

Time for action on Ragwort

The British Horse Society is taking a stand against the poisonous plant ragwort with a nationwide survey to assess the scale of the threat.

Almost everyone involved with horses will know about the dangers that ragwort poses – every year animals die painful and unnecessary deaths as a result of damage to their liver from consuming the toxic plant. Despite this, ragwort levels seem to be on the increase and the BHS has certainly seen this in the number of cases reported over the last few years. This suggests that the laws governing ragwort (Weeds Act 1959, Ragwort Control Act 2003) are not being enforced and that many horse owners are not taking the threat the plant represents seriously.

There is currently no hard data that can be used to support arguments against ragwort, an issue the BHS believes needs addressing urgently. Data is required to paint a picture of the extent of the UK's ragwort problem and will be used to encourage better enforcement of ragwort control and lobby for changes in legislation.

The Society, in association with eazitools Ltd, is appealing to everyone with an interest in horses to take time to help complete a “snapshot survey” taking place during BHS Ragwort Awareness Week (12-18 July 2010). If anyone spots ragwort during this period they are asked to spend just a couple of minutes filling in a simple survey which is available on www.bhs.org.uk. The aim is to record the extent and location of ragwort spotted during the Awareness Week. Mapping software will be used to highlight the areas where ragwort is most prevalent and the number of animals grazing in ragwort infested fields will be calculated.

Lee Hackett, BHS Head of Welfare, said: “Ragwort has been causing horrible deaths to horses and ponies for many years and yet it seems to be becoming more and more widespread in its distribution. Even when it isn't in a field grazed by horses it produces seeds that the wind can carry long distances and spread the problem in future years.

“The laws surrounding ragwort are not being enforced and now we need to stand up and be counted. We must take action now rather than sit back and let the problem become progressively worse”.

Manufacturers of the Rag-Fork, eazitools Ltd., have donated 50 Rag-Forks for people who fill in the survey. Anyone interested in winning a Rag-Fork should provide their contact details when filing their report. All survey responses will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

For further information and pictures, please contact: Alison Coleman, The British Horse Society, 01926 707737 or a.coleman@bhs.org.uk