

Letters

Is BSE a new disease?

From Mr O. Swarbrick

SIR,— I agree with Roger Eddy (*VR*, May 26, p 537) that bovine spongiform encephalopathy may not be a new disease. Over the years neurological signs suggestive of BSE have been observed. Everyone now has a more critical view of such signs and is more aware of their possible significance.

In the 1940s and 1950s numerous cattle with neurological disorders were seen and in many this was attributed to 'tubercular meningitis'. Tubercles were found in some but not all these cattle. I am not aware that any histology was carried out on any of these brains.

OLAF SWARBRICK
The Cricket Field
Fontwell
Arundel, West Sussex

From Mr D. J. Spark

SIR,— I do not agree with Mr R. G. Eddy (*VR*, May 26, p 537). I saw my first case of BSE in 1985 after 30 years practice in the south west; remarking at the time to the farmer 'I never saw this before.'

Not once, during the past five years, have I thought otherwise.

DAVID SPARK
Coombefield Veterinary Hospital
Axminster
Devon

From Mr M. B. de C. Giles

SIR,— I would like to endorse, in full, the letter by R. Eddy (*VR*, May 26, p 537). I believe bovine spongiform encephalopathy has been about for longer than we have imagined.

I would also like to say that British beef is being well monitored, and the fact that it appears not to have been seen in other countries, is because they have not looked for it. The veterinary symptoms are so similar to 'cases' we have had in the past — recumbency, non-response to metabolic treatments, etc.

M. B. de C. GILES
Balsam Fields
Wincanton
Somerset

Oilseed rape and equine respiratory disease

From Dr P. M. Dixon and Mr B. McGorum

SIR,— Residing permanently outdoors is the optimal environment for horses in suitable climates and much equine respiratory disease, ie, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), is due to housing. However, a small minority of horses can suffer respiratory diseases associated with pasture. Most equine headshakers are 'seasonal headshakers' which appears to be caused by a pollen induced rhinitis (Lane and Mair 1987) and over the next few months such cases will frustrate most attempts at treatment.

A smaller percentage of horses will develop

COPD-type disease, frequently severe, while outdoors and recently we reported two such cases seen at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in 1988 (Dixon and McGorum 1990). Last summer we saw a further five cases, two of which grazed adjacent to oilseed rape (OSR) fields. In a discussion of a paper on this topic at the British Equine Veterinary Association annual congress at Warwick in 1989, it became clear that many practitioners recognised this type of outdoor pulmonary disease and could identify horses in which it recurred annually.

By the first week of May this year, we were already aware of 11 cases of suspect pasture associated pulmonary disease and in all cases the horses were grazing adjacent to OSR fields. In one instance the owner's children were suffering hay fever, diagnosed as being due to OSR. OSR is also in Scotland associated with lower airway disease, ie, asthma-like, in man (G. Russell, personal communication).

Because of the vast increase in acreage of the unsightly OSR crop throughout Britain, presumably an EC attempt to acquire a balanced portfolio of surplus foodstuffs, it may be coincidental that so many horses have respiratory disease while adjacent to OSR fields. However, it appears more likely that this early flowering plant which appears to act as an irritant rather than an allergen to the human respiratory tract, may also cause respiratory diseases in the horse. A current survey on the potential effects of OSR on 2000 people in Scotland being carried out by Aberdeen University may cast some further light on this potential problem.

P. M. DIXON
B. MCGORUM
Department of Veterinary Clinical
Studies
University of Edinburgh Veterinary
Field Station
Roslin

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Aleutian disease in the ferret

From Mr M. Oxenham

SIR,— Spontaneous Aleutian disease (AD) in ferrets (*Mustela putorius furo*) has been reported in the USA (Kenyon and others 1967), Canada (Daoust and Hunter 1978) and New Zealand (Cox 1984). This is a preliminary and first report of AD in the ferret in the UK.

AD is caused by a parvovirus and can be a serious problem on mink farms. In the ferret it is characterised by a persistent viraemia, immune mediated pathological changes in various organs and hypergammaglobulinaemia. Clinical signs are variable, such as weight loss and general malaise, chronic respiratory infection and degrees of posterior paralysis. Transmission is both vertical (transplacental) and horizontal (blood, saliva, urine and faeces). Diagnosis is based on histopathology, gammaglobulin estimation and blood serology using the counterimmunoelectrophoresis (CIEP) test.

