Diary of a poultry intern

William Garton, intern at Minster Vets, has been on an intensive two-week poultry health course where he gained lots of new knowledge as well as a sense of direction and purpose.

I should probably start this month’s entry with the promised update on the role of a poultry vet while on-call, seeing as I’m now several months into my out-of-hours rota. It is perceived that one of the draws to poultry medicine is the minimal out-of-hours work, and while this is partly true, it is by no means non-existent.

Most of my evening and weekend work has been resolved over the telephone, whether this be outlining a dosage rate or discussing signs of notifiable disease. One of the great benefits of working in the poultry industry is the high level of stockmanship I see with the poultry producers – as with all farmers they know their stock, and they know when to ring the vet. However, just as with any livestock, every day is a working day and some of our large-scale producers require veterinary assistance over the weekends throughout the year.

The gamebird work follows a distinct seasonal trend with a continuous flurry of keepers coming into the practice throughout spring and summer with young poults before they are released. Fortunately for me the call-outs so far have been few and far between, but we shall see what the game season brings.

My main focus of this month has been attending the poultry health course. This is an internationally recognised course, aimed at technical staff, veterinary surgeons and managers from the poultry sector of agriculture and food production industries. The course focuses on the nature, diagnosis and control of infectious disease in poultry, with workshops on vaccination techniques, postmortem examination and field investigations. The course was co-organised by the world-leading research centre on viral disease in livestock, the Pirbright Institute, the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science at the University of Nottingham and Minster Veterinary Practice. Fifteen delegates attended the course, mainly from across Europe, but also as far as Saudi Arabia, with various backgrounds including animal welfare officers, technical managers, government vets and, of course, private veterinary surgeons.

The first week at Pirbright brought back memories of university with six hours’ of lectures a day, covering nearly every virus you could think of, as well as all the major bacterial, protozoan and fungal pathogens. It was enlightening to be lectured by global experts in their fields on topics they had dedicated their careers to researching. Lots of the theoretical knowledge that I required to increase my competence as a new graduate poultry vet was gained in this week of densely packed lectures and seminars; I hope my clinical confidence and consulting experience will follow suit.

The second week, based at the University of Nottingham, followed a more interactive theme with seminars and discussions on biosecurity and hatchery practice, field investigations and laboratory diagnoses. Industry experts and veterinarians came from across the UK and spoke via Skype to offer invaluable advice and share knowledge on areas that they have studied and practised for years.

I came away from the course with masses of information and knowledge beyond that delivered at university, but also with a sense of direction and purpose – to achieve and excel through knowledge, research and clinical expertise within the poultry industry as much as my lecturers and mentors of the previous fortnight.

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