients in that area. In contrast to Topcliffe, this will be a ‘drop off service’. Birds will be left by the client at the practice in Dunnington by prior arrangement with the practice office at Topcliffe and results will be communicated as soon as they are available. Where a client cannot fit in with this system or the clinical picture dictates, then the birds should be taken to Topcliffe as they have been previously.

Process:

The client should phone the Topcliffe office and request to take birds to Dunnington. The Topcliffe office will advise if a vet will be available at Dunnington. New clients will be required to register with the Topcliffe office to have an account set up prior to using the service.

Birds must be delivered to Dunnington before 12noon. The post mortem will be done between 1pm and 6pm on days when Dan is available. No birds will be accepted for examination unless they have previously been booked in via the Topcliffe office.

Clients will be informed of the results by phone – they must ensure that they can be contacted.

Drugs will be available for collection from Dunnington if required. Reports and invoices will be sent from the Topcliffe office.

Hopefully this service will enable some clients who live closer to the Dunnington practice to have birds examined there without the need to travel to Topcliffe.

NEW MEMBER OF STAFF

Julie Walker joined us in the third week of March as our new laboratory technician.

Julie has worked for 16 years in laboratory testing and the post mortem room at APHA Thirsk and she also worked for a year in the parasitology department at APHA Sand Hutton, York. Prior to that she worked as a microbiologist for Hillsdown Turkeys.

Like Sandie and Janet, Julie will be working full time during the busy summer game bird season and part time over the winter months.

PRACTICE MEETING 2017



The practice meeting for our game bird clients was held on 15th February at Topcliffe Village Hall.

About 100 people attended the meeting – our own clients with clients of Bishopton Veterinary Group and the Minster Veterinary Practice together with industry representatives.

The high attendance reflected continued concern about the presence of Avian Influenza in the country together with worries about Mycoplasmosis and possible restrictions on the use of antibiotics.

SCOTTISH GAMEKEEPERS 25TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING – PERTH

Richard Byas was invited to discuss the need to reduce antibiotic usage in rearing game birds at the Scottish Gamekeepers 25th Anniversary meeting in Perth on 3rd March. Practical ways to reduce usage without adversely affecting game bird health were outlined and the presentation was followed by a question and answer session.

MAINTAINING A HEALTHY GUT

There are thousands of different types of bacteria and trillions of each type within a bird's gut in addition to viruses and fungi. The combined sum of all the bacteria, viruses and fungi on a body is known as the Microbiome and within a healthy gut the bacteria, viruses and fungi, whilst competing with one another, live in a balanced state.

The bacteria in the body consist of both 'good' and 'bad' bacteria and it is the competition between these that, in a healthy bird, keeps the 'bad' bacteria in check. So, a healthy gut has a natural balance of bacteria, viruses and fungi. Thankfully most bacteria are 'good' and they are necessary to prevent 'bad' bacteria becoming dominant.

Recent work has shown that there may be 7000 different types of bacteria in a chicken's gut and it is likely that there will be a similar number in the gut of a pheasant or partridge. Anything that upsets the balance of the gut bacteria and allows 'bad' bacteria to thrive is likely to be seen clinically as the bird passing wet droppings.

One of the avoidable upsets to a bird's gut bacteria is the inappropriate use of antibiotics. Antibiotics do not distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' bacteria – they will kill any bacteria which are sensitive to them. Antibiotics given by mouth will naturally kill off gut bacteria and the greater their killing power (i.e. the less targeted their effect), the more likely they are to kill off large numbers of 'good' bacteria. This allows the other bacteria which will be resistant to the antibiotic to multiply and take over the space formally taken by the bacteria that have been killed. If the bacteria that multiply up are predominantly 'bad' bacteria, then the gut Microbiome will be unbalanced and the birds are then more likely to scour.

When deciding to use antibiotics, we have to make a balanced decision – is the danger of using the drug and possibly upsetting the gut greater than the possible benefits of treating the birds? If birds are ill with a bacterial infection, then the use of a suitable antibiotic is usually the best option but the use of antibiotics in healthy birds can be dangerous. At best the use of antibiotics in healthy birds will have no effect but at worst it will cause health problems in the birds, possibly several weeks into the future, when the connection between treatment and problem may not be apparent. It must be remembered that antibiotics only kill bacteria. Antibiotics do not kill viruses so if birds have Rotavirus, Coronavirus, Adenovirus or any other pure viral infection it is unlikely that antibiotic medication will have any beneficial effect. Similarly, antibiotics do not kill protozoan parasites so they will not kill coccidia, hexamita, trichomonas or cryptosporidium.

The pre-emptive use of antibiotics to prevent disease is questionable and may be illegal next season. It can be argued that if disease can be predicted to the extent that the strategic use of antibiotics will prevent it, then action needs to be taken to improve management in such a way that medication is not needed. We can never defend putting birds or any livestock into an environment where disease is inevitable.

The use of in-feed antibiotics to control potential gut problems is also a practice that is questionable. Sick birds continue to drink longer than they continue to eat, so water medication of sick birds is more likely to be effective. There are release pens in which there are natural supplies of water available to the birds and in which water medication of sick birds is problematic but in such situations the response to in-feed medication is also often poor. We need to try to determine the triggers for gut problems in such pens and then try to implement management changes to reduce the incidence of problems occurring.

Prolonged in-feed medication for gut problems is an area where a reduction in antibiotic usage could be achieved without adversely affecting bird health. After 7-10 days, any in-feed antibiotic, given at the correct dose, will have killed the gut bacteria which are sensitive to it and thereafter the remaining bacteria will be resistant and further use is likely to simply waste money as there will be few bacteria remaining for the antibiotic to kill.

When any antibiotic treatment has been required, it is sensible to then help support the Microbiome by treating the birds with a prebiotic to help the remaining 'good' bacteria multiply rapidly and outgrow the 'bad' bacteria.



We have available 'Total Prebiotic', the successor to PreBiotic Spectrum and advise its use both in chicks to establish a healthy gut and after antibiotic treatment to help restore a balanced gut Microbiome.

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