

UPDATE ON STAG DEATHS.

I. WALKER

At the 1988 conference of the Deer Branch, a case study of post velvetting stag deaths was presented. (Walker & Middelberg) The aim of this brief contribution is to update that report based on clinical observations during the 1988 velvetting season.

In the 1987 velvetting season there had been an apparent increase in the number of stags dying after velvetting. The extension of that experience was to determine what velvetting procedures we should change for the 1988 season.

In our practice we reviewed current velvetting procedures and also the farm management strategies employed on the properties involved.

These included:

1. Pre-velvetting treatment
 - pasture conditions,
 - levels & types of supplementary feeding,
 - farm fertilizer history,
 - climatic conditions,
 - yard conditions,
 - pre-anaesthetic starvation,
 - stress.

- ii. Velvetting treatment
 - drugs used and dose rates,
 - procedures during velvetting,
 - additional medication needed if any.

- iii. Post velvetting care
 - degree of sedation of stags as they returned to their paddocks,
 - potential haemorrhage after tourniquet removal,
 - degree of supervision of stags,
 - sub clinical effects if any.

The outcome was that we could not justify any significant changes to our present system based on any further information or experiences we had.

However, we did elect to try the use of antihistamines at the time of recervyl administration, based on our previous assumption of a delayed hypersensitivity reaction. We also used the same anaesthetic techniques and drugs, although the propriety brands for xylazine, xylocaine and yohimbine has varied.

UPDATE OF 1988 SURVEY DATA.

	1987	1988
Estimate of total number of stags velvetted -	17,256	15,000
Total number of deaths recorded -	30	2
Death rate/1000 stags velvetted -	1.74	0.13
Number of practices surveyed -	11	2

We recorded one death of a stag after velvetting in our practice this season (1988), and this stag presented a similar history and histological findings to the deaths recorded in the previous season. The one stag that died had been given an antihistamine at the time of recervyl administration, so this additional medication appears to be of limited value.

Deaths of stags from other practices not included in this survey have also been noted from the last season. However, there is no specific information given of these stags.

We also acknowledge the fact that there are other reasons why stags may die after anaesthesia including stress, haemorrhage, misadventure, bloat and injuries from fighting in the yards, but believe that these are more readily definable.

There was one stag reported that had an apparent slow recovery after velvetting, and took 36-48 hours before he was regarded as being fully recovered from the anaesthetic. Clinical signs included:

- i. Reduced appetite,
- ii. Spending longer than normal in sternal recumbancy,
- iii. Head lowered when standing and not disturbed,
- iv. Generally depressed.

This stag was kept under close observation to ensure the stag did not go down. He was treated also with Finadyne, antibiotics and adrenaline, and recovered uneventfully.

The cause of the significant decrease in death rate of stags after velvetting this season remains speculative. However, there certainly appears to be in my opinion, some subtle differences between the proprietary brands of xylazine which may be of significant in influencing the results of the velvetting procedure.