



## ANIMAL HEALTH

"Most deer range extensively in the wild and browse as well as graze. However, when farmed on small paddocks and forced to graze intensively without access to browse, deer may acquire heavy parasite burdens. Sound management practices for deer should include:

- Provision of good quality pasture and supplements for adequate nutrition
- Keep stocking rates low and include access to browse
- Use anthelmintics strategically to minimize pasture contamination
- If possible, move treated animals to spelled pasture

Strategic drenches should include a summer drench for all animals, a drench for young deer at weaning (and monthly until 12 months old if the farm has an inherent problem i.e. with lungworm) and a pre-calving treatment for hinds. A monitoring program should be established to determine whether treatments are necessary at other times. Fresh faecal samples collected from representative deer should be tested periodically to monitor faecal egg counts of the group."

*(Paul Presidente, Parasitologist, V.I.A.S. Attwood.)*

The best way to ensure animal health is to make sure they have a nutritionally balanced diet. A lot of farmers overstock their land, making good pastures an absolute necessity as browse is almost impossible to maintain in this situation. Good pastures need a healthy, "balanced" soil. Attaining a "balanced" soil should be a long term goal for all farmers. It will, more than likely, be an expensive and frustrating job as life within the soil is so complex. In theory, in a system of good pasture and grazing management which supplies all the nutritional needs of the deer, proprietary drenches or vaccines should not be needed. Alas, we are only human! Livestock usually succumb to disease or infection through human mismanagement.

Generally speaking, deer are amazingly tough and forgiving. More often than not, by the time they have started losing condition you can bet they have had the problem for a while. The skill, as with any livestock, is to observe the herd regularly and check for behavioural abnormalities. Remember the adage "survival of the fittest"? In the wild, if a member of a herd is sick or weak and it is likely to put the rest of the herd in danger, they will try to exclude the sick animal from the main group. The same thing will happen on the farm. Look for an animal that is away from the mob - remember Fallow, Red and, to a lesser extent, Elk are all herding animals. There may not be a problem. Just in case, observe the animal until you are satisfied that it is still accepted by the mob. The animal may be moving slowly, have a pained gait, hold its head differently, look sleepy or have a rough, lacklustre coat. If possible, bring the mob slowly into the yards and, if you can not make a diagnosis, call your Vet immediately.

The age of an animal is very important when making an assessment of a problem. Left naturally, in low stocking rate conditions, deer will develop a resistance to most parasites and harmful bacteria by the time they are one year old (Fallow, Red) or two year old (Elk). This resistance is developed by mild exposure to a potential problem and allowing their natural defences to build up and control it. If their natural defences are not strong enough, a problem will occur. It is more than likely that our livestock health problems will occur in the first year of life. This is not to say that inadequately fed and stressed mature animals will be O.K. They will most certainly have similar problems which, if neglected, will result in death.

If you see what you regard as a problem, you must act quickly. If the problem is a broken leg or something "structural", your course of action is fairly clear. If you cannot see an obvious problem, you must bring the mob into the yards and isolate the sick animal for a closer inspection. Your initial thoughts will depend on the age of the animal, the time of year, the condition of the pasture and the prevailing weather conditions.

Yersinia is a common cause of illness in young Red, Wapiti and Elk deer. The bacteria generally cause problems for weaners in July and August. Usually the pastures are low, the stocking rates are too high and a sudden bout of cold weather adds extra stress to their system. The affected animals will, more than likely, look in good condition but may be away from the mob and look "lifeless and tired". They respond well to treatment but can die overnight if not treated.

If in doubt - get the Vet. A.S.A.P.

Lungworm is a common parasite in farmed deer. Once again, this is a mid winter problem. Animals with a lung worm infection will lose condition and may cough for no apparent reason. Faecal samples can be taken and an egg count will give you an indication of your next course of action.

Probably less than one half of deer farmers vaccinate their deer with a 5 in 1 vaccine against clostridial diseases. As it is not expensive, it is a good insurance policy for you if you are not sure of your farm's history.

Fuso (*Fusobacterium necrophorum*) has had some disastrous effects on some Fallow herds in Victoria. This bacteria invades the body through cuts or abrasions. It can be a common problem in very intensive farming situations. Those who have witnessed the problem, mainly in young stock, have been trying to have a vaccine reintroduced to Australia but have had no success to date.

Deer, like any other animals, have a long list of possible problems that could kill them. Good management will reduce these possible problems to almost zero. However, if you are ever in doubt of your herd's health, get your Vet out there immediately. The problems mentioned above have the potential to kill if not treated immediately (up to 50% losses have been recorded with extreme cases of Yersinia and Fuso). Your best strategy - prevention is better than cure - feed your young stock plenty of nutritious feed and provide adequate shelter/protection.

## **Hints for Beginners**

When you have an animal slaughtered whether on farm or at an abattoir, check its lungs, kidneys, liver and intestines to check for abnormalities. Take a liver sample to your Vet and have it tested for copper. Copper is extremely important to browsing animals. Deer, especially, have a high requirement for copper.

*Page courtesy of VicDeer*