



The Natural Fibre Company

# News up-date

Autum

2008

## Bluetongue: vaccine the best option - keep it up

The Bluetongue vaccine seems to be keeping the midges at bay. Around 90% of farmers in the south opted to vaccinate, but rather less in the north.

Across the Channel the situation is different. France has had several thousand outbreaks and the number is still rising.

There are anecdotal reports that vaccinations have brought problems for sheep, goats and alpacas. These include premature births and general malaise.

But one large flock of alpacas, where the vaccine was used, reports no greater incidence of problems than usual, and certainly Sue's flock of Gotlands, including this year's lambs and some quite elderly animals, suffered no ill effects.

Two factors that may have contributed to malaise were the later breeding cycle caused by the movement limitations last autumn, and the lack of a summer.

Because of the way the vaccine was rolled out there was no choice on the timing this year. Vaccination in late summer or early autumn looks the best: a bit before tupping, but after the main run of vaccinations and the youngsters are weaned.

Cows suffer less than sheep, but they are a reservoir of infection and huge damage can spread to neighbouring animals. So it's important to keep urging cattle owners to vaccinate.

While the midge season is coming to an end, there are still plenty around and a mild winter could bring them out early and at a time when you would probably prefer not to vaccinate.

On balance, the risk of vaccination does seem worthwhile: it is better to lose a few animals than many or even all. So don't hesitate - vaccinate now!

The DEFRA website is very helpful on Bluetongue and other husbandry matters, including worms and feet. The address is: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/bluetongue/index.htm> .

## Use discount to offset price rise

Last autumn we hoped to hold our prices for a year, but costs increased so dramatically that we were forced to increase them in August.

Volume discounts are still available and regular customers with an annual average spend should discuss this with us.

For those who order oiled hanks, these will in future be delivered in a group of 10 with one hank knotted round the other nine.

In order to help customers spread the pain of payment, and help our cash flow, from 1 January 2009, we may ask for a £90 deposit with 10kg orders (scour and card only) and £180 per 20kg of spinning orders.

But this reduces the final bill and enables us to prioritise work in order of the receipt of deposits, a fairer way of running things, we think.



## Trade orders boost mill

Since we re-located to Cornwall, the textile industry has been supportive of The Natural Fibre Company, but some companies in the large-scale wool trade are now backing us with orders.

As we can process small (by their standards) batches of yarn, for both knitting and spinning, we are helping them develop new products and ideas.

Orders so far include a knitting yarn made with organic wool and blended with alpaca to provide colour, kid mohair tops for a specialist suiting fabric, a carpet for a large organic estate, knitting yarns for a craft yarn supplier and knitting designer and, possibly, some alpaca car rugs for promotional use.

## Moth control

We are putting together an advice sheet on moth control so please send us anything you think should be included. Meanwhile, Wikipedia is very informative on clothing moths.

We are also continuing to collect information on **mini-mills** and other service providers. Please keep us informed so we can pass it on.

## Neem oil and garlic help with fly strike

Several of our customers have come forward with ideas to treat fly-strike including neem oil or neem oil blends which they say are excellent.

We have been told of two suppliers, neither of which we have tried: The Neem Team ([www.theneemteam.co.uk](http://www.theneemteam.co.uk)) and Stop-it-all ([www.karenruggles.co.uk](http://www.karenruggles.co.uk)).

Iodine is another possible treatment. It would pass any organic tests and as it is used to dip umbilical cords is likely to be in stock. It turns the fleece bright yellow for a while, but after a month or so in the rain it washes out.

Until the Bluetongue vaccine became available we used garlic and can thoroughly recommend it. Perhaps flies have something in common with Count Dracula: they don't like garlic!

It was fed it to our Gotland flock and despite the lack of summer and heavy rainfall, we've had NO foot problems and the general health and well-being of the sheep remain good good.

We gave it in powdered form, which we found in 3kg food grade bags, and sprinkled one tablespoon over 2kg of mixed feed for 20 sheep. It can also be added to water; garlic licks/tubbies are available which may be more suitable for larger flocks.

Please speak to us if you're using fly-traps. We are still looking into these and have come across an electrically operated **midge killer machine** which is distributed in this country by Ingrid Batcup of Alpacas of Gower.

Finally on health look at the latest information on **lameness treatment** either via Eblex or on the DEFRA website. The recommendations make life easier for both animals and their carers.

## Revised trade terms

Regular customers please note that we have revised our terms of trade, although the changes are minimal. They now run to seven pages instead of six, but that's only because we've printed them slightly larger in the interests of easier reading.

