



Letters & Notices

DANGEROUS DOGS

XL bully neutering deadline approaching

AS colleagues will be aware, the American XL bully breed type has been added to the list of banned breeds under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. This means that it is now a criminal offence to own or possess an XL bully dog in England and Wales without a valid certification of exemption. An important condition of the exemption is that owners must have their dog permanently neutered by set deadlines. This is primarily a population control measure to reduce the population of XL bully dogs over time.

The first neutering deadline is now approaching. This relates to all XL bully dogs that were aged 12 months or older on 31 January 2024. These dogs must be neutered by 30 June 2024. If these dogs are not neutered by this date, the certificate of exemption will no longer be valid, the dog could be seized by the police and the owner could be prosecuted.

Defra is encouraging owners to book an appointment with their vet as soon as possible to avoid the risk of not getting an appointment before the deadline. We are actively reaching out to owners through various communication pathways and we would be grateful if colleagues could also reach out to clients that own XL bullies with the clear message to get their dog neutered by 30 June 2024 if appropriate for their age.

We are working closely with veterinary professional organisations to monitor capacity but are concerned that some owners may delay the neutering of their dogs to the last weeks of June. Therefore, we would be grateful if veterinary practices could consider increasing neutering availability to help respond to any increase in demand during this period.

Once the neutering procedure has been carried out, the owner and vet must complete the veterinary confirmation of neutering form (VCN01) and should send this to Defra

as soon as possible. Defra will contact the dog owner if there are any issues verifying the information on the VCN01 form.

For the certificate of exemption to remain valid, the dog must have been neutered on or before 30 June 2024 and Defra must have received a correct, completed form by 26 July 2024 at the latest.

I wish to thank veterinary colleagues for their collaboration and professional advice to dog owners through this period.

Guidance to vets on neutering can be found at <https://bit.ly/4bPxIkC>

All other guidance on XL bully dogs can be found at <https://bit.ly/48bM1NK>

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OVINE WELFARE

Correct application crucial for safety of ClipFitter device

THE welfare issues around the tail docking and castration of lambs are a continuing concern for farm vets and many farmers.

With outdoor lambing systems in particular, the use of rubber rings without local anaesthetic within the first seven days of life can present certain challenges, including the increased chance of mistothering because of the pain response displayed by lambs. Farmers are therefore exploring alternative methods to carry out these procedures.

ClipFitter (Eadie Bros and Co) is a recently developed system that applies a crushing clip across the whole scrotum or tail. Crushing of the nerves (akin to the effect of a Burdizzo device) by the clip rapidly desensitises the tissues distal to the clamp. Regulations allow the use of the clips

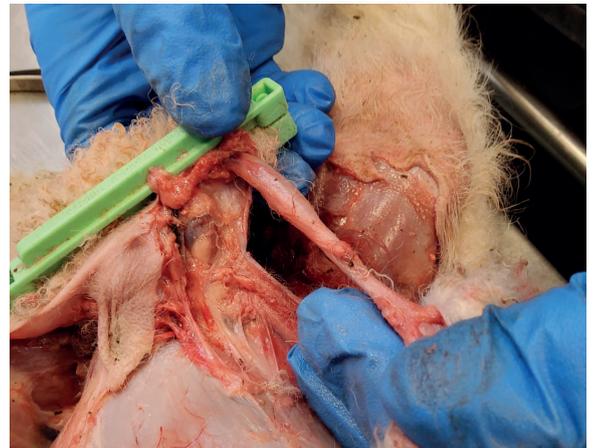


Fig 1: Lambs that died from urinary retention and bladder rupture due to occlusion of the penis caused by clips being placed incorrectly just cranial to the scrotum in an approximately craniocaudal direction

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It is a method with significant potential welfare benefits

in lambs up to three months of age in Scotland (currently up to seven days in the rest of the UK). A recent study¹ showed that the ClipFitter device was able to mitigate pain responses associated with castration in young lambs (<seven days old) to a level indistinguishable from uncastrated lambs. Older lambs (five to six weeks old) castrated with the clips demonstrated more pain responses than uncastrated lambs, but lower than those seen with rubber rings alone. It is therefore a method with significant potential welfare benefits.

