



# Warby St Vet Hospital News

## and Wangaratta Equine Hospital

**There have been some definite cold, crisp nights and snow on the hills in the last few weeks signalling that winter is well and truly on its way.**

**Winter Edition 2011**



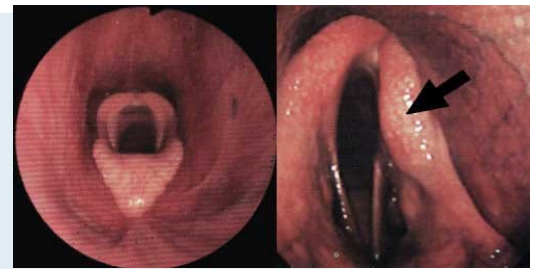
## Equine Endoscopy and Arthroscopy

An endoscope is a lighted optical instrument that can be inserted into the body to provide an internal view. In horses endoscopes are commonly inserted to the nose to visualise the respiratory tract, and to the joints to visualise the bones and cartilage. The Wangaratta Equine Hospital (WEH) is equipped with multiple endoscopes to serve both these functions both in the field and in the hospital. As well as the endoscopes there is the capacity in the hospital to connect the equipment up to a video monitor. This makes it easier on the eyes of the operator and also provides a valuable educational tool as vets and students can directly observe what the operator is seeing.

For many years vets at the Warby St Veterinary Hospital and now the WEH had been using endoscopes on farms and at the racetrack to observe the nasal cavity, pharynx, larynx and tracheas of their patients. These endoscopes had an eyepiece on the end that allowed the vet to observe the image from inside the horse's respiratory tract. Although perfectly functional it was not easy to show the owner or trainer the problem and the vet's head and eye had to follow the whims of the horse as it threw its head around. This equipment and technique is still important to examine horses after work at the racetrack, but it is nice to have the video endoscopy setup as well to allow horses to be examined more easily in the hospital environment. Endoscopy of the nasal cavity and respiratory tract allows the diagnosis of a variety of illnesses and problems such as ethmoid hematomas, laryngeal hemiplegia ("roarers"), lymphoid hyperplasia of the pharynx, and the technique of bronchioalveolar lavage (BAL) and culture to diagnose inflammatory or infectious processes in the lungs.

The other service that we are now able to offer is arthroscopy. This technique uses rigid endoscopes that are inserted into the joints of a horse. Without a dedicated hospital and aseptic operating theatre this diagnostic and surgical tool is impossible. The joints of a horse are very susceptible to infection and to insert these types of equipment into the joints in a paddock or barn would be unthinkable. In the hospital horses can be safely anaesthetised and their legs prepared aseptically for the procedure. The climate controlled operating theatre ensures that the risk of infection is very low. For these arthroscopic procedures we call on the services of specialist equine surgeon Dr Alastair MacLean who has extensive experience in the field. The goal of these procedures is to visualise the cartilage surfaces of the joints (usually the carpus) and in many cases to use instruments inserted into the joints to remove bone chips and arthritic areas. The analogy of a stone in your shoe is quite apt in describing how a bone chip in the knee affects the performance of elite horses.

Due to the size of the horse there are other uses for endoscopes as well. One further technique that can be employed is endoscopy of the urinary tract looking for bladder stones. In a dog or cat these would be observed on x-rays, but the thickness of the horse makes x-raying the bladder more difficult.



Endoscopic view of an equine larynx. The picture on the right shows laryngeal hemiplegia (arrow) in a "roarer".



Endoscopic view of a large bladder stone in a horse's bladder



Arthroscopic view of a bone chip in a horse joint

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## “Ratsak” Poisoning

As many of you are well aware there has been an inundation in the North East of rats and mice throughout the Autumn. As is often the case when this occurs the sales of rat and mouse poisons have skyrocketed and for us the number of poisonings in dogs and cats have risen accordingly. There is a place for these rat and mouse poisons in controlling rodent plagues, but pet owners must understand that the poison is not selective and will affect a dog or cat in the exact same way as it affects a rat or mouse.

These poisons are anti-coagulants, which basically stop the blood from clotting. Everyday the blood vessels in mammals spring small leaks which are quickly plugged by the clotting system. In an animal that has ingested a rat poison the blood can no longer clot effectively and these leaks multiply and remain open allowing large volumes of blood to be lost.

The clinical signs of rat bait poisoning are associated with blood loss. The gums will be pale and the reduced circulation means the animal will be sluggish and weak. More specific clinical signs develop depending on where the blood has been lost to. Bleeding to the abdomen can present as bloating. Bleeding to the urinary tract sees red urine, where bleeding to the intestines may present as red blood in the feces, a dark, black and tarry feces, or bloody vomit. Bleeding to the lungs may lead to laboured breathing and coughing, with the animal even coughing up blood. The dog or cat may also bleed subcutaneously, which will present as large hematomas or bruises under the skin. Even if you have not been using rat baits on your property it is possible that neighbours may be and we never know where our dogs and cats get to when we're not watching!

As with most things, prevention is better than cure so if you are using rat poisons do everything possible to place them in a location where your pets cannot get at them. Also bear in mind that poisoning can also occur from your pet eating a rat or mouse that has died from the poison. Make sure you dispose of any dead rodents that are found in a way your pets cannot reaccess them. It is also a good idea to check your pet's gum colour each day. If you feel that they are looking pale it would be advised to have them checked by a vet. Finally, keep a track of where you left the baits and when the rodent problem subsides collect them up and dispose of them. Bear in mind the other alternatives as well such as mouse/rat traps and getting yourself a good cat!

