



FOCUS ARTICLE

Equine Grass Sickness Surveillance Update: June 2008.

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This spring the Animal Health Trust (AHT) launched the first nationwide surveillance scheme for equine grass sickness (EGS). The aim of the scheme is to record details of prospective and retrospective EGS cases dating back to the year 2000 in order to facilitate the proposed vaccine trial against *Clostridium botulinum*. This is a collaborative project with the Universities of Edinburgh and Liverpool and the Equine Grass Sickness Fund, generously funded by The Horse Trust.



The surveillance scheme consists of two questionnaires for owners to report new cases and provide details of any occurrences since the year 2000. A total of 1300 questionnaires were sent to owners who had previously reported an occurrence of EGS to one of the project collaborators. In addition to this the scheme was widely publicised in the equine press and each equine practice in the United Kingdom (n=846) was contacted requesting their support of the scheme. So far 200 equine practices have responded to this request with 191 (96%) willing to assist with the surveillance scheme and each of these practices was sent a fax-back form to report new cases to the AHT. A new website www.equinegrasssickness.co.uk was developed to allow the reporting of cases by completion of the questionnaire online.

At the beginning of June 2008 the EGS surveillance scheme was aware of 986 cases of equine grass sickness that had occurred since the year 2000 and a total of 1613 separate owners that had ever experienced cases of the disease (Figure 1). For the cases where the location of the horse was known there were: 302 cases (53%) in England, 254 cases (45%) in Scotland and 11 cases (2%) in Wales (Figure 2). Completed questionnaires have yet to be received from the missing cases.

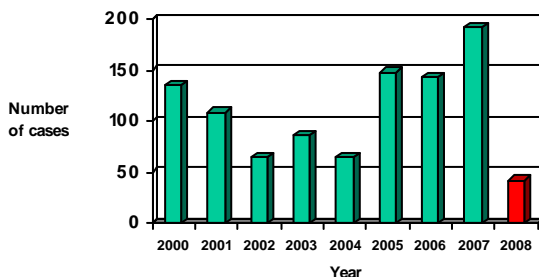


Figure 1: Bar chart showing the number of EGS cases reported from the year 2000 to June 2008 (n=986).

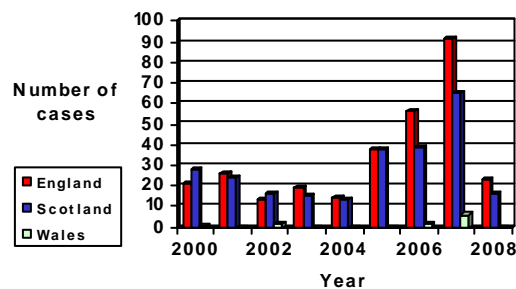


Figure 2: Bar chart showing the country distribution of grass sickness cases from the year 2000 to June 2008 (n=567).



Figure 3 shows the location of owners of any EGS case throughout England, Scotland and Wales (n=1613). Figure 4 shows the location of EGS cases reported via completed questionnaires (n=567). By early June 2008, 42 cases of grass sickness were reported to have occurred in the current year and their location is shown in Figure 5. The areas which reported the majority of EGS cases in the last six months of 2008 were North Yorkshire, England and Aberdeen, Scotland.

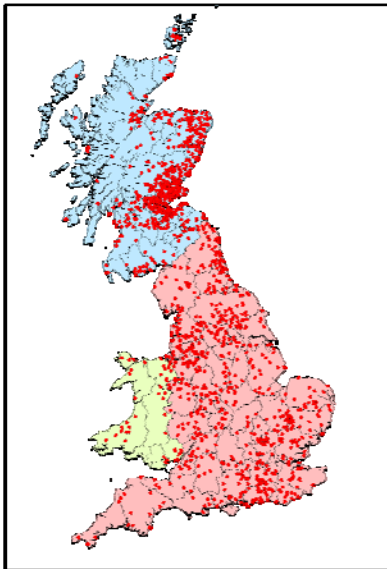


Figure 3: Map showing location of owners of EGS cases on the database (n=1613).

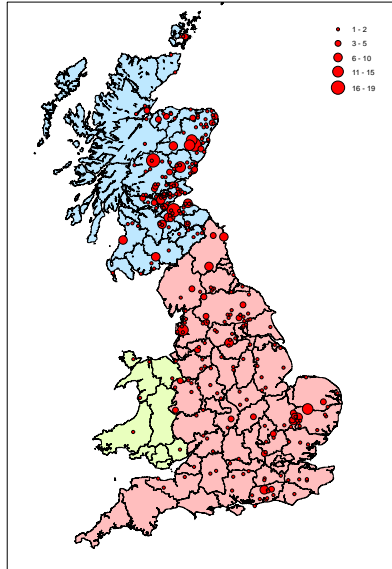


Figure 4: Map showing location of EGS cases reported by questionnaires (n=567).

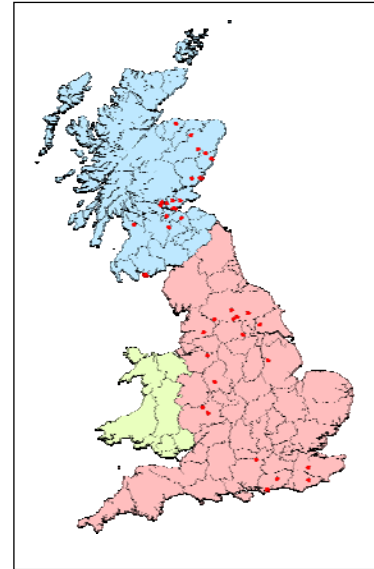


Figure 5: Map showing location of cases reported in the last six months of 2008 (n=42).

As of June 2008 the database consisted of horses, ponies and three cases in donkeys, with 66 different pure breeds represented and Thoroughbreds, Highlands and Cobs appearing most frequently. Both genders were equally represented and there was a range of ages from 2 months to 47 years, with 4 year olds represented most frequently. Since 2000 in each year the majority of cases had been the fatal acute or subacute types, in comparison to chronic cases. Since 2000 most cases of EGS each year had occurred in the spring, with May being the high-risk month consistent with previous reports.

The results from the completed questionnaires received so far need to be interpreted with caution as no reference to the normal equine population is so far possible. With the development of the National Equine Database comparisons can be made in the future.

The nationwide surveillance of equine grass sickness is an ongoing project and to report any occurrence, from 2000 to the present day, or to register your equine practice with the surveillance scheme, please contact Claire Wylie at the Animal Health Trust on 01638 552993 Ext: 1241 or email claire.wylie@aht.org.uk. Further information is available at www.equinegrasssickness.co.uk where both questionnaires can be viewed and completed online.