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Holly leaf ingestion causing pharyngeal obstruction in lambs

We read with interest the letter on pharyngeal obstruction in lambs caused by holly leaf (*Ilex aquafolium*), a useful alert to include this condition as a differential diagnosis when examining lambs showing respiratory distress (Jones and Diesel 2017).

This presentation has been recognised in previous years, particularly in south-west England, and was the subject of an advisory note in the journal "In Practice" in the 1990's (Simpson 1992).

It was described as "Ilex choke" after the scientific name for common holly. In this article, it was speculated that the reason young lambs are almost exclusively the victims of this condition is that old leaves of holly are shed in late winter and early spring (despite holly being considered an evergreen plant), coinciding with the period when young lambs are starting to graze and explore their nutritional options.

In addition to causing respiratory distress, dysphagia and hyper-salivation as described in the letter, lambs can be found recumbent and struggling without respiratory signs (Simpson 1992), or simply found dead. The condition has been diagnosed in the post-mortem room at Langford, Bristol Veterinary School on several occasions over the years, though pasteurellosis due to *Mannheimia haemolytica* is a far more common diagnosis and cause of respiratory distress in lambs (APHA 2015).

We agree with the authors that this condition emphasises the importance of examining the throat when examining lambs in respiratory distress. It also demonstrates the value of post-mortem examination when investigating both respiratory disease and sudden death in sheep, whilst recognising that there are more common causes to be considered as differentials for both syndromes.

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