

RIVERINA LOCAL
LIVESTOCK UPDATE

August



Local Land
Services

Case study: 'My lambs! They look Orf-al!'

By Georgia Grimmond, District Vet

🔍 Sheep

CASE HISTORY:

A producer called to report that a number of his 2-3 month old Dorper lambs had 'scab-like' lesions developing along their lips, nose, neck and feet after having brought them in for lamb marking. The Dorper dams had been purchased scanned in lamb earlier in the year from a property in the Central-West. The flock had been grazing an irrigated lucerne stand, supplemented with cereal hay and loose licks at a relatively high stocking rate for the last 4 months. Affected lambs were noticeably in poorer condition, though it appeared that no lambs had died. No ewes appeared to be affected.

CLINICAL EXAMINATION:

On flock examination approximately 30% of lambs presented with lesions of varying severity. They ranged from small pinpoint areas of inflammation, to raised blisters and crusted scabs. Lesions were proliferating around the lips, nose, oral cavity and lower legs of lambs. One ewe was observed to have lesions developing on her udder. Despite the lesions and reduced BCS, affected lambs were otherwise healthy. Bloods and skin samples were taken from five clinically affected lambs and submitted to the laboratory for further analysis.

DIAGNOSIS:

Orf virus – Scabby Mouth.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Scabby mouth is a highly contagious viral disease of sheep and goats caused by the Orf virus. It usually affects lambs and kids under 12 months of age however sheep of any age are susceptible to infection if they have not had any previous exposure to the virus. The virus is spread when a ruptured pustule or scab comes into contact with damaged skin. Lesions begin as a pinpoint area of inflammation which develop into pustules and then rupture to form scabs. The most common site of infection are areas of exposed skin such as the lips, nose, eyes, oral cavity, lower legs and udder.

Scabby mouth rarely results in deaths however the economic loss can be serious, depending on the severity and location of the lesions. Oral and foot lesions lead to reduced feed intake and poor weight gains, resulting in higher feed costs and delayed time to sale. Ewes with affected udders often fail to feed their lambs and can develop secondary mastitis.

