FERNSIDE VETERINARY CENTRE

WINTER 2015

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NEWS

Winter Birds

The depths of winter are tough for our garden birds. Food is scarce, the cold weather punishing and even water can be hard to find during a freeze. Putting food outside will really help get them through these long months before the Spring arrives.

Different species will prefer to eat from different feeding stations. The little Sparrows and Tits like the hanging feeders, ground feeding is preferred by Blackbirds, Robins and Thrushes (but avoid this if you have cats!) but most will enjoy the traditional, flat bird table. Place them in areas where the birds have a good view of the whole garden to watch for predators and within a couple of feet of a hedge or tree so they have somewhere to escape to if they feel threatened.

A variety of seeds and nuts will be appreciated. Peanuts will be popular in the winter as they are full of fats but only use plain ones especially for birds, they won't appreciate salted or roasted! Talking of fats, fat balls are an excellent winter food and will always be popular. If you are using bought ones, always remove the nylon mesh first as it can trap and injure the birds. Finally, do consider mealworms, loved by Robins and Wrens, and if you have any old fruit, Blackbirds will love to peck at them if you simply leave it on the garden (again, not if you have cats!)

Current Practice Offers:

Vaccine Amnesty – Vaccinations overdue? We are currently offering all our existing and new clients the opportunity to make sure their pets are fully up to date with their vaccinations by offering a full re start vaccination course for ONLY the price of an annual booster – saving up to £30.00..!! This price also includes a full health check and worming for your pet. Alongside this we are offering 15% off (if purchased at time of booster) our new parasite pack – these packs contain all you need to cover your pets against the most common parasites – lungworm, tapeworm, roundworm, fleas and ticks.

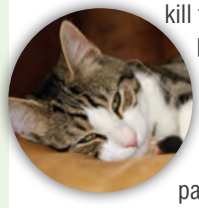
Winter fleas – don't get caught on the hop!

Fleas are a fact of life for pets and it is important to have some protection against them in place. Not only do they cause itchy bites, they can spread tapeworms and, in young pets, can cause life threatening anaemias.

During the winter months, fleas usually only breed indoors – making the most of the central heating. Adult female fleas can lay up to 50 eggs per day and these fall off your pet and onto carpets and bedding. The eggs can remain dormant for many months, but equally in warm centrally heated conditions, they will rapidly hatch out (via larval stages) into more fleas and a repeat of the problem you thought you had treated!

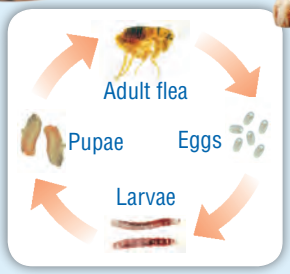
So what's the answer? Year-round veterinary flea treatment!

The advantages of our veterinary standard products are huge. They are extremely effective at killing fleas and they kill them *before* they lay their eggs, thus preventing house infestations. Some work even before they bite (vital for sensitive pets) and some can have an effect on the environment as well. Many veterinary spot-ons are multipurpose and will kill other parasites including scabies, ear mites, ticks and worms. Additionally, our staff are fully trained to be able to recommend the best treatments and formulations for your pets and their lifestyle.



But what about products from supermarkets and pet shops?

Flea products from supermarkets or pet shops are not always particularly effective. They may kill the fleas – but they often do so *very slowly*, giving fleas ample time to feed, mate and lay eggs. This is why, even though all the fleas may disappear and you think the problem is solved, they often return with a vengeance a few weeks later! Additionally, many spot-on flea treatments for *dogs* bought from pet shops and supermarkets contain **permethrins**. Whilst these are safe on dogs, they should NEVER be applied to cats – **permethrins are very toxic to cats**.



The flea life-cycle

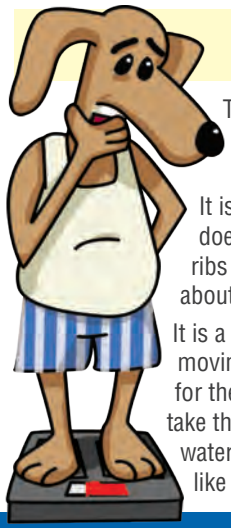
Checking for fleas

Although the low temperatures make most people think '*At least I don't have to worry about fleas!*', actually the opposite is the case! The winter is the worst time for parasites because by turning on our heating, we make our houses the perfect hotels!

Whilst it is often difficult to find live fleas, specks of flea "dirt" (faeces) in the coat points to a flea problem.

So, if you are worried about fleas or other parasites in your pets, make us your first port of call!

Winter weight alert!



The shorter days, and cold, wet weather all conspire at this time of year to prevent us and our pets getting out and about and this can have a negative impact on all our waist lines (pets and humans alike!)

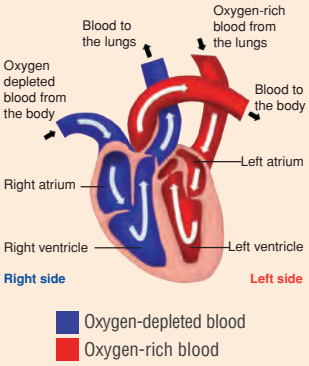
It is very important to keep an eye on winter weight gain and make sure it doesn't become too great. Get into the habit of regularly feeling your dog's ribs and monitoring their body shape. If they start to look a little broader about the beam, then you should be making some changes!

