

Sandhill Veterinary Services

Game Bird, Poultry and Pigeon care

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

PIGEON CLIENT NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2013

WELCOME: the season has so far been very busy with a wide range of problems being seen in birds from coccidiosis to young bird sickness. We have heard some interesting stories about what people claim to be able to diagnose from swabs and our first article looks some of the myths related to testing pigeons.

Office 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

TESTING PIGEONS - FACTS AND MYTHS

Respiratory Disease.

Myth 1: you can diagnose 'respiratory' from looking at swabs. Most respiratory disease in pigeons is caused by either bacterial or viral infections. These are not visible under a light microscope. Canker can cause respiratory noise but most pigeon fanciers are very well aware of canker and it is not usually regarded as respiratory disease.

Myth 2: Mycoplasmosis can be cultured and identified from swabs within 2-3 days.

Fact 1: To culture Mycoplasma requires specialist media and cultures can take up to three weeks to grow. Very many Mycoplasma organisms that live in birds cause no disease at all therefore to treat birds for Mycoplasmosis on the basis that Mycoplasma has been isolated from a bird without first having it identified is often of no benefit. Once isolated, it usually takes at least a week to identify the organism. Therefore you should expect to wait about three weeks for the results of Mycoplasma culture – results that arrive within a few days are unlikely to be reliable.

Fact 2: respiratory viruses and Mycoplasma can spread rapidly when birds are in close contact – this is particularly likely when birds are sent to races. The first signs are often exercise intolerance, head shaking, feathers around the ears not flat to the head and discharges from the eyes and nostrils. If birds are infected then they need a full course of treatment as prescribed by your veterinary surgeon. It is a **myth** that 24 – 48 hours treatment after racing will prevent disease. Such action only leads to the development of resistant bacteria.

Loose Droppings:

Myth 3: Any bacteria isolated from a cloacal (rectal) swab must be the cause of the problem. Virtually all birds will carry E.coli bacteria in their intestines and so these bacteria are likely to grow from any cloacal swab. Clostridia and motile bacteria, both of which are of more importance when birds have loose droppings, do not grow on the common culture media available in veterinary practices. In addition loose droppings can result from viral infections which are not detected by cloacal swab cultures. Hence cultures from cloacal swabs are worthless in determining the cause of loose droppings (unless any E.coli isolated is typed to see if it is known to cause disease in pigeons – this is both an expensive and time-consuming job and you would not expect to get useful results within at least two weeks).

Fact 3: fresh swabs from pigeons can help suggest the cause of loose droppings but swabs received through the post do not give useful results therefore we only examine swabs we have taken from birds at the practice.

Bringing in birds for examination:

Fact: you need to make an appointment for birds to be examined and we need to accurately know how many birds you are bringing. If additional clients come without an appointment we may well be unable to fit them into our schedule.