Developing the sheep sector’s next generation

THE National Sheep Association (NSA) is on the hunt for 12 new ambassadors for 2018. The NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme is aimed at young individuals, aged 20 to 34, that are involved in the sheep sector who wish to expand and develop their knowledge. The ambassadors will be elected to take part in five two/three day technical and personal development sessions throughout the year. The 2018 group will be the fifth of its kind, after the initiative was launched in 2014. Online applications are now open for the 2018 NSA Next Generation Ambassador group at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk/applyonline. The deadline for applications is 17 December 2017.

First World Horse Day announced

WORLD Horse Welfare and the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) will be joining forces to create the first ever World Horse Day on 17 September 2018. This will be a day where the horse is celebrated for its outstanding contribution to human society, culture, history and economies. A full outline for the day and the months leading up to it will be announced early next year.

Protecting animal health following poor harvest in NI

NORTHERN Ireland’s chief vet has urged farmers to plan ahead after poor growing and harvesting conditions this year have left fodder in short supply.

Huey said the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) was aware that waterlogged fields had forced many farmers to keep cattle indoors through summer and that grass intended for ensilage could not be cut across much of the country. Consequently, more conserved feed than normal had been used up for the time of year.

Huey said that taking hard decisions to remove less productive stock early in the winter would help to conserve fodder, improve the efficacy of the farm business and protect animal welfare.

Equine vet takes top award at American conference

PADRIAC Dixon, professor of equine surgery at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and the Roslin Institute, Edinburgh University, has received the Milne Award from the American Association of Equine Practitioners.

He accepted the award after delivering the Frank. J. Milne lecture at the AAEP’s convention last month.

Professor Dixon’s lecture focussed on the evolution of the horse, particularly in relation to its dental development.

Professor Dixon graduated from University College Dublin and has a PhD in equine respiratory disorders.

DOGS MORE BRAINY THAN CATS, RESEARCH SHOWS

RESEARCHERS have proven once and for all that dogs are indeed smarter than cats.

A team of researchers from six different universities in the USA, Brazil, Denmark, and South Africa analysed the brains of one or two specimens from each of eight carnivoran species (ferret, mongoose, raccoon, cat, dog, hyena, lion and brown bear) to count the number of cortical neurons. Neurons are associated with thinking, planning and complex behaviour—all considered hallmarks of intelligence.

They found that while cats had 250 million cortical neurons, dogs had over double with 530 million. This compares to 16 billion in the human brain.

The authors also looked at the neuron-to-brain ratio, and found that brain size did not correlate with the number of neurons.

They found that the brain of a golden retriever has more neurons than a hyena, lion or brown bear, even though the bigger predators have brains up to three times as large. The bear is an extreme example. Its brain is 10 times larger than a cat’s, but has about the same number of neurons. The research also found that raccoons appear to be an outlier: they pack the same number of cortical neurons as a dog into a brain the size of a cat’s.

The research has been provisionally accepted in the journal Frontiers in Neuroanatomy.