

# SANDHILL VETERINARY SERVICES



GAME BIRD, POULTRY AND PIGEON CARE

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NEWSLETTER

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**COMMENT:** One of the great delights of my job is the steady progress we make in understanding the underlying causes of diseases in game birds and the steady advance in medicines available to treat disease. In many cases the advances may not seem particularly dramatic but by the combination of management techniques and medication most conditions can be controlled if we are able to get the birds to take the medication, which is not always possible, especially if birds have been released. At our game bird meeting for clients on 11<sup>th</sup> February I hope to update clients with our latest thoughts on the control of some of the more common conditions seen in chicks, rearers and breeding birds and later in the evening I intend to talk about some of the more unusual conditions we have seen in recent years which hopefully will highlight some potential problems that clients may not even be aware of. The lead article in this newsletter looks at the perennial problem of wormers that appear to be ineffective.

## WHY GAME BIRD WORMERS APPEAR TO FAIL

One of the more frustrating situations for clients is when they worm their birds and the treatment appears to fail. In many cases the client blames the drug for the failure but the very nature of game bird rearing and the fact that we do not have 100% control over feed intake, is often the reason that the treatment appears to have failed.

All licensed medications should 'do what it says on the packet' – the very fact that the product is licensed shows that it has undergone extensive tests to show it is effective. So why the failures?

First and foremost is that the drug will only work if sufficient of the product is consumed by the birds within the 7-10 day period that the birds are being treated. Persistent low intake of medicated food will result in the birds never ingesting sufficient drug in the required time for it to be effective.

Secondly the drug has no residual effect so if birds are held on highly contaminated areas re-infection occurs immediately the drug is removed and, for gapeworms, clinical signs will be seen again within the week.

There are rare occasions when the worms are resistant to the drug but in the overwhelming number of cases this is not the cause of the problem.

Factors that can reduce feed intake in the rearing pens can include inclement weather (including very hot weather when feed intake declines) and insufficient feeders for the number of birds present. In the release pens factors include birds eating food other than the medicated food provided, inclement weather reducing feed intake, aerial predators frightening birds away from the feeders and dilution of medicated feed when feeders are simply topped up with medicated feed rather than all the feed being replaced with medicated feed. It can be seen that some of these factors are outside the control of the keeper but likewise these factors are also out of the control of the drug manufacturer so it is not the fault of the drug that it appears not to have worked.

Keepers should be able to ensure that birds do not remain on highly contaminated areas after treatment particularly in release pens where feeders or feed areas can be moved but this is often not possible in old breeding pens which in some cases need to be re-sited if there are persistent problems.