

# 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 ridden since she was a child.

## Emergency rescue

Our vet columnist Nicola Thompson comes to the aid of a horse that has become stuck in a bog

Part of life as an equine vet is out of hours work. The majority of vets work nights and weekends on a rota basis.

It is a very unpredictable part of the job, and while many calls concern the more usual wounds, colic and lameness, you'll often come across something dramatic.

And things don't get more dramatic than a call I answered one Sunday morning.

I was checking in-patients at our clinic when the phone rang and I was asked to come to the aid of a horse stuck in a bog.

Maggie, who is 28, had walked too close to the stream in her field and was stuck up to her belly in mud.

The first thing I told Maggie's owner to do was call the fire brigade. Then I jumped in my car and rushed to the yard.

### A sticky situation

On arrival, I found Maggie was calm, with a normal heart rate, and she wasn't struggling.

The Delta Watch of Macclesfield Fire Service had already arrived and were controlling the scene, and there was a specialist Animal Rescue Team on the way.

Luckily, there are several specially trained and equipped teams in

the Cheshire area who are on call to rescue animals from bogs, ditches or swimming pools.

When the rescue team arrived and assessed the situation, I was asked to sedate Maggie. Horses have a strong flight response and if she struggled she could do serious damage to herself or those around her.

Her right foreleg was hidden in the mud, and we couldn't dig it out because the mud was so deep.



Maggie's eyes were covered to help keep her calm

We also covered her eyes, to help keep her calm. Luckily, she is well behaved and not prone to panic. Other horses may have needed more sedation or even full anaesthetic.

## "Maggie had walked too close to a stream and was stuck up to her belly in mud"

Instead, the rescue team managed to dig her hindlegs out, which gave us a better chance of pulling her backwards out onto drier land.

A problem with bogs is the suction that is applied when you are trying to pull something out.

Air was blown into the mud to reduce this effect, but the 'pull' proved to be too strong for manpower, even with the specialised straps we placed around Maggie.

### Putting plan B in action

Plan B required the help of a farmer and a tractor with a telescopic arm.

Straps were placed under Maggie and she was lifted straight up and out of the bog, before being pulled backwards to dry land.

Following this method, she was soon on solid ground. Then, Maggie was turned over and got to her feet quickly, though she was still very wobbly.

To allow all of this to happen I had to sedate Maggie heavily – far more than I would use for clipping a horse or any veterinary procedures.

Looking back on that morning I am struck by how efficient and professional the rescue teams were. There was good communication between the members and, above all, an awareness of how horses can react.

Most owners feel they know what to expect from their horses day to day. But in this type of situation they are unpredictable animals and one of the main objectives was to prevent any of the people involved in the rescue getting hurt.

The episode has a happy ending as Maggie was steady on her feet two hours after we started the rescue and walked back to her stable. She had no wounds from her ordeal.

The next day she was a little stiff but no more than usual for a 28-year-old cob with arthritis. Other than being very muddy, she was back to her normal self. ■

**Next issue:** Nicola shares the story of a Shetland pony called Mr Pickles, who needs veterinary attention after being kicked in the head.



The rescue service dug out her hindlegs