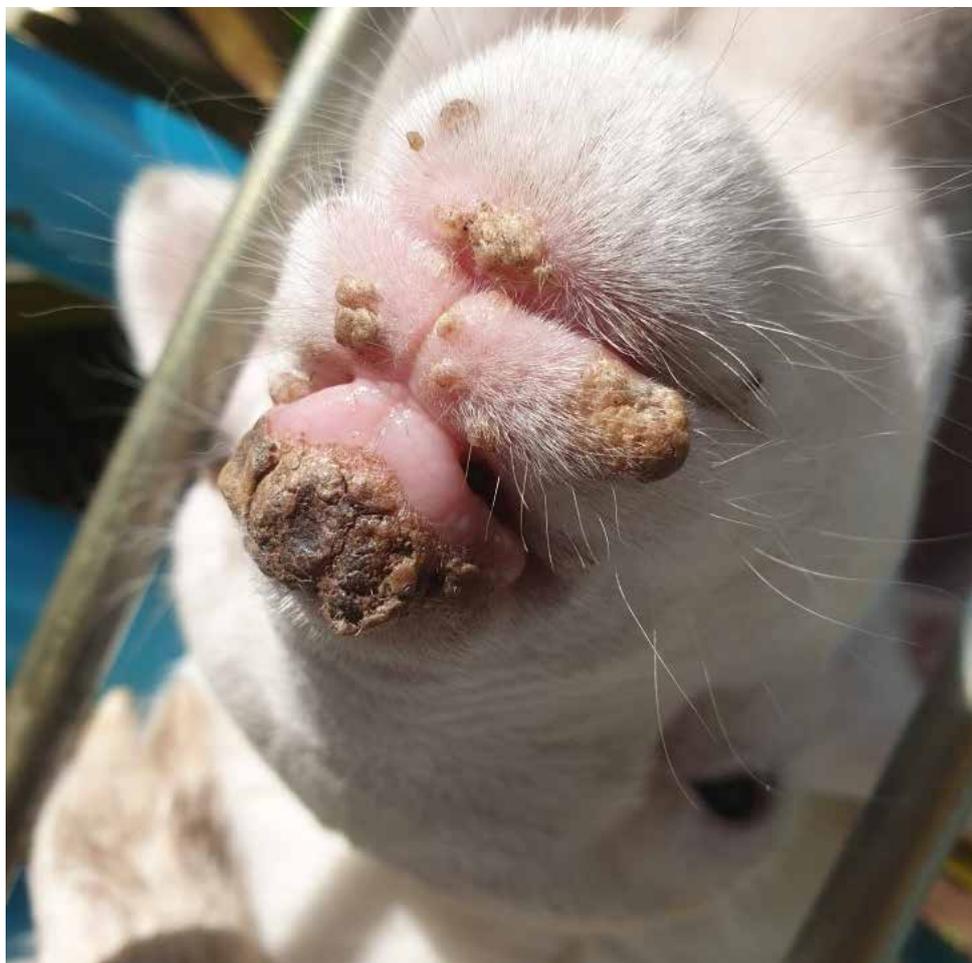
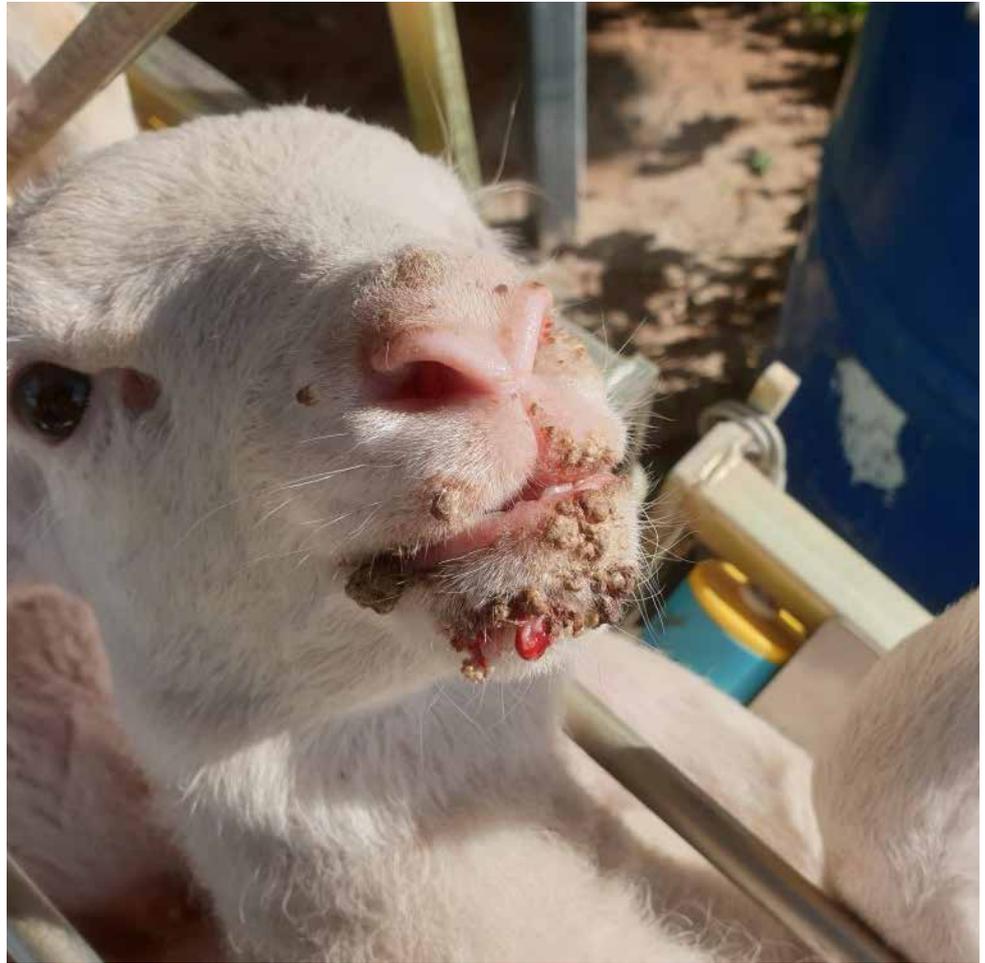


Image 1 & 2 (page over): Lambs with proliferative scabs on their nose and lips caused by the Orf virus.

This is just one of the many reports of scabby mouth in the region on properties with no previous history of the disease. Infected stock purchased from areas where the disease is endemic was the most likely introduction of disease. The recent wet conditions – which softens the skin making it more susceptible to damage - combined with exposure to abrasive feedstuff (e.g. coarse hay, lucerne stands, shrubs) helped to facilitate the spread of the virus in cases seen. Once the disease is introduced to a property, the virus can survive in scabs in the right environmental conditions for years. Whilst infections may not arise every year, they will often present in conditions with high levels of challenge (e.g. feedlots, rough feedstuff).

