



**Practice News**

We hope you all had a lovely Christmas and New Year. Did you get a puppy for Christmas? We have been running free of charge **Puppy Parties** at Bearsted Veterinary Surgery since 2007 and they have proved to be extremely popular. Socialisation is an essential part of a puppy's development and holding the classes at the surgery ensures that the puppies become familiar with the staff, sights and smells of the veterinary environment. This can prove to be invaluable when your puppy needs to return to the surgery for more unpleasant reasons! Puppies are invited to attend the parties once they have had their first vaccination at 8 weeks, and can attend for four sessions. Each owner receives a socialisation hand book at the start of the course which contains plenty of hints and tips on house training, socialisation and puppy development. **Puppy Parties are held at the surgery on Monday evenings from 7.00pm.** Please speak to reception or telephone the surgery on 01622 736677 to book your place. Puppy behaving badly? Once every four weeks, **Sam Grice** from **Dog Behavioural Services** attends the Puppy Party to answer any behaviour or training questions that you may have. Sam also runs a free drop in clinic at the surgery on Wednesday afternoons. Please telephone her on 07969 552696 to make an appointment. We would also like to welcome back Liz, our Head Nurse, as she returns to work after maternity leave.

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**Looking after your new pet!**



THE arrival of a new pet is a very exciting and happy time for the whole family and the good news is that we are here to advise

you on every aspect of caring for your new puppy or kitten!

**Vaccinations:** Provided their mother was fully vaccinated, puppies and kittens should be protected in the first few weeks of life. However this immunity rapidly falls and in order to restore it, a primary course of vaccinations is required. This immunity will also fade over time and regular booster vaccinations, combined with a health check, are the best way of protecting your pet, *plus* keeping an eye out for any other problems.

**Worms:** It is very important to treat puppies and kittens for roundworms (see photo left) since they can acquire these from their mothers early in life. As they grow up they are susceptible to infection with both roundworms and tapeworms and will require regular worming treatment. Additionally, lung-worm is a problem for many dogs (see overleaf for further information).



**Fleas:** Puppies and kittens often arrive complete with a small army of fleas, so it is a good idea for us to give them a check over on arrival! Spot-on treatments are ideal for treating your pets, whilst household sprays are great for treating your home.

**Feeding** the correct diet is vitally important! Specifically formulated *life-stage* diets are recommended and offer your pet a perfectly balanced series of diets from tiny kittens and puppies, through adulthood and into their senior years.

**Microchipping** is a very effective method of permanently identifying your pet, so should he or she go missing, you have the best chance of being reunited. **Pet insurance** is also highly recommended, giving you *peace of mind* should unplanned for veterinary treatment be required. We are here to help, so please ask us for further information on any aspect of caring for your pets!

**Vaccination against infectious diseases**

We recommend you regularly vaccinate your pets against the following, potentially fatal, infectious diseases:

**Cats:**

- Cat flu virus
- Feline panleucopenia virus
- Feline leukaemia virus

**Dogs:**

- Distemper
- Infectious canine hepatitis
- Parvo virus
- Leptospirosis
- Para influenza virus

Photos: Jane Burton.



**Early training and socialisation!**



DID YOU know that exposing your young puppy to a range of sounds and experiences, in a controlled and gradual manner in the first three months of his life (while pups are naturally investigative), can be of help in *preventing* him develop fears, phobias and behavioural problems?

Even before he's fully vaccinated, you can try to familiarise your young pup within safe environments like your house, garden and car, and with other adults and children. Short car trips can be fun and allow him a wide range of experiences – try to take him to places where he will hear other traffic and loud noises. As soon as he has developed immunity from his vaccinations it's important for him to get out and about to different environments, to meet as many other dogs and other animals as possible to build up his confidence. If you would like any further information on this very important topic – please just ask!



## Lungworm Alert!

IF LAST year's weather is anything to go by, there's a fair chance that Spring and Summer 2013 will be another wet one. Apart from making us all generally depressed, there are in addition, some animal health issues associated with this.

