



Animal WOFs Newsletter **– July/August 14 –**



Welcome to another *Animal WOFs for Lifestyle Blocks* newsletter.

Each issue we are covering important animal health issues relevant for that time of year. Please feel free to give us feedback or ideas for the next issue, with any topics you would like to see covered.

In this issue:

Animal Health Diary – things to watch out for at this time of year:

Pre-birthing checklist


Bearings and Uterine Prolapses
– a common springtime emergency



Animal Health Diary July/August



A pre-birthing checklist...

- Ensure **vaccinations** are up to date prelambling/calving as vaccinated mothers will pass the antibodies to their newborns in the colostrum, to provide protection for diseases like Tetanus, Pulpy Kidney, Black Leg and Leptospirosis. A vaccine for Rotavirus infections, causing severe and debilitating diarrhoea in newborn calves is also available. Talk to your vet about which vaccine to use for your stock.
- Monitor for **metabolic disorders** like sleepy sickness, milk fever and grass staggers before, during and after birth. For more information please see the July 2011 newsletter on our website www.lhvc.co.nz/animalwofs.html or talk to your vet. 
- Check **body condition scores** of your stock and ensure animals are neither overweight or underweight prior to birthing, as this will help reduce risks of metabolic diseases, birthing problems and prolapses. For body condition scores please see our newsletter from May 2011.
- Provide waterproof and warm **shelters** for winter, especially for goats and pigs.
- Keep an eye out for **footrot** if the weather is quite wet and provide dry out-of-the-mud areas. Ensure your goat and sheep feet are trimmed and checked regularly.
- Monitor your breeding stock for **impending birth** – the udder should be bagged up, the vulva will get floppy, and a dam will often separate herself from the mob, become restless and start straining, with her back arched and tail in the air.

Here's a quick reminder on when to call the vet:

- Stage 1 labour is lasting longer than 4-6 hours
- The amniotic sac (or water bag) has been out of the vulva for 60 min or longer without a baby following
- You notice an abnormal presentation, like 2 feet presenting without a head, or a head without feet
- There is no progress of a visible baby in more than 15 minutes
- The uterus has been pushed out after the newborn, this is called a uterine prolapse and needs to be treated immediately by a vet
- If you have any concerns or are unsure if birth is progressing normally
- If the dam is unable to rise following a prolonged birth or large newborn



Bearings and Uterine Prolapses – a common springtime emergency

With calving and lambing upon us once again, the vets at LHVC are getting ready for spring and birthing related emergencies.

There are three farm animal emergencies, that our large animal vets attend:

1. Dystocias or birthing problems – newborns are stuck and need urgent assistance
2. Metabolic problems, like milk fever, grass staggers and sleepy sickness – these can be life or death situations and require urgent treatment
3. Bearings and uterine prolapses – these are also emergency situations that require prompt attention.

So, what's a bearing??

A bearing is another name for a vaginal prolapse. These can occur in ewes and less commonly cows and heifers, usually from a few days to weeks prior to giving birth.

An increased pressure in the abdomen, often from a large uterus holding twins or triplets, or large singletons, together with a full stomach, a full bladder and often overfat conditioning of the animal, causes the vagina to be inverted and pushed out through the vulva.

The bearing then appears as a round fleshy lump, about the size of a small melon, protruding from the back end of the ewe.



Once the bearing is pushed out, the pressure of the vulva around the prolapse reduces the blood supply to the vagina and occludes the urethra (the connection between the bladder and the outside world) so affected ewes are often unable to urinate.

Also, if the ewe has already gone into labour, a bearing will stop any further dilation of the cervix and lambs will not be able to be born.

And what's a uterine prolapse??

Unlike bearings, where the vagina prolapses but the uterus stays in place (as it still has unborn babies inside), a uterine prolapse occurs immediately after the birth when the cervix is still open and the uterus is very floppy, so often the whole uterus will be inverted and pushed out through the vulva.

This occurs rarely in sheep but is occasionally seen in



cows or heifers.

Uterine prolapses are often related to milk fever during the birth, as low calcium levels cause the uterus to be extra-floppy and not contract properly immediately after the birth, so that any continuing straining can cause the whole uterus to prolapse.

Uterine prolapses are much bigger than vaginal prolapses, and will have large visible nobbles on it. These nobbles are part of the placenta.



With the uterus inverted like this, the blood vessels going to and from the uterus are very stretched and sometimes occluded, so blood supply to the uterus can be interrupted. Ultimately this can lead to the whole uterus dying off.

The blood vessels can also rupture, especially if the animal is up and walking or running around, which can cause internal bleeding and death within minutes.

The sooner the veterinarian replaces the uterus back inside the body, the better the chances of cow survival.

What do I do when I see a bearing or uterine prolapse in my farm animal?



- Call the vet asap. The faster the vet gets to the prolapse, the easier they are to replace, and the more successful it will be.
- If the animal is up on it's feet, keep her quiet and ideally confine her to yards to reduce movement. At all costs avoid making her run, as the uterus swinging from side to side can damage the blood vessels and cause sudden death by bleeding internally. This is not quite so dangerous with a bearing.
- Get a bucket of warm water for the vet, to wash the prolapse prior to replacing.

How does the vet deal with bearings and prolapses?

Replacing bearings and especially uterine prolapses, can be a challenging job, because often the prolapsed tissue is very swollen making it harder to fit back through the vulva.

With uterine prolapses the dam can often be very unwell also and require injections like calcium and magnesium, and sometimes sedation to calm her down enough to be handled.

The vet will give an epidural local anaesthetic to numb the uterus and reduce straining and discomfort, then clean and wash the prolapse and gently start massaging and kneading it back into place.

The swollen uterine or vaginal tissue can often be very thin and fragile, and great care

needs to be taken to avoid any tears.

Once successfully replaced, the dam will receive injections of anti-inflammatories, pain relief, and antibiotics.

With a bearing, the vet will often place a stitch in the vulva after replacing the prolapse, or use a plastic bearing retainer, to reduce the risk of it prolapsing again.

It is very important to monitor animals with replaced bearings for the onset of lambing, as the stitch or bearing retainer will need to be removed at the first signs of labour, so the babies can be born. Often this will be a bubble appearing at the vulva, lots of fluid leaking out and the animal being very restless and straining.

In some advanced cases, euthanasia may need to be considered, especially if the uterus or vaginal tissue has started to die off already.

Also, animals with bearings are more likely to get a bearing again in the following season.



How can I prevent bearings and prolapses in my stock?

- Ensure animals especially sheep are not overly fat in late pregnancy. Heavily pregnant ewes require a steady but not excessive intake of good pasture or supplements to reduce the risk of sleepy sickness, but should not be allowed to get too chubby.
- Keep animals in flat paddocks rather than hilly ones the closer they get to birthing. This reduces the risk of sitting bum downhill and gravity also pulling on the uterus.
- Check animals daily for signs of bearings or uterine prolapse and call the vet asap if you see a bearing or prolapse, as the earlier it's treated, the better the chances of success.

Please don't hesitate to call the clinic on 368 2891, if you require assistance with a bearing or prolapse, or if you would like more advice.



Looking forward to see you at the clinic or at your place,

Step of the team
@ LHVC.

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