



Equine E-News February 2021

The More dun Foundation Equine Grass Sickness Fund

Five Year Plan

Over 100 years since the disease was first discovered, there are still more questions than answers about this deadly disease. To pull together the known facts about the disease and create momentum around research, EGSF has published a Five Year Research Plan. This keeps up the pressure on existing hypotheses, whilst allowing us also to take a step back and look at the broader picture, bringing in experts from different scientific fields, and the vast knowledge and expertise of vets and horse and pony owners, to look at the disease in new ways.

You can read more about the Five Year Plan here: <https://grasssickness.org.uk/research/egsf-five-year-research-plan/>

OnFarm Scottish Rural Stories Podcasts

To launch our ambitious new research plan we worked with The More dun Foundation and OnFarm on two episodes of OnFarm's popular rural affairs podcasts.



[In EPISODE 1](#)

Three horse owners discuss their experience of grass sickness from very different angles. Sylvia Ormiston of the Balmoral Highland Pony Stud describes the heartbreak of losing five valuable breeding ponies within the course of a year. Yvonne Maclean tells the story of her grass sickness survivor Mal, a homebred 17.2hh Hanoverian, and why it inspired her to go on to raise over £50,000 for grass sickness research. Dr Beth Wells is the scientist at More dun heading up the Fellowship Project with Dr Kathy Geyer, and she talks about the research and the importance of working with horse owners and vets to break new ground.



[In Episode 2](#) HRH Princess Anne, patron of both The Moredun Foundation and EGSF speaks of her delight in seeing progress made in grass sickness research.

She cites the significance of Moredun choosing to launch the EGS Fellowship in its Centenary Year, with grass sickness having been a research objective of Moredun from the very beginning. She expresses her hope that by adopting Moredun’s model of working with farmers to promote animal welfare, that new light can be shed on this elusive disease.

EGS Research Fellow Appointed

Dr Kathy Geyer joined us as EGS Research Fellow in February 2021. She brings a wealth of experience in areas vital to this research project. You can read more about Kathy here: [EGS Research Fellow, Dr Kathy Geyer](#)



Equine Grass Sickness Biobank/Database Project Summary

By Dr Kathy Geyer

A new fellowship signals a fresh approach to Equine Grass Sickness research

Despite its discovery over 100 years ago, we unfortunately still know too little about the fatal neurodegenerative disease known as Equine Grass Sickness (EGS). Clinical symptoms of the disease are nonspecific and in the absence of a reliable diagnostic test, diagnosis of EGS presents a challenge for veterinarians. As definitive diagnosis requires biopsy samples of either the ileum (pre-mortem) or autonomic ganglia during post-mortem examination, the majority of cases remain undiagnosed. In turn, due to the frequent lack of diagnosis, the number of reported cases to the Equine Grass Sickness Fund (EGSF) is most likely an underestimation of the actual number of horses affected by the disease.

Around 80% of diagnosed EGS cases reported to the EGSF, result in euthanasia on welfare grounds confirming that there is a great need for a fresh approach for EGS research, as well as improved surveillance, diagnostics and data collection, in order to advance research in the field and ultimately prevent the disease in the future.

Although decades of EGS research have led to various different hypotheses on causal agents, the causes of disease is still obscure but the lack of success in identifying a single causative agent, suggests it is a complex disease with a multifactorial origin. Therefore, by systematically reviewing existing studies and

data associated with EGS, as well as identifying their gaps and limitations, we envisage a more informed and multi-disciplinary approach of investigating the potential causes underlying this disease.

In a mission to raise awareness of this devastating disease, and in order to aid future research, by working closely with veterinarians and horse owners, one of our major aims is to establish a nationwide biobank for EGS. This will be achieved in a citizen science project by collecting and storing biological and environmental samples associated with horses affected by EGS as well as relevant controls, such as co-grazers. Since these samples have been a limitation to research advances in this field so far, the availability of an EGS biobank poses an invaluable resource for scientists working on this enigmatic disease.

Additionally, selected equine premises with a historic record of EGS may offer the possibility of longitudinal or longer term study sites.