Several diseases that are exotic to Australia and notifiable can present similarly to scabby mouth – such as Bluetongue and Foot-and-mouth disease – therefore it is important to consult with your veterinarian if these symptoms arise in your flocks. This disease is also ZOO NOTIC – meaning the virus can be passed onto humans.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT?

There is no treatment specific for the Orf virus. The disease is self-limiting, with affected animals self-curing within 4-6 weeks. In severe cases, antibiotic treatment of secondary bacterial infection and flystrike prevention may be warranted.

There is a vaccine available (Scabigard®) which contains live Orf virus. A special pronged applicator is required to 'scratch' a bare area of skin in order to inoculate the animal with the virus. This is generally performed at lamb marking. As this is a live vaccine capable of causing the disease, it should only be used on properties which have a repeated problem of scabby mouth.

Care should be taken when handling either infected animals or the vaccine. Lesions in humans are usually solitary lesions which heal spontaneously in 6-7 weeks however more severe reactions have been reported. For more information on the zoonotic potential of the Orf virus consult your local doctor.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/179835/sheep-health-scabby-mouth.pdf

Case study: Mary had an itchy ram

By Rhys Powell, District Vet

🔍 Sheep

CASE HISTORY:

A producer called to investigate a mob of 15 1 year old Merino rams that were scratching constantly and pulling for at least 2 weeks. These were homebred rams, grazing improved pastures with supplemental cereal hay and mineral blocks. They were up to date with vaccination and drenching (Cydectin® Eweguard SE B12 6 in 1). This young ram mob was the only one affected on the property.

CLINICAL EXAMINATION:

On arrival at the sheep yards, there was evidence of pulled wool along the fence lines and low hanging branches. Two rams were observed to be scratching on a fencepost.

The rams were in excellent body condition (4/5) with 5 months wool. On parting the wool no lice were seen, however across the shoulders 12 of the 15 rams had a yellow pigment and inflamed skin and some crusts and clumps of wool were observed. The severity varied from mild to moderate.

DIAGNOSIS

In this case, Dermatophilosis (Dermo or lumpy wool) was diagnosed. This is a dermatitis caused by *Dermatophilus congolensis* bacteria. Fleece rot, sheep lice, itchmite, grass seeds and photosensitivity are other conditions which can cause sheep to rub.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The major issue with lumpy wool is the increased risk of fly strike - it is likely in this case that the recent cooler weather minimised the risk. However, in spring and summer it may be devastating. Additionally, lumpy wool can cause tender wool or a unscourable colour that can reduce the price of the clip.

Lumpy wool occurs when bacteria invade the skin and the wool follicles, causing intense irritation leading to rubbing and pulled wool. It also causes a discharge that causes the crusting and clumping of the wool, hence the name. After the crust lifts from the skin, healing can occur. However, if the wool and skin remain wet the skin can be reinfected, and the cycle continues. Older animals can act as carriers, with subsequent wetting facilitating growth of the bacteria, causing disease.



Image 1 Photo similar to the lesions presented (Flock and Herd)

Younger sheep are more susceptible due to a thinner wax layer on the skin and a more open staple structure compared to adults. As young sheep are more susceptible, treatment with antibiotics can be of benefit in some cases. As older sheep are more resistant, they may recover spontaneously and are unlikely to need antibiotics. Sheep should be treated at least 6 weeks before shearing.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT?

Control of lumpy wool is centred around limiting contact between wet animals such as yarding or shearing. It is also advisable to shear or dip younger stock before older and affected stock to limit the spread of the disease. Setting shearing time to ensure that sheep are not in long wool during wet weather can also assist in control. However, there are many factors to consider when setting shearing time (contractor availability, lambing time etc). With the continued wet weather predicted producers should be mindful for the development of lumpy wool and subsequent increased risk of fly strike.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

NSW DPI: Lumpy Wool- a skin disease of sheep

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/sheep/health/other/lumpy-wool>

Liceboss: Rubbing tool. Decisions support tool for rubbing sheep, not specific for lice

<http://www.liceboss.com.au/sheep-goats/tools/rubbing.php>

Announcements and additional warnings

RICKETS AND CALCIUM DEFICIENCY IN LAMBS ON CEREAL CROPS – BY EMILY STEARMAN, DISTRICT VET

With a more traditionally wet winter this year, Riverina producers should be on alert for signs of rickets (soft skeletal bones) in lambs in late winter and early spring. Where sheep are lambing onto, grazing during lactation or lambs are weaned onto cereal crops dietary calcium is deficient. Many overcast days, along with the naturally short-day length of winter, combined with possible anti-vitamin D factor in green growing cereal crops, can lead to a low availability of Vitamin D. Vitamin D is required for the absorption of calcium and lambs have a high requirement for calcium to calcify their growing bones. Low dietary calcium and Vitamin D predispose to the risk of rickets.