This spring, a client with 1100 Romney-type ewes that lambed outside opted to use the ClipFitter system to tail and castrate his lambs. Clips were applied to approximately

600 lambs aged from three to seven days. Within two days, lambs started to die and six were presented to SRUC Veterinary Services St Boswells for postmortem examination.

All of the lambs were male (weight range 6–8 kg) and all had died following occlusion of the penis at a level just cranial to the scrotum by clips that had been applied in an approximately craniocaudal direction (Fig 1). This had led ultimately to urinary retention and bladder rupture in all of the presented lambs. In total 75 lambs either died or were euthanased. The clips had been applied at such an angle with the intention of minimising skin irritation to the medial thigh region of the lambs with the ends of the clips.

The clips are marketed in three sizes, and the mid-range size, intended for lambs 10–15 kg, had been used in this case, although the lambs were smaller than this.

ClipFitter has been used in thousands of lambs with few reports of adverse effects; however, this letter is to alert vets and their clients to the importance of using the correct application technique and size of clip, which will require adequate training of operatives.

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Reference

- 1 Dwyer C, Donbavand J, Weston M, et al. Evaluation of a novel method of lamb castration and tail docking in reducing behavioural pain responses in lambs aged < 1 week or 5–6 weeks. *Animal – Science Proceedings* 2023;14:149–50

ANIMAL WELFARE

Change to RSPCA's scope of service

WE thank *Vet Record* for highlighting challenges in the animal charity sector in the recent feature article, 'At crisis point: the challenges facing the UK's rescue and rehoming sector' (VR,



4/11 May 2024, vol 194, pp 334–338).

The RSPCA, like other animal charities, is feeling the strain more than ever. Every year, we receive around a million calls – including one report of cruelty and neglect every six minutes – and we simply cannot help every animal alone. We need to encourage more people to take action.

Vets are integral to helping create a better world for animals and we couldn't do the vital work we do without your invaluable support, and we thank you for this. As we seek to reach even more victims of cruelty and neglect, we'll be asking the public to help more animals themselves.

People who find small, sick, injured or abandoned animals will be encouraged to take them directly to their local vet, ensuring they get the help they need as quickly as possible. In turn this will help to free up our specialist teams so that they are able to prioritise the animals which need them urgently having suffered cruelty and neglect, and those which have no-one else to help them.

To help the public feel confident helping these animals, we'll be improving our online information and tools, as well as liaising with other groups with a responsibility to help animals, such as the police and local authorities.

We don't expect any of our partner agencies to be significantly impacted, as we'll be asking the public to help with jobs that equate to around 30 incidents a day, spread across the sector throughout England and Wales. In due course, we'll also be providing

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and linking to a variety of resources for vets in practice to help them with wildlife cases, understanding the welfare needs of these animals, how to assess them clinically, and assess whether they could be feasibly rehabilitated and released or require euthanasia. We hope that by better educating the public about how to safely handle animals, and also trying to set more realistic outcomes for injured wildlife (eg, recognising that euthanasia is often the kindest outcome), these cases will be less stressful for the practice team.

If you have any questions, concerns or feedback please contact us at the email address below.

We're incredibly grateful to everyone who is working to create a better world for every animal. Thank you.

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ANIMAL WELFARE

Animal cruelty disguised as entertainment

I WAS dismayed to see yet another animal act in the final of Britain's Got Talent this year. This act was not voted for by the public, but was the unanimous pick of the four judges. They should know better, or need to be educated.

It has long been an accepted and encouraged practice to withhold a proportion of a dog's food intake to be fed in tidbit fashion to aid training, producing 'good canine citizens'. The way the two small dogs that finished the act frantically begged for more tidbits at the end of the act suggests to me that these performing dogs are having 100 per cent of their dietary needs fed in tidbit fashion in return for jumps, spins and other completely abnormal behaviour, in the name of light entertainment.

In my opinion, this is animal abuse and should be called out for what it is – animal cruelty.

Letters are not peer-reviewed, unless stated.