

# Sandhill Veterinary Services

Game Bird, Poultry and Pigeon care

RICHARD T. BYAS B.Vet. Med., M.R.C.V.S.

## SPRING 2013

WELCOME to our spring game bird newsletter with the lead article discussing the problems of the 2012 game rearing season.

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### Opening Times:

Monday-Friday

8.30am - 5.00pm

### Saturday

9.00am - 12.00noon

All other times by appointment only

14 Long Street  
Topcliffe  
Thirsk

North Yorkshire  
YO7 3RW

Tel:

01845 578710

Fax:

01845 577685

e-mail:

rtb@sandhillvet.co.uk

Web:

www.sandhillvet.co.uk

## Game Bird Newsletter

### REVIEW OF THE 2012 REARING SEASON

2012 was one of the most difficult rearing seasons for a number of years. Between May and September we saw 400 pheasant and 167 partridge submissions at the practice. Despite a dry start to the breeding season we saw an increase in Mycoplasmosis in breeding pheasants early in the season and as birds approached peak lay we saw a number of cases of Coronavirus infection. However significant problems started in May as a result of poor quality chicks many of which came from France or were hatched from



French eggs. It was reported that there was a shortage of eggs in France and so all eggs were being set without being graded and as a result a significant number of small, non-viable chicks were hatching and being transported to clients. As a result, at its worse, early deaths of up to 15% in the first week of life were recorded in some imported chicks. The chicks that survived were often very variable in size which in some cases led to additional disease problems later in life as the smaller birds failed to compete with their flock mates.

The main clinical problem seen in birds once they were over one week old was bacterial enteritis. In most seasons Rotavirus infection accounts for about 50% of cases of enteritis seen in birds between 7 and 14 days old but in 2012 Rotavirus levels were low and the primary problems were bacterial in origin. The bacteria responsible were mainly Clostridia but a significant number of cases of Spirochaete bacteria causing enteritis were seen with the youngest birds affected with Spirochaete bacteria being only eleven days old. The antibiotic treatment of affected birds differs depending upon whether Spirochaete or Clostridia bacteria are present. The wet weather throughout the rearing season added to the stresses on the young birds with some rearing fields being waterlogged in places. Considering the difficulties, most clients coped very well and problems were not as serious as may have been expected.

Once the birds got into the release pens we saw significant problems with the birds eating cleaver seeds instead of the commercial food being offered. It was suggested in some cases that this may have been due to the abundance of the cleaver seeds due to the wet summer. Unfortunately cleaver seeds

appear to have little nutritional value and birds that eat a lot of the seeds tend to loose body condition and are presented to the practice due to their poor body condition. The wet weather was ideal weather for worms. We saw cases of gape worm infection in both pheasants and partridges. Also of concern were a number of cases of Capillaria intestinal worms. Capillaria worms can cause severe damage to the lining of the upper digestive tract causing loss of condition and in severe cases weakness and death. This emphasized the need for routine worming of birds after release. Another problem associated in many cases

with the bad weather was disease in birds being held in release pens until the harvest was completed. These birds suffered higher than normal cases of enteritis together with parasitic diseases. Even when the pens were opened many birds showed reluctance to leave the pens. With the wet conditions treatment of sick birds in release pens proved to be difficult.



Cleaver seeds in gizzard



Capillaria Worm Egg

## PREPARING CAUGHT-UP PHEASANTS FOR THE BREEDING SEASON

Late autumn and the early part of winter were ideal conditions, being damp and relatively mild for parasitic diseases. Worm burdens, both in birds and in any breeding pen that has been used in previous years, are likely to be higher than usual so treatment of birds for worms, as soon as they are caught up is advised. Within breeding pens the highest concentrations of worms are likely to be around where the feeders and drinkers were positioned last year so moving them to a new position, if it is practicable may have some beneficial effect. Even if worms do not cause clinical disease their presence will reduce the reproductive effectiveness of the birds so a programme of worming the birds every two to three weeks during the breeding season is advised. Towards the end of last year Flubenvet® wormer for inclusion in diets was in short supply but it is available once again and hopefully there will be no problems in having medicated food made this season.

Two other diseases that were seen commonly in breeding birds last season were Mycoplasmosis and Coronavirus infection. It is important for the control of Mycoplasmosis that birds are checked at catching up and any birds with signs of disease are not kept for breeding. Even healthy looking birds can carry the disease so it is important that a control programme for the disease is in place for when the birds enter the breeding pen. The control programme will vary depending on the circumstances of the breeding unit, source of birds etc. and should be developed in consultation with the practice.



Coronavirus in pheasants tends to destroy the bird's kidneys resulting in deaths in both hens and cocks. Vaccination of birds on entry to the pens can reduce the incidence of infection but may not be 100% effective as the vaccine used is a related poultry vaccine that will not give complete control over the pheasant strains of the virus.

## CHICK QUALITY AND RELATED DISEASE PROBLEMS

It was very evident early in the 2012 season that there were lots of very small chicks being delivered to clients especially from the French game farms. The immediate problem was that many of these birds proved to be non-viable and high mortalities were often suffered in the first week of life.

Had this been the only problem and had the remaining chicks reared well then the problem would have been more easily dealt with but a consequence of the initial poor chick quality appeared to be a wide variation in the size of the chicks (both pheasant and partridge) as they were reared.

In the early stages of rearing this resulted in higher mortalities in the smaller birds which were directly due in many cases to bacterial enteritis with the suspicion that their small size was a significant contribution to the stress on the birds.

Later as the time came for the birds to be released it was noticeable that the smaller birds seemed to stop growing and in many cases it was necessary to release the larger birds and allow the smaller birds to grow on to a suitable size which resulted in some management difficulties. Due to the poor weather conditions these small birds were not viable if released along with their larger flock mates thus the effects of poor chick quality continued to be seen and have financial implications long after the initial problems post delivery were over.

## PRACTICE MEETING 2013

The practice game bird meeting is booked for Tuesday 12th February, 7.30pm in Topcliffe Village Hall.

This year the topics are all related to grouse management and diseases and invitations will be sent to all clients known to have grouse moors.



Any other client with an interest in grouse who would like to attend should contact the practice before 6th February to book a place at the meeting.

Tel: 01845 578710

## PRICE LIST 2013

### Services:

Post-mortem	28.00
Bacterial culture	6.50
Coccidial oocyst / worm egg count	6.50
Trichostrongylus worm count (Grouse)	12.50
Culture hygiene swab	5.50
Culture water sample	6.50
Medicated foodstuff prescription	8.50

### Vitamins and Tonics:

Janssen Game Bird Tonic 1litre	26.94
Optishell Algal Booster	52.68
Vitamax Liquid Multivitamin 1litre	11.93
Vetrellyte 1.5kg	23.07

### Disinfectants:

Antec Virkon-S 5kg	40.78
Bi-oo-cyst 5litre	40.96
Biochlor Tabs 200	8.79
Orffa pH 10kg	22.70
Poultry Shield 1litre	10.19

All prices quoted are exclusive of VAT

All prices quoted are subject to alteration without notice.

Carriage will be charged where applicable.

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14 Long Street, Topcliffe, Thirsk, N. Yorkshire

Tel: 01845 578710

Fax: 01845 577685

e-mail: [rtb@sandhillvet.co.uk](mailto:rtb@sandhillvet.co.uk)

Website: [www.sandhillvet.co.uk](http://www.sandhillvet.co.uk)