Cases of calcium deficiency may precede cases of rickets in lambs grazing cereal crops. Affected lambs are generally either lame or down and unable to rise. They can appear bright and alert. When examined they have elevated temperatures and may have fractured bones in their legs or their ribs. Autopsies have found very soft ribs and facial bones as well as fractures of the ribs. Blood test results show a mixed range of calcium levels (but often low).

Some affected lambs respond well to injections of calcium, while other cases are complicated by rickets as well, resulting from a lack of calcium and possibly vitamin D. These cases may exhibit lameness as a result of bone fractures. If alternative pasture containing legumes, or sun-cured legume hay, can be provided, this will assist in overcoming the problem. Yarding the lambs to treat with injectable vitamin D, while it can be helpful, may result in more clinical cases of hypocalcaemia and increases the risk of bone fractures.

Prevention is better than cure. When grazing cereal crops Stock-grade lime and coarse salt provided as a loose lick is recommended to reduce the incidence of calcium deficiency. The addition of Causmag to this lick will also be beneficial to prevent sub-clinical grass tetany and thus benefit growth rates whilst grazing cereals. This year, it may be beneficial to give preventative vitamin D to lambs at marking and /or weaning. Producers should consider that Vitamin A, D & E products do cause localised tissue inflammation, which will reduce feed intake in days following injection. Reduced appetite further reduces calcium intake and can exacerbate clinical signs. Producers are encouraged to seek advice from their veterinary adviser if they observe similar signs in their lambs due to the complexity of causes and management.

FARMERS' SHEEP HEALTH AND MANAGEMENT IN NSW SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey is part of a research project being conducted at The University of Sydney to better understand the current management practices and impact of sheep diseases, risk factors contributing to diseases, as well as the financial and animal welfare impact. It is anticipated that information and data collected as part of the study will enable a greater understanding of the common sheep health issues in NSW as well as how to better improve disease management in-order to increase production and welfare on NSW sheep farms.

As part of this study, this questionnaire has been administered to sheep producers within NSW. You can participate in the survey here: <https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=CNPRJ388CMDM3YCD>

CSIRO SEEKING SHEEP PRODUCERS FOR NUMNUTS STUDY

CSIRO Scientists are looking for sheep producers who currently aren't using pain relief at marking, but who are interesting in trialing a new approach on around 60 of their lambs this year. There is no breed requirement however they will need to be either non-mulesed, or mulesed at a later date. CSIRO will provide all the instructions, a sheep vet or technician to be present and an incentive payment of up to \$1000 to cover additional time and materials needed for the trial. Producers will be required to separate lambs into treatment groups and note down some behaviors after marking.

For more information contact either:

Jim Lea: Jim.lea@csiro.au, Ph: 04 07 137 466 or

Dr Alison Small: Alison.small@csiro.au



BLOAT – BY GEORGIA GRIMMOND, DISTRICT VET

With the recent rain and the promise of warmer sunnier weather just around the corner, pasture growth rates are set to escalate. But with lush pastures comes bloat risk!

Bloat occurs when ruminates (more so cattle) consume lush, immature and rapidly growing legumes (e.g. clover, medics, lucerne) or grasses that are high in soluble carbohydrates and protein and low in fibre. This lush green feed is broken down quickly within the rumen, which does one of two things;

1. The natural foaming agents within these plants causes a stable foam to build up within the rumen.
2. The rapid digestion of feeds causes a drop in the rumen pH and a proliferation of gas-producing bacteria.

When foam and gas are mixed together in the rumen, the gas becomes trapped within the foam and cattle are unable to eructate (burp) up the gases. The build-up of gas in the rumen causes it to expand until it can no longer do so. Death occurs due to pressure from the rumen compressing the heart and lungs, causing the animal to suffocate.

Signs of bloat include separation from the mob, inappetence, enlarged left abdomen, staggering, distress and difficulty breathing. Often there will be no clinical signs observed, with stock found dead on their side.