Together with the collaborative efforts from experts from different disciplines, as well as the establishment of a national database and sample archive (equine as well as environmental derived) as a valuable resource, we will hopefully make progress towards finding causal agents, and thereby solutions, for this elusive disease.

How can you help?

In order to help horse owners and vets understand the crucial role they have to play in developing the equine grass sickness research, we have organised two webinars in March. These are free and you can register your place on the following links:

Webinar for Vets: 23rd March 7.30pm [Register here](#)

Webinar for Horse and Pony Owners: 25th March at 7.30pm [Register here](#)

Fundraising News

Fundraising is a vital part of what we do. Without the funds in place we simply cannot progress grass sickness research. Thank you to everyone who supports us, whether by a monthly donation, organizing their own fundraiser, buying our merchandise or even leaving a legacy. If you would like to see your fundraiser featured here please get in touch.



Audrey Anderson, Equine Touch Instructor/ Practitioner, raises £350

All ready to participate in the BHS sponsored Ride and Drive at Balmoral Estate back in May 2020, which was to support the amazing work that has been done for many years by the Equine Grass Sickness Fund. When C19 stopped the event from taking place, I decided to set aside £5 from each session of The Equine Touch to go towards giving EGSF at least some support in these crazy times. We have all had challenges these last months and I usually give to many different charities sponsoring local shows. I decided research was really important, it can only progress with funding. A few of my clients experienced the difficulties with Grass Sickness not only losing an equine but dealing with the after effects.



Yvonne's Lockdown Locks Lopped

In perhaps her craziest stunt yet, Yvonne Maclean decided to raise money by getting her pony tail lopped off. Not only that, but she pledged that if she raised over £1000 she would get the whole lot shaved off.

Well, red rag to her work colleagues, who kindly ensured that Yvonne's fundraising page shot well over her target, indeed it is now up to £2200!

To support Yvonne's 2021 efforts, including her regular show on 14th August please visit:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/yvonne-maclean4>

Candy's Clan Virtual LEJOG Walk

Remember Leanne and Candy's adventures back in 2015, when they walked from Spey Bay in the North of Scotland, to Edinburgh?

Not to be daunted by covid restrictions, Leanne and Candy (plus other members of the clan, including sheep Pup and Smiler, Toffee the cat and dogs Lexie and Opal) are taking on a virtual journey of 1000 miles from Lands End to John O Groats.



<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/thefabulousfivesgrassicknessawarenessrides>



1000 miles in side saddle habit

Catherine Bradley is attempting to ride 1000 miles dressed in side saddle habit! The challenge will be made up of a combination of side saddle riding and hacking in hand, as she and her horses 6 build up their fitness. Between herself and her two side saddle horses, Alice and Barney, she aims to cover 1000 miles in a year:

<https://bit.ly/37Pp2f6>



Spring into Action

To kick start a virtual fitness campaign we invite you to ‘Spring Into Action for Grass Sickness’! You can choose any 30-day period during the peak grass sickness season between March and June, and enter either by a direct donation, or by setting up your own Just Giving page. This is just for fun and to raise awareness of grass sickness, but any page raising over £100 will receive a commemorative rosette.

Walk, run or ride, you can take part in any way you choose, and see how many miles (or calories or steps!) you can rack up for grass sickness research. You can take part either as an individual or a team, just get your page set up and spring into action! <https://bit.ly/3krxCWl>

Straight From The Horse’s Mouth Videos

Every month we plan to bring you a short video clip from the people who are involved in our work. You can find these on the Equine Grass Sickness Fund playlist on Moredun Group YouTube channel. These are no fancy productions, but just a little insight into what we do, and we hope you enjoy them:

[EGSF YOUTUBE PLAYLIST](#) If you would like to star in one of these please get in touch!

Events:

(In person events TBC subject to coronavirus regulations)

Tuesday 23rd March at 7.30pm

Vet Ambassadors Webinar

Thursday 25th March at 7.30pm

Horse and Pony Owners Webinar

Thursday 17th – Sunday 20th June

Royal Highland Show

Saturday 14th August

Ross-shire Fun Show

We hope you have enjoyed this e-news update. We plan to alternate every couple of months with our regular printed newsletter which goes out in April and October. We would be delighted to hear your comments about anything you have read in this edition.

Please contact:

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