

# VET DIARY

## Fight the fever

Our regular columnist Nicola Thompson enjoys some R&R and offers tips on fighting mud fever

It has been a slightly quieter month for me as I've had some holiday time. I even managed to go away for a few days with my family.

We stayed in a lovely cottage in Tideswell, in the Peak District, and it was very relaxing.

I tried my first 'real' Bakewell tart, walked Fern our family dog – an elderly Springer spaniel – and visited Chatsworth House.

We all need a break but it can be hard to stop thinking about my equine patients, even though I know they are in good hands.

After my break I spent two days on a training course in Edinburgh, which covered health topics from colic to foaling.

It was useful and refreshed my knowledge on essential skills for both emergencies and more routine circumstances.

There was also a chance to compare techniques and cases with other equine vets, which always leads to interesting debates!

### Winter woes

Back at work we've been dealing with many cases of mud fever.

The condition is caused when bacteria enters the skin where there is a break in the natural skin barrier. This can be a small scratch or a crack from wet, cold weather or



Nicola's pony, Bella, has suffered from mud fever

even tiny gaps between skin cells which can occur when legs are constantly wet in wintry conditions.

Bella, my 21-year-old former Pony Club pony, has always been prone to mud fever.

Because she has thick feathers, it can be hard to spot the start of the infection.

We have to be vigilant in checking for any troublesome scabs around her heels and pasterns.

**“Always dry legs well after washing them, and don't wash them too frequently”**

### Taking action

There are ways to help prevent infection. Maintaining good skin health is a natural barrier to infection. Frequent washing and poor drying of legs can break down the natural barriers within the skin.

Just think of how cracked your hands can become during winter, if they constantly get wet when you're filling water buckets or lifting soaked haynets.

It's the same for our horses, so always dry legs well after washing them, and don't wash them too frequently.

Barrier creams can help prevent infection reaching the skin. However, once infection is in the skin, don't apply a barrier cream or the bacteria will be sealed in and will multiply.

Once an infection is present, get the affected skin open to the air and start treatment to gently remove scabs.

I use an aqueous cream to help with this but there are lots of options.

Try not to scrub at the scabs as this can cause further skin trauma and is painful. Antibacterial cream can be helpful but simply keeping the legs clean and dry is important.



### OUR EXPERT

Nicola Thompson is a qualified vet who works for Wright & Moreton in Cheshire, a member practice of XL Equine. A keen rider, she has a 16.3hh warmblood, Frazer, on loan.



Enjoying some time off from work

Often, it's necessary to clip the legs so you can get treatment right down to the affected skin. If the sores are very painful, contact your vet as additional treatment will be needed.

Bella has been put on box rest before to help treat her mud fever, as it's the only way to get her legs to dry out.

As a vet I see horses with suddenly swollen legs caused by inflammation and infection.

Often, there is more swelling than you would expect with a touch of mud fever but even a minor attack can trigger cellulitis.

Cellulitis is inflammation of the soft tissues in the leg, which presents as swelling.

It is very painful so the horse will need pain relief, anti-inflammatory medication and antibiotics to get the initial infection under control.

Mud fever is often preventable, and catching it early helps us treat it effectively.

There are other conditions that can be similar in appearance to mud fever. If in doubt, ask your vet for advice. ■

**Next issue:** Catch up with our vet columnist Nicola's latest news, and pick up some handy tips for treating and managing wounds.