Prevention of bloat can be difficult and often unreliable.

Pasture management should aim to reduce the rapid consumption of the highly digestive component of high-risk pastures. This can be achieved by holding off grazing until the pasture matures or by limiting their access, strip grazing or ensuring hay is supplemented prior to and whilst grazing lush pastures. There are currently three types of preventive bloat control agents available at your local ag store.

- Anti-foaming agents: e.g. bloat oil, tallow
- Detergents: e.g. teric – alcohol ethoxylate, both of which aim to break down foam.
- Rumen modifiers: e.g. monensin, to reduce the population of gas producing rumen bacteria.

These products can be administered to stock in a variety of ways e.g., oral drenches, bloat lick blocks, bloat oil in water supply, additives to feed etc. Provided these products are consumed daily and in adequate amounts, they can be a reliable way of controlling bloat. However, ensuring that every animal receives a protective dose can be difficult, costly and often time consuming.

Pulpy kidney and bloat are often interchangeable – so before grazing your livestock on lush pastures ensure that they are fully vaccinated. Keep in mind that many of the commercial vaccines have a pulpy kidney protection period of only 3-months under high challenge situations, so it might be worth giving them a booster now.

More information on bloat [can be found here](#). If you haven't already, please consider downloading the Bloat Alert App, which will notify you if bloat cases are occurring in your area. If you are having issues with bloat, please consider reporting it on the App.

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/111411/Bloat-in-cattle-and-sheep.pdf



Upcoming events

RIVERINA BEEF CATTLE PRODUCERS BUS TOUR – BY EMILY STEARMAN, DISTRICT VET

Are you a cattle owner who would like to engage more with our Riverina District Veterinarians?

You are invited to join us on the Inaugural Riverina Beef Cattle Producers Bus Tour on Wednesday 8 September 2021.

The bus will leave from Wagga, travelling to three properties between Book Book and Tumblong. We will return late afternoon, re-joining for a meal and some light entertainment at the Mercure Wagga from 6:30PM.

During the day you will have the opportunity to learn more about bull production, growing and managing your heifers, as well as assessing the composition and nutritional value of pasture.

The day will be hosted by three local producers and our Wagga District Veterinarian, Emily Stearman who will be joined by our resident agronomist, Lisa Castleman.

We hope the day provides some thought provoking concepts as well as the opportunity to meet and catchup will fellow beef cattle enthusiasts from your region.

With the current COVID restrictions participants will be required to wear facemasks, adhere to QR rules and sign in sheets as well as hand sanitising.

At this stage the event is open to all producers in Riverina, however due to seating the number of participants will be limited to 42 people. Please register your interest below. We look forward to sharing the day and evening with you!

[Save your spot here.](#)

PODCAST SPOTLIGHT - SEEDS FOR SUCCESS

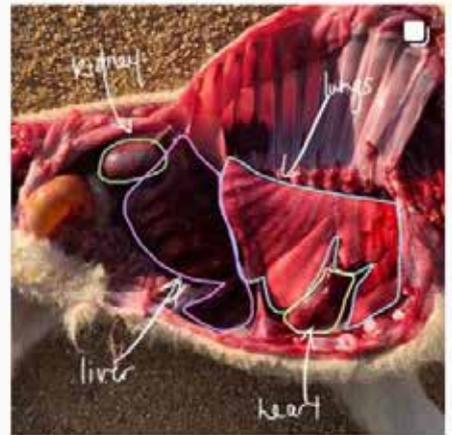
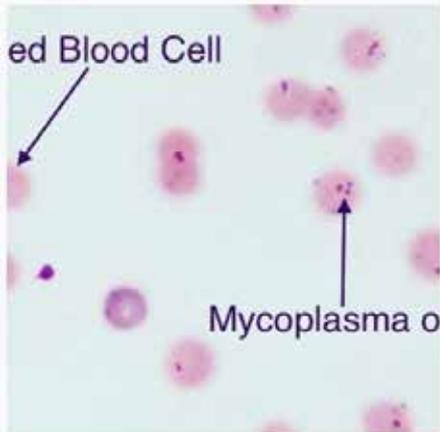
This podcast talks about agricultural life with producers who are having a go. On the show, you'll hear from farmers in NSW who are out there battling the elements, making tough calls and getting the job done.

You'll get a laugh out of some of their stories, and also pick up some know-how along the way. Produced by Central West Local Land Services.

Listen here now: <https://bit.ly/3yHT0gj>



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