

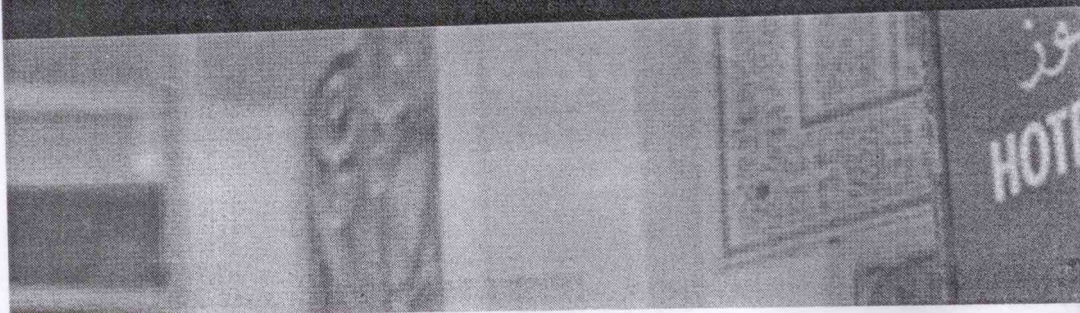
CHRISTOPHER PLEDGER

No vaccine, no treatment despairs as killer virus



Andrew Wood at his farm near North Chailey in East Sussex. The vet has been called on to help lambs badly deformed

Problem.





Weather warning Wading birds hit hard
by floods telegraph.co.uk/earth

atment... vet virus spreads



...d by Schmallenberg virus but says that he is powerless to prevent it

**WILLIAM
LANGLEY**
in East Sussex



FOR MOST of the years that Andrew Wood has worked as a country vet in an affluent part of East Sussex, the job has played out much as he expected – tending to girls' ponies, old ladies' cats, occasional zoo calls and a fair chunk of farm work.

But recently something stranger and darker has been taking up Mr Wood's time. A mysterious bug known as Schmallenberg virus has hit East Sussex hard, leaving thousands of deformed newborn animals in its wake. Most of the victims are lambs but now cattle are succumbing, amid fears for other livestock.

"I've not seen damage like this before," said Mr Wood, 37, who works at a practice in Uckfield. "I grew up on a farm, the animals get to be like family, and it's hard not to be affected."

It is thought that the virus was carried to Britain by midges from Holland and Germany, where the disease emerged last year. Strong winds supposedly blew infected insects across the sea in the autumn.

But the disease remained hidden until the lambing season, when cases began to appear in southern and eastern England. *The Sunday Telegraph* has led the way in reporting the outbreaks.

Not everyone believes that windblown midges are to blame. Some think it more likely that they got past Britain's much-criticised bio-security on cars and lorries. Others reject the midge theory – citing causes that range from radioactive contamination from Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant to genetically modified animal feed.

Whatever the truth, the virus's calling card is a frightening one. Across the South – and, recently, as far north as Lincolnshire – animals are being born with deformities, including misshapen heads and twisted limbs.

Figures released last week by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, show that 254 farms in the UK have been affected, with 219 reporting infections in sheep and 35 in cattle – although, as the disease is non-notifiable, it is possible

North Chailey. So far none has been infected, but he understands the fear spreading across farms throughout Britain. "Like everyone else, we're hoping for the best, and waiting for a vaccine to come along," he said. How bad could it get? "That's part of the problem. No one knows."

The most frightening thing about the virus is its unpredictability. "It's like Russian roulette," said Adam Quinney, vice president of the National Farmers Union. "You never know if it's going to get you."

Outbreaks have tailed off as the lambing season comes to an end, but the midges may have survived Britain's mild winter or laid infected eggs that will result in an even bigger assault later this year. "The next wave could be a lot bigger," said Mr Wood.

The virus has hit just as sheep farmers, after struggling for years to stay afloat in face of supermarket-imposed low prices and over-regulation, were looking ahead to better times. Prices, largely driven by demand from Asian markets, have recovered strongly and land values are rising.

But the economics of farming remain perilous, and even marginal losses can drive a business to the brink. The farms worst hit by the virus have lost up to 20 per cent of their lambs – which represents tens of thousands of pounds of income.

Many farmers are still reeling from the last virus, bluetongue, – also carried by midges – that hit Britain in 2007, but at least there was a vaccine against it.

Schmallenberg virus takes its name from a small German town, 50 miles east of Cologne, where it was first identified. The bug spread rapidly into Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland. Late last summer, it is believed to have crossed the Channel and the North Sea with late summer gales carrying midges that then feasted on livestock. Having invaded the south and east coasts, it seems to have fanned out across southern England with astonishing speed.

The rate of increase of the official tally has slowed in recent weeks as the lambing season has drawn to an end. But Defra expects to see the number of affected cattle farms continuing to rise into

TOULOUSAIN
RECEPTION

8 May – Schmallenberg virus: further update on GB testing results

There are 256 UK farms reporting SBV: 36 in cattle and 220 in sheep. There are no new reported cases since the 4 May 2012. All farms are within the recognised risk counties in England.

The decline in the numbers of reporting farms is in line with all EU Member States, where the sheep reports have declined as lambing in 'at risk' sheep (those at a critical time of gestation when infection can impact on the foetus) draws to an end. This is also in line with Defra's own predictions considering UK farming practices and estimated time of infection occurring in the UK. We continue to expect to see cases in cattle into early summer.

Figures correct as of 8 May 2012

+ 2 фермы 30 апреля 2012

County	Positive holdings (Sheep)	Positive holdings (Cattle)	Positive holdings (Other species)	Total
Bedfordshire	1	0	0	1
Cambridgeshire	1	0	0	1
Channel Islands	3	0	0	3
Cornwall	2	1	0	3
Devon	7	2	0	9
Dorset	5	0	0	5
East Sussex	38	5	0	43
Essex	11	2	0	13
Greater London	1	0	0	1
Hampshire	14	1	0	15
Hertfordshire	6	0	0	6
Isle of Wight	2	1	0	3 +1
Kent	39	6	0	45 +1
Leicestershire	1	0	0	1
Lincolnshire	1	0	0	1
Norfolk	17	5	0	22
South Gloucestershire	4	0	0	4
Somerset	3	0	0	3
Suffolk	12	6	0	18
Surrey	5	1	0	6
Warwickshire	2	0	0	2
West Berkshire	2	0	0	2
West Sussex	36	4	0	40
Wiltshire	7	2	0	9
Total	220	36	0	256

Please see the [VLA website Schmallenberg virus page](#) for background and an information note for farmers and vets in English and Welsh.