February started with cold conditions, but temperatures were mild across the UK by the end of the month. For the month as a whole, Scotland and Northern Ireland were both almost 2.5 °C above their 1961-90 regional averages, while England and Wales were only around 0.5 °C above theirs.

Three-month average temperatures across all regions were 1 to 1.5 °C above expected levels.

Rainfall was slightly above the 1961-90 average February figures for northern and western Scotland, but all other regions were drier than normal. Parts of eastern and southern England, and eastern Scotland received less than a third of expected rainfall.

Three-month rainfall figures range from 30 to 40 per cent above the long-term average in northern and western Scotland to 20 to 30 per cent below in eastern and southern England.

The first half of March has been generally mild and dry. Conditions are expected to remain largely dry in the south with some wind and rain further north.

April often sees cold showery spells, with historical data suggesting these are most common between the 10th and 20th of the month, and in the last week, going into May. The changing climate may affect this, however.

April Parasite Forecast/Update

The most recent version of this monthly parasite forecast may be accessed at www.nadis.org.uk.

SHEEP NEMATODES

Nematodirus

Mean UK temperature anomalies for December to February have all been positive this season (Figure 1). This suggests an early hatch and a below-average risk of nematodiosis this spring; however, March and April temperatures and rainfall can alter this picture. A forecast for overall incidence and peak hatch will be made in early April and will be included in the next parasite forecast.
May and June usually see by far the largest number of nematodirosis incidents, however significant numbers can also occur in April. The best control method is to avoid grazing lambs on pasture used for young lambs the previous year, or ideally the previous two years. If this is not possible, and March and April are mild allowing early hatching, then February and early March born lambs may need a prophylactic anthelmintic drench before the end of April. Colder (or very dry) weather over this period may make this early drench unnecessary, although prophylaxis may be needed later when greater numbers of lambs will be grazing, and therefore at risk. Benzimidazole (Group 1) wormers are usually recommended for *Nematodirus* prophylaxis.

Using faecal egg count monitoring to time *Nematodirus* treatments is very risky because disease is primarily caused by the developing larvae, and significant damage can occur before eggs, produced by adults, appear in the faeces.

*Nematodirosis is a problem when egg hatching in a late cold spring coincides with lambs beginning to graze. Adult sheep are not affected.*

*Nematodirius egg (largest) in faeces.*

Few upland farmers can operate a clean grazing system so timing of prophylactic treatment is critical.
Using faecal egg count monitoring to time Nematodirus treatments is very risky because disease is primarily caused by the developing larvae. Death may occur before eggs appear in the faeces.

Parasitic Gastroenteritis (PGE)

PGE was seen in many regions through the winter associated with the mild weather conditions. Also, in many areas the dry late summer/autumn delayed the peak in pasture larval numbers, and this pattern has previously been associated with autumn/winter PGE and larger over-wintering larval populations. However, continuing mild conditions will keep worm larvae active, and if they are not picked up by susceptible grazing animals they will use up energy supplies and die.

Infective third-stage larvae (L₃) of parasitic nematodes (particularly Teladorsagia spp.) may survive on pasture throughout the winter.

Heavy pasture contamination from late season store lambs.

Same field as above in spring – a parasite factory!

Large numbers of the over-wintered larvae will be picked up by late pregnant or lactating ewes unless conditions are extremely dry or they are grazing safe pastures. Little development of eggs passed by ewes will have occurred in early March due to the low temperatures, but larval development speeds up as weather conditions warm through March and April.
The aim of anthelmintic treatment of ewes around lambing time is to reduce pasture contamination and subsequent challenge to lambs.

In order to avoid undue selection for anthelmintic resistance, SCOPS recommend that this dose around lambing is targeted at sheep with reduced immunity:

- Thinner sheep
- Younger sheep and/or multiple bearing ewes,
- It is considered important that not all ewes are dosed and consequently some anthelmintic-susceptible parasites survive.

Rams must also be included in the parasite control strategy.
PGE is not uncommon in rams which may appear more susceptible than ewes.

In summary,

Ewes grazing contaminated pastures may need a persistent anthelmintic to prevent immediate re-infection from the pasture.

Ewes turned out onto clean pasture only require a short acting anthelmintic before turnout.

FLUKE in SHEEP

Maximum temperatures at the time of writing (mid-March) are above 10 °C across much of the UK allowing snail and fluke development on the pasture.

Chronic fascioliasis causes severe weight loss and emaciation.

Chronic fascioliasis is the predominant form in the spring, and cases of weight loss and poor body condition in ewes should be investigated. Fluke eggs passed onto pastures during the spring will develop over the summer in snails and lead to infective stages on pasture to challenge sheep from August causing acute disease from September onwards.

Stock on premises with a known fluke population will already have been dosed in the autumn and early winter and will need dosing again (March/April). Newly diagnosed cases of chronic fluke disease (fluke eggs in faecal samples) can be treated with any available flukicides. Triclabendazole should not be used as a high level of activity against immature fluke is not required.

COCCIDIOSIS

Coccidiosis is a significant risk in April, in February/March born lambs, or in older lambs when the feeding of medicated creep is stopped. It is a disease of intensive husbandry, and adverse weather conditions leading to poor colostrum supply, poor grass growth, wet muddy paddocks and/or extended housing periods can increase incidence.

Sheep must be moved from infected pastures/premises as soon as disease becomes apparent. Decoquinate (Deccox sheep premix), diclazuril (Vecoxan) and toltrazuril (Baycox) can be used for the treatment and prophylaxis of coccidiosis in lambs and the choice of medication will depend upon individual farm circumstances as prescribed by the veterinary practitioner.

CATTLE NEMATODES

Worm control for the grazing season needs to be arranged, as part of a veterinary health plan taking into account the type and age of stock, and the history of the available pasture.

To control Type I ostertagiosis, dairy calves and autumn-born suckled calves will require preventative treatment in their first grazing season. By applying a strategic early season control programme, for example
using pulse release or continuous release bolus, repeated or long-acting anthelmintic injections until at least mid-summer, pasture egg contamination levels can be effectively reduced and the risk of clinical disease later in the season is minimised. Spring-born suckled calves will not need preventative anthelmintic treatment in their first grazing season (apart from a housing dose) but they will probably need some control in their second grazing season. Vaccination (Huskvac) is an effective way to control lungworm in dairy replacements and in suckler herds with a history of disease, as disease can occur during the late grazing season even if the above control methods for ostertagiasis have been followed.

Effective parasite control should be part of a farm’s veterinary health plan

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Click here Health Quiz

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