

May 2021 Sheep Newsletter

Combating the Nematodirus Challenge

As warmer and wetter weather finally arrives, it is vital to be vigilant with managing parasite burdens in sheep, and especially Nematodirus in lambs at this time of year.

What signs of disease does Nematodirus cause?

- Profuse, watery yellow-green diarrhoea & dehydration
- Faecal staining of tails and legs
- Reduced appetite and rapid loss of BCS
- Dull fleece and tucked up appearance
- Death (up to 5% mortality)



What is the life cycle of Nematodirus?

The main difference in the life cycle of *Nematodirus battus* compared with other parasitic worms is that development to an infective larvae takes place within the egg and infection passes from one lamb crop to the next years' crop (it is not passed on by ewes). See overleaf for a diagram of the life cycle.

Before they can hatch, the eggs have to undergo a period of cold weather followed by warmer temperatures of 10°C or more. If these conditions occur over a short period of time, triggering a mass hatch, and it coincides with the time when lambs are starting to take in significant amounts of grass (over about six weeks old), the result can be devastating. **We are in this risk period at the moment!**

The SCOPS website has a very helpful Nematodirus forecast which monitors risk levels across different regions—please do make use of it to assess when control might be needed for your flock.

Nematodirus Forecast



Risk at a Glance

Each dot on the map represents a weather station. Zoom in on the map and click on the weather station closest to you - but **read more below** on how the information relates to your holding.

- Negligible Risk
- Low Risk
- Moderate Risk
- High Risk
- Very High Risk



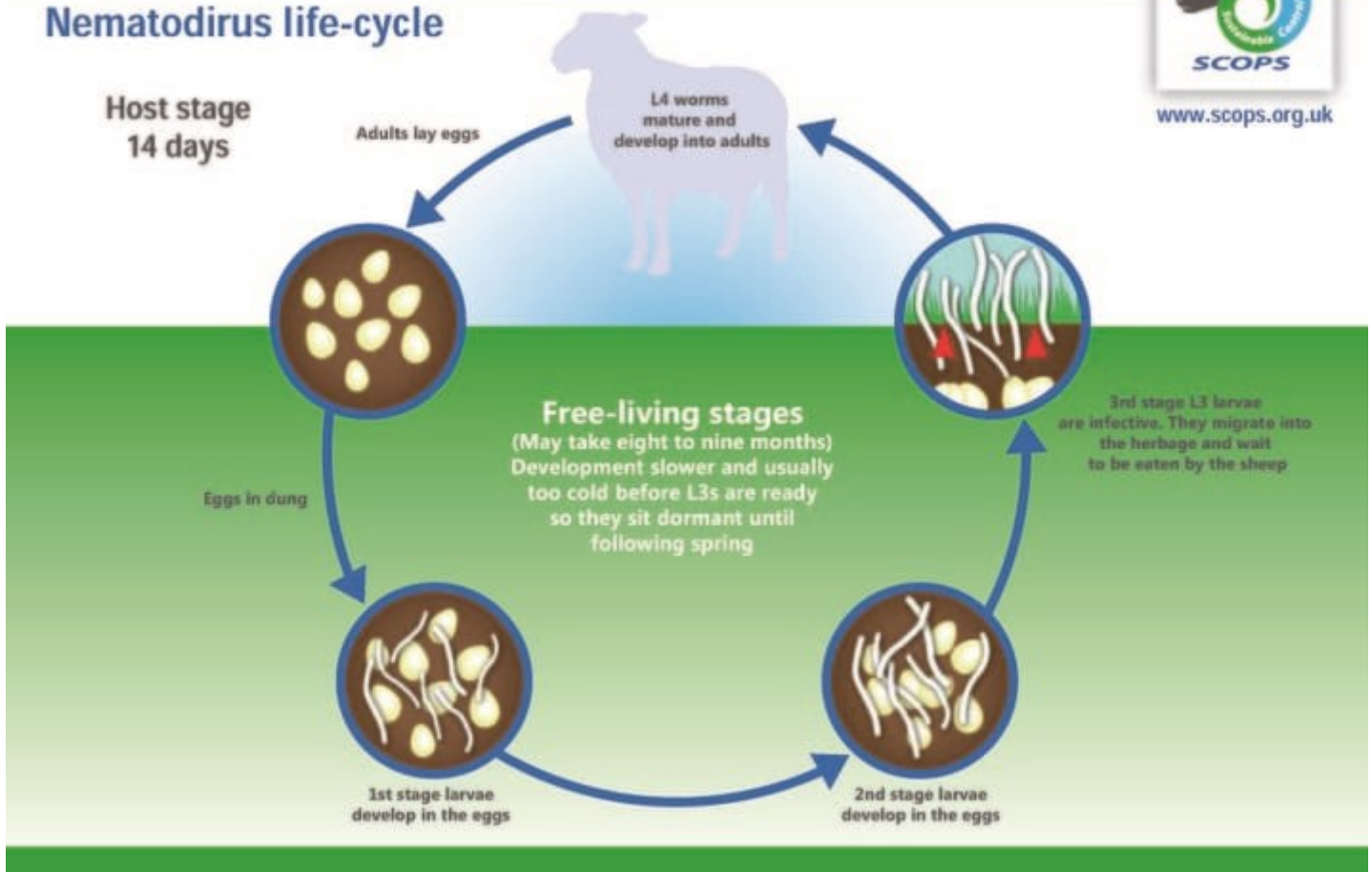
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Nematodirus life-cycle



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What can we do about *Nematodirus*?

With the vast majority of parasites, we recommend faecal egg counts (FEC) before treating. However, with *Nematodirus*, disease can occur rapidly with lamb deaths occurring before parasite eggs appear in faeces—therefore (FEC) are not recommended for diagnosing *Nematodirus*. Instead, rely on the *Nematodirus* forecast.

- ⇒ If possible, avoid infection. Move at-risk lambs (4 weeks +, twins and triplets) to low risk pastures (i.e. pasture that WAS NOT grazed by lambs the previous spring).
- ⇒ If avoiding high risk pasture is not possible, SCOPS advises farmers to use a white (1-BZ) drench to treat for *Nematodirus*. There are currently very low levels of resistance in *Nematodirus* to this drench, so it is safe to use.

For more information do speak to one of the vets or visit the SCOPS website which has lots of very useful information.

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