In January 1990, a six-month-old jill was

presented with acute posterior paresis and urinary incontinence. It was treated with chloramphenicol and betamethasone by injection. Within 24 hours the condition had progressed to quadriplegia and euthanasia was carried out. Autopsy was performed at the veterinary investigation laboratory, Winchester, and there were no gross lesions on the internal organs. Histopathology on the brain, spinal cord, lung and kidney was done at the Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge, and demonstrated significant changes in the spinal cord suggestive of a viral aetiology. The brain was normal. It was at this stage that AD was suspected. Blood serology was carried out at Harlan Olac Ltd using the CIEP test and was positive for AD. Gammaglobulins comprised 21.5 per cent (normal 5 per cent) of the total serum protein. This owner had seven other ferrets, five of which gave a positive CIEP test.

Another owner had a similar case two months later. This ferret was also put down and histopathology is in progress. The CIEP test was positive. This owner had 13 ferrets, five of which were also positive. It was then decided, in cooperation with the Wessex Ferret Club, to carry out a survey of the incidence of AD infected ferrets using the CIEP test. A total of 204 pet ferrets belonging to 49 owners were tested and 11 (5.4 per cent) were positive. Some of these 11 had had episodes of hindleg weakness, or respiratory infection and weight loss. A more detailed account of the epidemiology, symptoms and pathology will be published in due course.

Ferret clubs and societies are concerned about these findings since CIEP test positive ferrets should be regarded as potentially infective to other ferrets. As the test is simple to do and inexpensive, owners who breed ferrets, go to shows and other events are being encouraged by the organisers to have their stock tested. Control of AD is dependent on testing, cessation of breeding and isolation of positive ferrets. Antibiotic and steroid therapy may give some response but there is no known cure. Vaccination is not possible due to the immune-mediated nature of the disease.

I am grateful to David Welchman, Winchester Veterinary Investigation Centre, for carrying out the autopsies, to the Central Veterinary Laboratory for histopathology and the Zoological Society, London for the gammaglobulin estimations.

MICHAEL OXENHAM
64 West End Road
Bitterne
Southampton

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Enterohaemolysin and Shiga-like toxin genes in *E. coli*

From Dr P. Pohl and others

SIR,— Two thousand seven hundred and twenty-five *Escherichia coli* isolates from cattle in Belgium with systemic or enteric colibacillosis were studied with several gene probes for

heat-stable and heat-labile toxins (STaP, STb, LT) and adhesins (K88, K99, 987P, F41) produced by enterotoxigenic *E. coli*, for more recently described heat-labile toxin IIa (LTIIa) and Shiga-like toxins I and II (SLT-I or VT1, SLT-II or VTII), for adherence factor of enteropathogenic *E. coli* and for enteroinvasiveness properties of enteroinvasive *E. coli*. Of the probe-positive isolates there were 72 *E. coli* that hybridised with SLTI and, or, SLTII probes but not with other probes (53 SLT-I + isolates, 11 SLT-II +; 8 SLT-II and II +).

Among these 53 SLT-I *E. coli*, 44 strains (83 per cent) produced an enterohaemolysin. The detection of enterohaemolysin requires overnight incubation on blood agar with 5 per cent washed sheep erythrocytes supplemented with 10 ml 1 CaCl₂; contrary to alpha-haemolysin it does not appear on plates containing unwashed erythrocytes (Beutin and others 1986).

Among 11 strains that hybridised with the SLT-II probe only three produced the enterohaemolysin; and among eight strains that hybridised with both probes SLT-I and SLT-II only two strains produced this type of haemolysin.

One hundred *E. coli* strains that hybridised with none of the probes were tested for the production of enterohaemolysin. Only one strain produced it.

Thus the production of enterohaemolysin is suitable as a marker for the detection of potential SLT-I producing *E. coli* but not for the SLT-II or SLT-I + SLT-II strains.

We would be interested in receiving SLT-I or II *E. coli* strains to confirm our results.

P. POHL
P. LINTERMANS
National Institute for Veterinary
Research
Brussels
J. MAINIL
G. DAUBE
A. KAECKENBEECK
Veterinary Faculty
Brussels, Belgium

Reference

BEUTIN, L., MONTENEGRO, M., ZIMMERMANN, S. & STEPHAN, R. (1986) *Zentralblatt für Bakteriologie, Mikrobiologie und Hygiene A* 267, 576

Iatrogenic laminitis

From Mr R. A. Eustace and Dr R. R. Redden

SIR,— We are writing to remind colleagues that the use of corticosteroids in horses and ponies may induce laminitis and founder. Each year we are each presented with animals in which this disease has occurred shortly after administration of these drugs to sound horses and ponies, often to treat relatively mild ailments. In severe cases this has necessitated the humane destruction of the animals.

We have previously reported on the contraindications of this class of drugs in relation to laminitis. Corticosteroids are absolutely contraindicated in the treatment of equine laminitis.

