

## WINTER 2010 COLD, COLICS, CUSHINGS AND MORE COLD!

At last Spring seems to be here after one of the worst winters for many years. Horses have been stuck in their stables for days if not weeks on end and many events and activities cancelled.

Yards have been inaccessible due to a combination of ice and snow, and some visits had to be made on foot with a veterinary back-pack!

Although veterinary work was very quiet during the worst periods of snow, two conditions seem to have predominated.

Colics have been more common than usual. Most colics are caused by changes in management, and this winter has been no exception. Reduced water intake – either because drinkers and troughs are frozen or because horses tend to drink less when the water is very cold, is one of the main causes of impacted colic with or without displacement of the large bowel. Another causal problem is normal food rations with reduced or no exercise. Sadly three horses died as a result of their colics despite the best efforts of the vets at the Bush – a large number for such a small practice as mine. Thankfully many more survived with treatment.



Cushings disease has been positively diagnosed in a number of horses and ponies recently. This condition is caused by dysfunction of the pars intermedia of the pituitary gland in the brain. The resultant hormonal upset causes a variety of clinical signs, of which laminitis is frequently the most serious.

Cushings disease commonly only affects animals over 15 years of age, however this winter has seen two 11 year olds diagnosed with the condition. Testing for Cushings is now simpler and more accurate than in the

past. A single blood sample, taken early in the morning after an overnight fast, is sent to the Liphook Equine Hospital and results are back the following day.



Although Cushings disease cannot be cured, in many cases it can be well controlled with Pergolide and devastating cases of laminitis can be avoided. As you can see from these photos, Cushings disease is not always easy to diagnose from outward appearances. All 3 have laminitis but there the similarity ends. Diamond and Spud are both elderly and have the classic external signs of Cushings with long curly coats, excessive sweating, bulging fat pads above the

eyes and dipped backs, but Baloo has none of these signs and is only 11 years old. All 3 tested positive for Cushings and are responding to Pergolide treatment.

The take home message should be - if your horse has suffered from unexplained bouts of laminitis, especially during the winter, test for Cushings even if the other classic signs are absent. Treating the laminitis alone is never going to succeed if the underlying cause is not identified and treated.