The diagnosis of rat bait poisoning is relatively straight forward. The clinical signs, history and some simple blood tests generally yield a rapid diagnosis. If you have seen your pet ingest the poison it is recommended that you have a veterinarian induce vomiting within 30-60 minutes, which will greatly reduce the seriousness of any poisoning. Luckily if a poisoning is confirmed there is an effective antidote (vitamin K) that neutralises the rat bait in the animal's system. Depending on the specific type of rat bait they have ingested your pet will need to take this antidote for 2-6 weeks. If you suspect your pet has ingested the poison it is better to have them checked sooner rather than later. As time progresses and the animal loses more blood the seriousness of the situation dramatically increases. Animals that have lost large volumes of blood may require a blood transfusion and extended hospital stay and in many cases without this will die. Early treatment of a suspected poisoning is simple whereas treatment of a weak, anemic and bleeding patient becomes much more difficult and costly.



## “King Valley Run”

A service provided every **TUESDAY** charging **TRAVEL FEES** from Glenrowan, Greta, Moyhu or Milawa.

## “Beechworth & Myrtleford Valley Run”

A service provided every **THURSDAY** charging **TRAVEL FEES** from Markwood, Everton, Beechworth and Myrtleford



## Paspalum Staggers in Cattle

Over the Autumn we have had many reports of ‘staggers’ in cattle. This is characterised by one or more animals in a herd that are uncoordinated in their gait, or in some cases unable to stand. The cattle may tremor or be easily “spooked” and the staggering gait is often worsened by forced movement. Although there are many different reasons for a cow to develop ‘the staggers’ (eg. Milk Fever, Grass Tetany, Rye Grass Staggers, snake bite), in late Autumn Paspalum staggers has to be high on the list. In rare cases horses and sheep may also be affected by Paspalum staggers.

As the name would suggest the condition is seen in cattle grazing pastures containing Paspalum grass. It is not actually the grass itself, but a fungus that grows on the seed head that is poisonous. The particular fungus in this case is *Claviceps paspali*, which can be identified by a sticky substance on the seed head, sometimes called ‘honeydew’. This fungus can inhabit the usual paspalum grass species (*Paspalum dilatatum*) but may also be present on other grasses like water couch (*Paspalum distichum*) that becomes abundant around watercourses and low lying areas after flooding. The fungal spores develop within the seed head into an ergot that produces toxins called tremorgens. When ingested these tremorgens are the cause of neurological signs in the cattle. The problem of Paspalum staggers occurs following humid and wet conditions over summer, such as the season we have just gone through. These conditions provide the perfect conditions for growth and spread of the fungal spores. Signs of the disease usually develop in Autumn as cattle graze and eat the Paspalum seed heads. The disease is at its worst when the fungus is passing from the sticky ‘honeydew’ stage to the hard black stage.

The clinical signs all relate to dysfunction in the nervous system. They may include hypersensitivity to noise or touch, muscle tremor with exercise or even at rest at the disease worsens, involuntary leg or head movements and severe ataxia (inco-ordination when walking). Affected animals may fall and paddle and attempts to rise are unsuccessful. Generally a period of rest sees things settle down and the cow regains its feet. Appetite is not affected, but some deaths can occur due to accidents like drowning. It is possible for only one animal in a herd to be affected, but usually there will be multiple animals affected.

There is no treatment for the problem other than slowly and gently moving cattle off the affected pasture. You may use the pasture if only intermittent periods of grazing are allowed (obviously labour intensive with frequent cattle movements required) or once the seed heads are cut and raked.



Paspalum Grass



Water Couch Grass



A down cow, showing uncontrolled leg jerks due to staggers.

# Some Veterinary Anecdotes and Jokes

Some real life questions presented to the consumer advise hotline of a major pet food company!

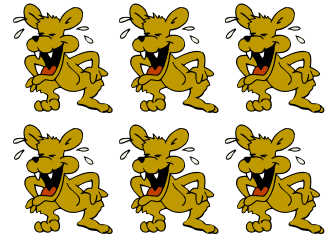


1. My cat just came in from the garage and I was wondering...how many calories are in a mouse?
2. I have a desexed male cat. How old should he be before I can breed him?
3. What should I feed a borderline collie?
4. What size litter box do I need to keep my cat comfy?
5. Is it normal for a dog to shed?
6. How can I keep my cat from stealing my husband's toothbrush?
7. My cat passed a stool on the indoor rug and it's stuck in the vacuum cleaner. Any suggestions?
8. Will chewing aluminium cans remove enamel from my puppy's teeth?
9. Where can I get a six-toed cat?"

One day at the veterinarian's office where I take my cat, a man and the receptionist were verbally sparring.

After a few moments a nurse came to her co-worker's defence.

"Sir...Do you know what happens to aggressive males in this office??"



Sign in a veterinarian's waiting room,

"Be back in 5 minutes. Sit! Stay!"

Bert took his Saint Bernard to the vet. "Doctor," he said sadly, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to cut off my dog's tail."

The vet stepped back, "Bert, why should I do such a terrible thing?"

"Because my mother-in-law's arriving tomorrow, and I don't want anything to make her think she's welcome."

Dr. Cutter is the local Veterinarian in Lorne, known for his wry humor. He surpassed himself one summer day when a city dog was brought to him after an encounter with an echidna.

After almost an hour of prying, pulling, cutting and stitching, he returned the dog to its owner, who asked what she owed.

"1000 dollars, Ma'am," he answered.

"Why that's simply outrageous!" she stormed. "That's what's wrong with you Lorne business people, you're always trying to over charge summer visitors. Whatever do you do in the winter, when we're not being ripped off here?"

## NEWSLETTERS ONLINE

If you would like to receive our newsletters in your email please fill out this slip and return it to us at the hospital. Alternately you may email me at [tim@warbyvet.com.au](mailto:tim@warbyvet.com.au) and I will add you to the mailing list.

Name: .....

Email address: .....