

VET DIARY



OUR EXPERT

Nicola Thompson is a qualified vet who works for Wright & Moreton in Cheshire, a member practice of XL Equine. She has a special interest in anaesthesia and internal medicine.

Seeing a problem

Our regular vet writer Nicola Thompson talks about common conditions affecting the equine eye

I have had a busy time since writing the last column – I've worked on several interesting cases and had a fun holiday skiing in the Alps.

I'm very much a novice skier so there are a few bruises to show for it but I had a great time. I went with friends – mostly vets I was at university with – and it was nice to chat about our lives since graduating.

We have had a steep learning curve but are all still enjoying the challenge.

Corneal ulcers

At Wright & Moreton, where I work, we have seen several horses suffering from eye problems.

It is often difficult for an owner to assess the eye if something seems amiss – this is because head movement can prevent you getting a good look and horses often won't open their eyelids.

The most common signs owners notice are swollen or closed eyes. There are a number of possible causes, and many are severe and painful so it's always best to call your vet to check things out.

The two most common eye problems are corneal ulcers and uveitis.

Corneal ulcers are where the outer surface of the eye becomes damaged.

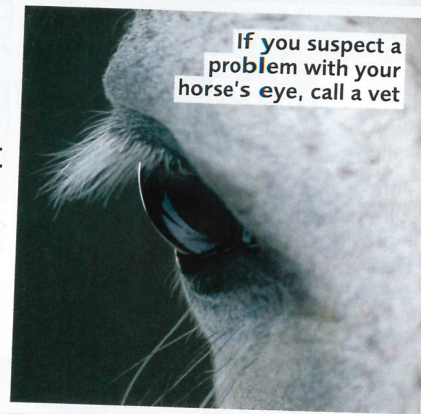


A special dye helps identify corneal ulcers

This may be caused by trauma and some viruses, and the situation can be made worse by bacterial infections.

As these ulcers are so painful, horses will often refuse to open their eye and need to be sedated for an examination to take place. Anaesthetic may be used to numb the upper eyelid and prevent movement.

We use an orange dye which sticks to the surface of the eye where the ulcer is and



painful, and stop responding to treatment – in this case, the only option open to us may be to remove the eye entirely.

“Horses usually do well with just one eye and can continue a normal life”

becomes fluorescent green. This helps us monitor the size of the ulcer and then identify if treatment is working.

Ulcers, if caught early and without complications, can heal quickly but they require quick action and intensive treatment.

Treating uveitis

The second common eye disease we see is uveitis, which is inflammation of the internal structures of the eye.

One warning sign is that the pupil is smaller in the affected eye than in the other eye.

There is lots of research ongoing into the causes and treatment of uveitis but while several trigger factors have been identified, often the cause of an individual attack isn't known.

We treat horses with drops to open their pupils and also with anti-inflammatory drops. These need to be given several times daily and treatment can last for several weeks.

Once a horse has suffered uveitis, he is likely to get it again.

In some cases, a horse goes on to suffer several episodes. The eye can become very

Horses usually do well with one eye and can continue a normal life.

Administering drops

Getting drops into an eye can be tricky – to counteract this problem, we have a special delivery system.

We place a tube into the eyelid of the horse so medications can be administered from a distance. The tube runs along the neck and is usually taped into the mane.

Swollen eyes are not always due to ulcers or uveitis, and may be down to other conditions such as trauma and allergic reactions.

Whether the eye has been affected by a medical condition, or has suffered an injury, call your vet out immediately.

Without fast diagnosis and treatment many conditions can get worse very quickly. ■

Next issue: Are you worried about sarcoids or a suspicious lump or bump? Check out Nicola's next column, where she will offer some sound advice.