

## **Flystrike & Trees**

### **Extracts from Nibblers online discussion group**

Dear forum members,

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> I was talking to a group of young agriculture students, earlier this year, about the various opportunities and possibilities for trees on farms and showed them some pictures of silvopastoral agroforestry in the UK. Comments that were prompted included some quite dismissive remarks along the lines of... "that's no good because the trees will be full of flies and the sheep will suffer from flystrike".

Amongst this group, most of them from farming families, there was certainly a view that introducing trees into pasture would cause more trouble than it was worth.

Is this a practical problem with silvopastoral systems involving sheep? I am not well informed on current views and approaches to preventative treatment for flystrike but wonder whether a move away from certain routine prophylactic treatments may in fact lead to a higher incidence of flystrike in silvopasture.

On a related theme, one student indicated that there is a lime tree on his farm (presumably *Tilia* spp. but not verified) that is preferred as a shade tree by sheep as it keeps the flies away.

I would be interested to hear from anyone who has experience, expertise or views in relation to these points.

Best wishes,

Tom Dutson  
Senior Lecturer in Forest Management

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I wonder if those who were dismissive actually treat their sheep to prevent fly strike, or whether they take a chance. In our experience fly strike is a potential problem everywhere - we have had cases on ancient grazing marsh miles from trees, but only early in the season before shearing, as we routinely apply Vetrizin immediately after shearing and then after a further eight weeks. In our experience it is 100% effective, even where there are many trees. Strike progresses so quickly and is so time consuming to deal with when there is an incidence that the cost of the treatment is worth it for peace of mind if nothing else. I would suggest that routine treatment is even more essential in most conservation situations where sheep are often not in easily inspected flat fields with short grass, and where lookers with varying levels of experience are inspecting the sheep. Such treatment appears to be routine even in organic systems as the Soil Association booklet "Organic livestock management on nature conservation sites" says "Most organic producers rely on the use of pour-on products based on the chemical cyromazin to prevent fly strike".

The bottom line based on our experience is - treat routinely with an approved pour-on like Vetrizin and relax about fly strike, even on wooded sites.

Mike Sandison  
Essex Wildlife Trust

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Having grazed sheep for over ten years in a traditional orchard as well as open pasture, I have not noticed any increased incidence of fly worry problems within the orchard area, which in places has an 75% canopy cover. Fly strike has occasionally

occured in both situations, originating from the usual footrot or back-end attacks. I have not been aware of any more flies associated with such trees, which can also provide shade. Indeed, sheep usually specifically make for the tree bases if they have an option. Such areas may have a greater abundance of droppings as a result, and this in turn could attract more flies, but if appropriate husbandry is carried out re feet, shearing and Vetrazine etc. then this should normally prevent fly strike in any event, as has already been mentioned. Odd weather conditions can always catch you out at any time in any situation, and flies can strike when least expected - the early heat this year was a cause of early strike so I have been told. So its back to good old husbandry again! My vet said the best livestock managers are those who take the time and trouble to look at their stock over the gate - but who gets the time to do this these days?

Martin Hicks

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I certainly agree with comments in that fly strike is just as likely in open pasture as in orchards. If you keep sheep then anyone looking at them such be aware of signs of flystrike and treat as possible. I have seen fly strike on shoulders, rump, back legs, feet. (not on same animal! but over a number of years)

Perhaps student's comments about trees in fields is that they have to drive around them, hit mirrors on branches etc. I have planted new cider orchard under CSS on 10m spacing and our grazer is able to make big bale hay fairly easily. Trees are standard and been planted for 3 years.

Tim Green  
Countryside Ranger  
Herefordshire Council

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I have to say that overall my impression is that flystrike is made rather more likely in wooded areas. My only cases this year were in young lambs with milk-muck on their tails that were in an orchard. Last year I even had calves with eggs on their tails in a similar situation although they failed to develop. I have always assumed that this was just because flies are on the whole weak fliers and prefer sheltered spots. Although they like sunny edges as well which may be why livestock often seek deeper shade. So I am especially vigilant when I put sheep in well wooded places.

Which is the other side of the problem because of course they are much harder to shepherd if they have trees and bushes to run off into. It can be very confusing for a dog to gather a flock amongst trees and they often need more guidance about where to drive; which is hard to provide when you can't see what is going on. Which is where the Vetrazin or Crovect come in very handy as a good back-up to husbandry but hopefully not a substitute.

Bill Grayson (GAP)

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