In order to comply with consumer protection legislation on distance selling, and to ensure that people can purchase safely without seeing or touching the products, we have created a separate set of terms of trade for selling products on the website.

It is included on the website in the final stage of buying things together with a privacy policy.



## Andrea the new face of Blacker Designs

The public face of The Natural Fibre Company changed dramatically over the summer as we added a shop to the website, commissioned photography, appointed public relations consultants and printed a catalogue, all to build the brand name Blacker Designs.

Had our marketing advisor Shireen not kept us on track, we would still be debating the brand name. We rejected a telephone book full of ideas ranging from awful puns to classical references to sheep, opting in the end for the managing director's surname. Conservative, perhaps, but still with a hint of a pun.

Crucial to turning concept into reality were Westcountry Photographers who found us the model Andrea. Between that and the new web site were Adrian Toms of 9-design, Matt Collins of Precise Minds and Adrian Brown of ABP Computers who will be hosting it.

The Marketing PR Company are only 10 minutes from the mill, but quickly understood what we were trying to achieve, partly because the chief executive's partner is a shearer.

All these appointments followed beauty parades, and although we looked everywhere for web designers, we are delighted to stick to our chosen philosophy of sourcing locally.

It's been a steep learning curve for everybody and we've worked to a tight budget, but the mistakes, and there are bound to be some, are our fault. We welcome feedback and expect it to be easier next year!



Facing up to it, left to right, Andrea, Sue and Shireen

## New hope for needle felt

We hope to be marketing a range of US-made needle felting machines in the UK and anyone who might be interested should contact us.

The machines come in three sizes, home, studio and commercial.

We have samples of the felt they produce and a CD that shows a machine in action.

A trial version should be available next year. The prices are not yet determined, but are likely to range from \$3,000 for the home version to \$15,000 for the largest. Carriage will be extra.

## Share scheme

The share schemes have been simplified. In future, anyone supplying fleece as part of a share scheme will be given a credit for the value of fleece submitted.

People sending less than 10kg should send it by post. We will continue sending out sacks and arranging for the collection of larger amounts.

Your credits can be used to purchase share scheme products at the trade prices that are normally only available for orders for more than £400.



The Natural Fibre Company



## Wool's in a name

In the UK at least, if your surname has no biblical or Shakespearian connections, it might be linked to the wool industry.

Wool was a major part of the national economy for centuries and did so much more than build all those huge churches.

So stand up all you Farmers, Shearers, Drovers, Weavers, Spinners, Dyers and Tailors whose ancestors were certainly involved.

Why let the Fletchers, Coopers, Carters, Carpenters, Plumbers and Smiths have it all their own way!

We've started an archive for all you others out there and think it might be a good way of accumulating stories. It might be more rewarding than sudoku.

Send us any 'woolly' names you know and we'll print the results in a future edition.

The Welsh and Gaelic equivalents would be fascinating.

## 2009 Dates

**Wonderwool Wales:**

25-26 April

**Woolfest** (Cumbria):

26-27 June

**Fibrefest** (Devon):

22-23 August

## Futile playing tag with scientific identification

The sheep industry is generally against electronic tagging. We also know that double tagging is not the answer as sheep or goats will tear both ears sooner or later.

There's no problem with small flocks, providing only one animal at a time loses its tag. And if there are two tags, it's less likely that both will be lost at the same time. If more than one animal loses both tags, it will inevitably become a matter of guesswork.

Electronic implants could surely be an effective solution. For sheep and goats, with short fat necks, a bolus lodged in the rumen seems the best option.

Anyone involved in the National Scrapie Scheme would have some of these already in place. It's a shame that the Scrapie Scheme investment cannot be re-used.

Because of their long, thin necks a bolus is feasible for alpacas. Chipping would seem the better option here, although chips have a slight tendency to drift around under the skin. This option is therefore not so good for animals due to be eaten.

Another option is freeze brands or tattoos, both of which are common in horses and many sheep flocks.

Proper identification has so many benefits: for breeding selection, health and fleece quality monitoring, being sure of selling the right animal and getting the right one back.

We think that in a few years' time, rather than a government plot to add to costs, scientific identification will be normal and seen as a useful management tool that adds value.

## Dieing for a dye plant

It's up and running, but what a struggle and at what a cost! Steam regulations, hot water, cold water, waste water, steam, blow-down, gas and electricity. We felt like using all the pipes to install a Hammond Organ. Plant had to be replaced, and the spares came always seemed to be wrong. Learning by experience isn't always fun! The installation team was brilliant, but some of the other contractors much less so.

Blacker Sheep Ltd trading as the Natural Fibre Company.

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