

When lightning strikes . . .

THUNDERSTORMS are very unpleasant and frightening at the best of times, but severe ones are very alarming.

We had a particularly violent storm the other afternoon which resulted in a power failure and the loss of our telephones. In the veterinary world such storms are often associated with the tragedy of struck losses.

Sure enough next morning I received a report of eight dead sheep on the hill. My visit confirmed the fury of the storm. Three trees had been struck, and one magnificent oak tree had had its bark stripped off like a peeled orange, with strips landing up to fifty yards away with numerous branches torn off as well and thrown to the ground.

Two holly trees were virtually destroyed and in one the foots had lifted out of the ground which had been

ANIMAL CARE

by a
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torn asunder as if the tree had contracted in its death throes. Even more surprisingly there was a large split in the earth down the side of the hill with the grass and soil thrown back as if recently ploughed, with side shoots of the main path like branches on a tree. At the end of these branches were dead ewes on the open ground and three dead in contact with the holly tree.

The fleeces were visibly signed, and the smell of burning flesh was nauseating. The extraordinary thing was the

farmer had been haymaking in the next field just as the storm broke. How fortunate it was that he did not shelter beneath these trees in the pouring rain. There but for the grace of God . . .!

Subsequently, I attended twelve dead ewes on the hill of another farm not far away. They were lying beneath three oak trees all very obviously struck by lightning and severely mutilated.

Two sheep had been bowled over by the power of the shock and had rolled down the bank. Both these tragedies were subject to insurance claims and it was my job to confirm and certify the cause of death for my clients.

I have been very gratified to receive so much correspondence following my article on the Key-Gaskell syndrome in cats. As letters are still arriving and if anyone else has any observations to make, please write, and I will discuss your comments in two weeks time.

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