ROBERT A. EUSTACE
The Laminitis Clinic
University of Bristol
Langford
R. R. REDDEN
PO Box 507
Versailles
Kentucky, USA

Fenbendazole resistance in *Haemonchus contortus* of sheep

From Dr C. L. Yadav

SIR,— *Haemonchus contortus* resistant to fenbendazole has been recorded from an organised sheep farm in Hisar, Haryana, India on which regular anthelmintic medication is practised. The history of the farm, visited first in August 1989, revealed that the increased frequency of dosing from monthly to once in one or two weeks failed to control the signs of parasitic gastroenteritis. Fenbendazole administration to a group of lambs kept at the farm failed to reduce the eggs per gram of faeces (epg) at the manufacturer's recommended dose (5 mg/kg). Pre- and post treatment larval cultures showed that other nematodes apart from *H. contortus* were removed.

In March 1990, some *H. contortus* infected lambs were purchased by this department and given fenbendazole at the above mentioned dose. Because of the surprisingly high epg seven days after dosing, one of the lambs procured from this farm was dosed again but this continued to show increased epg (2000 to 6600) and at post mortem examination 16 days after the second dosing 524 adult *H. contortus* were removed from the abomasum.

Evidence of benzimidazole resistance in nematode parasites of sheep in India, as pointed out by Vershney and Singh (1976), is rare and partial. This seems to be the first authentic report of benzimidazole resistance in *H. contortus* of sheep in India. Further work to investigate the extent of side resistance to other benzimidazoles and to conform the cross resistance to other groups of anthelmintics is being planned.

C. L. YADAV
Department of Veterinary Parasitology
Haryana Agricultural University
Hisar - 125 004
India

Reference

VERSHNEY, T. R. & SINGH, Y. P. (1976) *Indian Journal of Animal Science* 46, 666

RCVS Council election

From Professor R. S. Jones

SIR,— May I express my sincere thanks to those members who voted for me in the recent Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Council elections.

I will do my best to represent the views of the profession and to justify the confidence of the electorate.

R. S. JONES
Faculty of Veterinary Science
University of Liverpool

From Mr T. MacInnes

SIR,— Congratulations and commiserations. It is surely appropriate we have a 'First Lady' and nice to see 'Our Enery' well placed.

Surely the laurels must go to Walter Beswick who came within 19 votes of topping the poll - at first attempt, a vindication of his BVA Presidential year and robust stance against closure of Glasgow and Cambridge. Well done! To all colleagues and friends who contributed

to making my retiral party at PDSA Shamrock Street a memorable occasion sincere thanks.

TOM MacINNES
Loansdean
Cochno
Dunbartonshire

LVI fees

From Mr M. B. Stephens and others

SIR,— In March of this year we were informed that at long last an agreement had been reached between the BVA and the Ministry of Agriculture for a new fee structure and that a back payment would be made. It is obvious that inflation has eroded the value of these back payments.

I am now informed that the local payment units have not yet received authority to make these back payments and when this does reach them it will be a long process.

While ministers in Parliament are complaining that large companies are holding back payments to small suppliers and causing great cashflow problems, it would appear totally wrong that Government departments should be causing the same embarrassment to veterinary practices.

M. B. STEPHENS
N. F. PARTRIDGE
S. MASTERS
Valley Veterinary Group
Tutts Clump
Bradfield, Reading

Postscript

Who's afraid of the big, bad wolf?

VETERINARY researchers groaning at the prospect of yet another day squinting down microscopes or wrestling with statistics may be interested to learn how another researcher earns his keep. Dr Fred Harrington of Mount Saint Vincent University in Nova Scotia howls at wolves in the wild and analyses their replies. In common with many interviewees he rarely receives a straight answer.

According to *BBC Wildlife* magazine, wolves employ a variety of vocal tricks to convince other wolves or, indeed, researchers that the woods are bristling with large, savage wolves, when in fact there are only two or three small but enterprising ones. This lessens the chance of attack from other packs. However, one cannot help but feel anxious for Dr Harrington as his life may depend on the quality of his wolf impersonation. In order to exact a response from his wolf subjects he has to howl convincingly, and in order to avoid attack he should sound not just like one wolf, which is difficult enough, but like several large ones. His dilemma must surely be that experienced by students in veterinary school pipe bands, namely, where does he practise?

But to return to the weary veterinary researcher among the test-tubes; an actor in a theatre club bar was once kind enough to demonstrate to 'Totaliser' that it is possible to impersonate a lion's roar using an empty pint beer glass. Researchers wishing to secure a travel grant to exotic locations could make a modest start experimenting with the acoustic qualities of various laboratory glassware.

'TOTALISER'