It is a good idea to cut back a little on their food. Feeding fewer treats and moving to a 'light' version of their diet will help. Also, consider other activities for them. Many agility clubs train indoors in the winter, and you could also take them for a swim in the local hydrotherapy pool, or just simply put on your waterproofs and get splashing in the puddles! Please contact us if you would like any advice.

Ticker trouble – heart disease in pets

The heart is a busy organ! In the lifetime of the average animal, it beats about 1 billion times, and pumps an average of 4.5 litres of blood around the body of a dog every minute. Located in the middle of the chest, the heart is split in half by a muscular wall. The right side of the heart receives low-oxygen blood from the body and pumps it to the lungs, where it gets rid of waste gas (carbon dioxide) and receives fresh oxygen from the air. Blood then travels to the left side of the heart, where it is pumped under high pressure to the tissues of the body, to carry oxygen and nutrients for use by other organs (see diagram right).

How the heart pumps



Like humans, dogs and cats sadly do suffer from heart disease. Unlike their owners, heart disease in pets is most often genetic, not caused by lifestyle! In dogs, two common diseases are seen by vets. In older, small breed dogs, more than half of some breeds suffer a leak in a major heart valve by age ten (called "mitral valve disease"). In larger dogs, middle and older aged dogs can develop a weakness of the heart muscle (called "dilated cardiomyopathy"). Dogs with heart disease may show signs of reduced exercise ability, heavy panting, fast breathing, cough or even fainting. In cats, the most common heart disease is a thickened heart muscle (called "hypertrophic cardiomyopathy"). This is very common, with around 1 in 7 cats of all ages affected – more cats in older age may suffer the disease, and older cats are more likely to develop signs, such as breathing difficulties or weight loss.

Early detection of heart disease is very important. If you are concerned that your pet is showing any signs of heart disease, please come and see us for a check-up. Happily, modern techniques (such as chest x-rays and heart scans) can help us investigate further and recent developments in veterinary medicine mean that we have new treatments to help dogs and cats with heart disease, which can make them feel well and maintain a good quality of life for longer.

Rabbits: a mite-y problem!

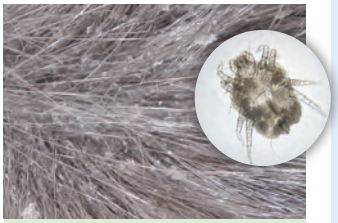
Whilst fleas tend to cause a myriad of problems in dogs and cats, **mites** are often a common problem in rabbits. It can be difficult to spot them but the symptoms they cause tend to be quite obvious.

Fur Mites: The most common mite found on rabbits is called *Cheyletiella* but it is much easier to say 'Walking Dandruff', its common name! This is because the mite is quite large and if you comb them out onto a dark surface, although they look like skin flecks, you can see them moving. They cause a thick scurf to form on the skin, patchy hair loss and they can be very itchy; affected rabbits can scratch themselves raw. It is often not possible to identify where the mites came from but it is often a bad batch of hay or bedding. Also, there is a variation in how sensitive rabbits are to the mite and often one in a group will be very badly affected but the others fine.

The treatment is a spot-on preparation, applied every fortnight for 6 weeks to fully clear the infestation. If there is skin damage, antibiotics may also be required. You should also clean out the hutch thoroughly after each treatment.

Ear Mites can cause very severe problems in rabbits. Infestations can be in one or both ears and the main clinical signs are a thick, flakey crust in the ear and a great deal of discomfort. These can be treated using spot-on drops, injections or ear drops.

So – if your rabbit is showing signs of scratching or itching, please see us for a check-up!



Fur mites can cause a thick scurf to form on the skin, patchy hair loss and can be very itchy. Inset – the mites can be identified down the microscope.

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Winter SOS!

Winter, more than any other season, brings its own challenges and potential hazards to our pets.

Older animals, especially if they are arthritic, will really feel the cold and can be noticeably stiff. If they are already on medication, have a chat to us about increasing or altering their doses to make them more comfortable. If they are not on any treatment, this is often a good time to start.

If you do manage to get out and about on the freezing days, watch out for snow and grit. The grit can cause nasty sores in your dog's paws and the snow can ball up into painful lumps of ice. So avoid both if at all possible and give their feet a good wash after walks.

Also don't forget about smaller pets who live outdoors. Make sure rabbits and guinea pigs have well insulated hutches, plenty of bedding to snuggle down in and check their water twice daily to ensure it hasn't frozen. However, do let them out on the finer days to stretch their legs. Their coats will grow more than thick enough to keep them warm and they will appreciate some fresh air!

Of course the best thing about winter is Christmas! However, many families' festivities are curtailed by pet related mishaps! Avoid any dramas by keeping decorations well out of your pet's reach; baubles and tinsel can be irresistible but extremely problematic if swallowed or smashed. The tasty treats we enjoy are not so good for our pets, so keep them out of reach! Chocolate is very toxic, especially the plain varieties and raisins can cause serious kidney damage so keep the mince pies and Christmas puddings to yourselves!

Scratching dog, rabbit, kitten and dog in snow. Jane Burton

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