



Introducing Claire Short, animal osteopath and rare breeds enthusiast.

Animal OSTEOPATHY

Osteopathy can assist in a number of problems including:

- Unusual behaviour patterns;
- Suspected back pain;
- Lameness;
- Post-operative issues;
- Arthritic conditions.

The principles of human osteopathy are very relevant in treating animals, but the practice is usually a little different... "I'm forever being asked how I get a Suffolk Punch horse onto the treatment couch!" says Claire Short, an osteopath practising in the Midlands and south east.

Claire completed the five year training to treat humans seven years ago and has since specialised in animal osteopathy. She now treats all species, but is particularly interested in rare breeds.

"My father had Hebridean sheep when I was a child, so I grew up reading *The*

Ark and attending the annual show at Stoneleigh," she explains. "I loved the diversity even then – so it seemed natural that I would eventually start to treat in this field." And treat in the field she does!

Osteopathy is a way of detecting and treating injured parts of the body such as muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints. During a treatment Claire uses soft tissue techniques, stretches and gentle joint mobilisation to remove any imbalances. "Manipulation is used when necessary and, despite the click it often makes, is painless."

Another technique used is cranial osteopathy. This gentle method of treatment is a powerful way to rebalance ligaments and ease strains throughout the body.

So why use an osteopath? "People bring horses to me because their movement is unbalanced or because the horse simply doesn't feel right," says Claire.

"The Hackney horse that lifts one front leg lower than the other; the heavy horse

who doesn't pull straight; or the Exmoor who doesn't bend to the right... these examples of poor performance may not be due to stubbornness, but may be caused by pain. A human athlete would be treated with physical therapy, and equine athletes benefit in the same way.

"Most of the rare breeds I see are from excellent bloodlines or have breed characteristics that owners are looking to preserve. Last year I treated a Hebridean ewe with a wonderful set of four horns, and without the split eyelids that are so often genetically linked. The owner obviously wanted to breed from this excellent animal, but she was lame, and it was not evident why.

"On examining her neck I realised that it was jammed on one side causing pain to radiate into her shoulder. Within one session her lameness was 90% better, and she has just this month produced twins with four horns and no split eyelids. The owner is delighted!"

Sometimes, animals have trouble with the physical aspects of reproduction – Claire recently treated an alpaca who

Left: Claire treating Peewit the Dexter.
Far left: And treating the leg of a Manx Loaghtan.

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was unable to mount his females due to joint pain. She has also helped a Manx Loaghtan ewe who became severely lame after giving birth to oversized lambs. Any mother who has had sciatica or low back pain after childbirth will sympathise with this!

Animals can only be treated with a vet’s permission and Claire has an excellent relationship with those in her area. “We work hand in hand,” she said “but if I come across a problem that is beyond the realms of osteopathy, I always refer patients back to the vet.”

Claire says that of all the animals she has treated, the rare breeds have been the most fun.

“As an osteopath, I am trained to interpret a wide range of diagnostic clues

in the search for the underlying cause of a problem.

“This detective work is so much more exciting when you know it is contributing, in its own way, to the preservation of rare breeds.”

For further information on Claire’s work visit her website at www.ashgrovehealth.co.uk. Tel: 01933 469043/ Fax: 01933 469044/ Email: info@ashgrovehealth.co.uk. Or write to the Ashgrove Clinic, Ashgrove House, 13 Lancaster Street, Higham Ferrers, Rushden, Northamptonshire NN10 8HY.

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