

The story of Seadown

Find out about a New Forest veterinary practice with a varied casebook ranging from leisure and competition horses to free-roaming ponies and donkeys. Photos: Richard Dunwoody



Donkeys that roam free in the picturesque village of Beaulieu are among the practice's clients



Vet Gillies Moffat undertakes some dental work

The New Forest is a magical place of ancient woodland, open moors, beautiful glades and coastal walks. It is still one of the largest remaining tracts of unenclosed pasture and heathland in the UK where ponies, cattle, donkeys and deer roam free.

It is also home to a particularly unique, mixed veterinary practice that has served the new forest community, it's people and animals since 1923.

According to its senior equine vet, Peter Tunney, Seadown Veterinary Group is special for many reasons. "Most of our vets and support staff have been together for many years - we're like a family," he reveals. "It is also a privilege to work in such a unique area and to enjoy close relationships with a cross-section of owners and their equines, helping to fulfil their hopes and expectations."

Seadown is deeply embedded in Forest ways and activities, providing honorary

veterinary services to the New Forest Pony Breeders and Commoners Defence Society, along with involvement in the annual stallion passing, breed show, point-to-point and welfare tours. Then there is veterinary cover at the New Forest Show every summer."

Peter also makes veterinary inspections at the New Forest pony sales, which started around the same time as Seadown, and remains a key part of forest life, although welfare standards have greatly improved.

A diverse casebook

Seadown's equine team operates out of Hythe, Totton and Lymington in Hampshire. Practice vet Gillies Moffat says they help treat and care for a diversity of equine patients.

"It's not just the ponies on the forest, but everything from competition horses and leisure ponies to donkeys and miniature Shetlands," he says. "We get involved in just about everything too - routine healthcare, a considerable amount of geriatric medicine,

along with lameness investigations and treatment, including stem cell therapy.

"As well as treating clinical cases we support the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Animal unit, which is the leading animal rescue unit in the UK. There has been many an hour spent in bogs and ditches and I think Peter has even been up and down cliffs before now, too!"

Seadown Equine has expertise in depth with six qualified and highly experienced

vets, two of whom are advanced practitioners, plus three referral ophthalmologists (eye specialists) on site to assist the general equine vets at a moment's notice.

Nonetheless, there are still challenges as Gillies explains: "There are the inevitable pressures of having to modify treatments and client expectations in line with what they are able to financially afford, because the forest ponies can be of low value and despite people's perception of the South, a number ▶

Peter Tunney undertakes a vet inspection at the October New Forest pony sales



The practice benefits from top-class facilities



of our clients fall into the low income bracket, but we understand these situations and do our very best to help.

“Living and working in a true community is also helpful because so many of our clients are longstanding and there is genuine mutual trust and respect.”

Complex cases

Amongst Seadown’s caseload, you’ll find the usual routine cases, but they also encounter situations that are more complex.

Laura Trigg, one of Seadown Equine’s experienced advanced practitioners, relishes these challenges as well as the tremendous team spirit they create.

“One of the most involved and rewarding cases I have been involved with was treating a point-to-pointer with a huge hole in his suspensory ligament, which was potentially career ending,” she says. “We harvested bone marrow and stem cells were grown and implanted into the core lesion. The horse then underwent extensive rehabilitation and successfully returned to racing last year.”

“Working at Seadown is immensely rewarding but can be very busy at times. However, our supportive equine team and our lovely clients ensure that our working days are always enjoyable.”

“Being a vet at Seadown is like being part of an extended family and we try to treat each patient as we would one of our own equines, whether it’s one of the Beaulieu donkeys or a top-level sports horse.”

“Our equine team and our lovely clients ensure that every working day is enjoyable”

All of the Seadown staff and vets live and work in and around the forest, almost all have their own animals and are as deeply rooted in the culture and local community as any of their clients. Laura enjoys competing her own horse, Serendipity IX, at horse trials across the South East.

A special anniversary

Listening to the vets speak and hearing the sheer passion and commitment in

their voices, it is not hard to understand why Seadown has been so enduring and so successful as it approaches its 95th anniversary year in 2018.

Its longevity has enabled the practice to have built up a huge amount of knowledge about the local area and the issues associated with all the different animals to be found there. And the team has immense pride in having serviced the community for so long and become a practice that many local

people trust with the care of their animals. Certainly, Seadown owes its success to the loyalty and dedication of its vets and staff.

Seadown has also welcomed some talented young vets and veterinary nurses to the practice, which will help to continue giving a first-class service to its equine patients and their owners for years to come.

Dr Ami Wright joined the team two years ago. She adores all animals and is following her dream to be an equine vet. Ami says she has benefited from the wealth of experience possessed by the Seadown partners and other vets, and from the opportunity to share experiences and discuss treatment options.

“Their knowledge and advice is invaluable,” she says. “At some practices, the vets are

not always available 24/7 at the end of a phone when you need them to help with a case. However, there is always someone at Seadown to advise and support me when I need them.”

Dani Cole has been with Seadown seven years, initially as a trainee nurse then as qualified veterinary nurse, helping to provide all the support and care that is so vital for the equine vets. Dani quickly earned the respect of her colleagues and grew into her role, always showing the utmost dedication and compassion to her patients

A special practice

There is no doubt that Seadown is a very special practice, every bit as special as the

New Forest area and surrounding country it serves.

“I am always so impressed by the sheer hard work of the team and their recognition of the need to support the Forest community, it’s people and animals in delivering traditional values of exemplary compassion and great customer service but also adopting modern and forward thinking veterinary technologies and treatment,” says Gillies.

“It’s also rewarding that many of the staff have been with the practice for many years,” adds Peter. “In fact, we have five instances where two of the same family are involved with Seadown, if you include a vet student. In one case we have three of the same family!”

“Stability is created by taking in new, younger partners who find the work rewarding and because continued development and education is also encouraged. For example, we have two young vets who have become advanced equine practitioners while working for us, and we have an equine ophthalmology referral service which benefits and inspires all of the team.

“Together with our wonderful clients, I couldn’t imagine working anywhere else – roll on the next 100 years!” ■



Laura Trigg administers shock wave treatment



Furthering her veterinary career at Seadown is Ami Wright...



...who is passionate about all animals

To find out more about Seadown Veterinary Hospital, visit: www.seadown.co.uk; tel: 023 8084 2237