



Antibiotic Reduction in Game Birds

Dan King MRCVS, Sandhill Veterinary Services LLP

The game bird sector has seen significant success in reducing antibiotic use in recent years, with usage dropping by 49% since 2016. Many of the 'easy wins' have now been achieved and further reductions will be more difficult for some producers. We need to further reduce antibiotic use if we are to prevent even more bacterial antimicrobial resistance in both our livestock and ourselves. It is important that we ensure we only use antibiotics against bacterial infections when necessary and at the correct dose for the correct length of time.

The reductions to date have come from shoots and game farms engaging with their vet, but there may be some who do not use a specialist game/avian vet and who are perhaps not aware of the industry pressure to reduce antibiotics. The game bird sub-committee of the British Veterinary Poultry Association (BVPA) is well placed to advise on member veterinary practices who do significant amounts of game bird work.

In recent years Sandhill Veterinary Services have run trials and antibiotic reduction case studies with our clients. These have been successful in reducing antibiotic usage and improving bird health. We believe this is down to various factors:

1. **Mycoplasma control** – based on laboratory testing, management changes and only using antibiotics when required and firmly based on the 'BVPA working group recommendations for Mycoplasma management in gamebirds'. We have significantly reduced the use of antibiotics in both breeding and rearing birds.
2. **Gut health** - Routine PM's, together with coccidial oocyst and worm egg monitoring allow us to intervene before clinical disease occurs. This helps stabilise the gut and so reduces outbreaks of disease.

Additionally, we have spent 2 years trialling a probiotic – Clostat® This is delivered in water, in feed or a combination of both throughout rear. Clostat® outcompetes pathogenic bacteria such as E.coli and actually kills Clostridia (a bacterial cause of enteritis often concurrent with Coccidiosis). In our 2019 trial, 70,000 pheasants were split into equal treatment and control groups. The Clostat® treated birds showed:

- 52% reduction in antibiotic use
- 25% relative reduction in mortality
- 4% improvement in daily weight gain

During the 2020 season many other sites have used Clostat® successfully. We feel probiotics such as Clostat® together with nutraceuticals have a clear role in promoting bird health and reducing antibiotic use.



Clients of other practices have also successfully used Clostat[®]. Dominic Boulton, Proprietor of Perfect Poults tried Clostat[®] in 2020. He commented “We saw a significant reduction in overall mortality across the season, and reduced antibiotic use compared to the previous few years. I will definitely be using it again in 2021.”

Carol Lopez, Veterinary Surgeon at PHS remarked “The feedback from our clients that have used it is good. They reported beneficial effects on the performance and there was a generalised perception that the birds were coping better with average challenges.”

3. **Water quality** – Ensuring clean water by having clean water lines is important for good bird health. We advise water audits on all sites ahead of and during the rearing season. This includes culture and line swabbing, live contamination quantification with an electronic ‘ATP’ device and pH monitoring.

Line cleaning ahead of the season and periodically throughout the season is essential to reduce a build-up of biofilm. To attain clean drinking water we advise acidification with organic acids.

To achieve antibiotic reduction, sites need to consider many management factors in consultation with their vet as each site has its own problems and challenges. It is important to our industry that every effort is made to achieve the 40% reduction in antibiotics targeted for 2024. This can be done without adversely affecting bird health if vets and owners work in close cooperation.