

■ ■ RABIES

Aiming for the top for World Rabies Day

RESEARCHERS from the Rabies and Wildlife Zoonoses group and the Centre for Epidemiology and Risk Analysis at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) left their lab coats behind on August 1 as they followed in the footsteps of Sir Edmund Hillary – not up Mount Everest, but to the top of Mount Snowdon. The challenge they had set themselves was to raise awareness of this year's World Rabies Day on September 28.

Hillary and his team trained on Snowdon before conquering Everest. For their trek, the VLA researchers were joined by colleagues from Defra, the Institute for Animal Health at Pirbright, and Liverpool and Cambridge vet schools. Two members of the 18-strong team came from further afield – the University of Texas in the USA and from the University of Bonn Medical Centre in Germany.

The idea of climbing Snowdon was suggested earlier this year as three members of the team, Tony Fooks, Karen Mansfield and Dan Horton, drove to a scientific meeting. 'We were brainstorming ideas for what we could do to mark World Rabies Day,' Professor Fooks said. 'We wanted something fun, a bit challenging and a bit unusual.'

Accompanied by canine companion Poppy, the team completed the three-hour climb up the Pyg track to the summit. The weather held out for most of the way, although the summit



Raising awareness: the team makes it to the summit

was shrouded in cloud and was bitterly cold and windy. 'We managed to draw a very bemused crowd while we had our picture taken,' Miss Mansfield said.

Professor Fooks added: 'We were surprised by how many people stopped us – and how much misinformation about rabies there is out there.' Some people did not realise that the UK is free of the disease, or that it is still endemic in some holiday destinations in Europe. Many questions, however, concerned the number of human deaths that rabies causes each year, the countries where they occur, and availability of human vaccines.

'My response was that more than 60,000 people die of rabies

each year,' Professor Fooks said. 'While these are official statistics, this number is an underestimate, and the true incidence is closer to 100,000 deaths each year, mostly in children under 14 years of age.'

'I also discussed the rationale behind World Rabies Day – uniting people around the world to take notice of the disease and, through awareness and education, ensuring that the global elimination of dog rabies is a realistic and achievable goal. This will only be attained by a paradigm shift and focusing our principal control efforts on dog vaccination against rabies and, in doing so, bringing together veterinarians, clinicians, scientists, policymakers and other stakeholder groups to work together to reduce the incidence of rabies in children.'

The team completed their trek by descending via the Miners' track. As well as raising awareness, the challenge also aimed to raise funds for the Alliance for Rabies Control, which aims to prevent human rabies deaths and alleviate the burden of rabies in animals across the world. So far, the team has raised over £650 – further contributions can be made via www.justgiving.com/mad-scientists-up-a-hill



What goes up, must come down – the descent of the Miners' track

NEWS IN BRIEF

Equine grass sickness

Notifications to the Equine Grass Sickness Surveillance Scheme, which was launched in April last year, so far indicate that over 1280 cases of the disease have occurred in Great Britain since 2000, and more than 425 since 2007. The scheme has details of over 1680 individual premises affected and is keen to gather details of cases occurring in 2009. Information can be submitted via a short online questionnaire at www.equinegrasssickness.co.uk

Car raffle to support the RCVS Trust

The RCVS Trust is set to benefit from a raffle being organised by the Foundation for Social Improvement (FSI). The trust has registered as one of the charities participating in the 'Small charity car draw', which is offering a Fiat 500 as a prize. The FSI helps to support small not-for-profit organisations. The raffle aims to help small charities raise money for their causes without costs to themselves. Tickets for the raffle cost £2, and the trust will receive over 95 per cent of the ticket price. Individual tickets can be bought online at www.everyclick.com/rcvstrust until August 21, and books of tickets are available from Sarah Briggs at the RCVS Trust, telephone 020 7202 0743. The draw will take place on October 1. Full details of the draw and more information about the FSI are available at www.thefsi.org

Management advice for equine practices

A new service designed to help equine practices identify areas of opportunity for improvement and development of their businesses has been launched by Merial Animal Health. 'Horse sense for equine vets' takes the form of a workshop involving staff from across a practice. It is intended to help practices assess what clients expect, and evaluate how well the business delivers on these expectations. All areas of the practice, including internal communication, operational procedures and efficiency, as well as marketing, are evaluated. More information is available from Merial territory managers.