Slugs and snails love warmer wet weather and as well as being very bad news for gardeners, they can also spell trouble for dogs.

Slugs and snails can carry the *larvae* of the life threatening lungworm parasite *Angiostrongylus vasorum*.

This is a problem for dog owners since dogs may unwittingly swallow infected snails and slugs (or their slime trails) whilst exploring parks and gardens. Once swallowed, the larvae migrate to the heart where they will develop into adult worms.



Electron micrograph of an adult lungworm

The adult lungworms live in the heart and those blood vessels supplying the lungs. Here they lay their eggs, which hatch into larvae and

migrate into the airways of the lungs. Affected pets may show a range of symptoms including: coughing, reluctance to exercise, weight loss, fits, diarrhoea, and clotting problems. The disease can be potentially fatal.

To complete the life-cycle, the larvae that have migrated to the lungs are in turn coughed up, swallowed and passed out in the dog's faeces. As the faeces break down, the larvae are then eaten by snails and slugs.

Lungworm is not prevented by routine wormers against roundworms and tapeworms, so in addition to these we also recommend specific treatment aimed at preventing lungworm. It is also vitally important to clean up after your dog in the garden and on walks to prevent the spread of worms.

Lungworm photos: courtesy Bayer plc. Scratching dog and grooming pet: Jane Burton.

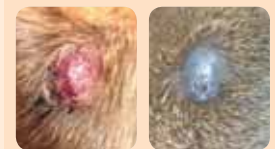
## Lumps and bumps – don't ignore them!

GROOMING and regularly stroking your pets is a very important part of pet care – not just because you and your pet will enjoy it, but also to alert you to any ticks, embedded grass seeds, developing lumps, and a host of other issues.

If you DO find a lump on your pet, there are several possible underlying causes. These include: abscesses (particularly common in cats), bee and wasp stings, hernias (often seen in younger pets) and tumours. Tumours are understandably the most worrying and are either *benign* – which tend to be slow growing and remain in one place, or *malignant* – which can be fast growing, invade the surrounding tissue and have the potential to spread to other parts of the body.

If you do find a lump on your pet, it is very important that we examine it as soon as possible. Speed is of the essence and a delay in appropriate treatment can be the difference between a small mass that is easily treatable and one that is far more difficult to treat – or is sadly sometimes untreatable.

So, now is a good time to check your pet over and to give us a call if you find anything unusual.



Skin lump on a dog Skin lump on a cat

Lumps may vary considerably in appearance. Some are fairly obvious (such as the photos above), whilst others are much harder to detect.

## Itchy skin – could it be an allergy?



DID YOU know that it's **not** just parasites that can give your pet an itchy skin? Allergies are immune reactions in which an animal responds abnormally to common, usually harmless substances; these substances are called *allergens*.

Our pets come into contact with allergens in three main ways: allergens can be *inhaled*

(e.g. pollens), *contact* (e.g. flea bite allergy where certain pets develop an allergy to flea saliva) and *ingested* (e.g. food allergies).

**Inhaled allergies** are common at this time of year – during the spring and summer months a surge in pollen levels can lead to seasonal allergies in humans and pets alike. However the symptoms are often very different; whilst humans get 'hay fever' and sneeze, affected pets tend to show *skin* symptoms – becoming *itchy*. Dogs may show generalised itchiness, but more commonly may show localised signs of paw chewing, face rubbing and itchy ears (leading to recurrent ear infections).



Paw chewing in a dog: Discoloured hair is a sign of excessive grooming.



**Flea allergies** are another common problem. Whilst fleas will *irritate* most pets, some pets (especially cats) become *allergic* to flea saliva, leading to very intense irritation and sometimes extensive hair loss – caused by over grooming.

**Food allergies** can present both with symptoms of diarrhoea and/or dermatitis (itchy skin).

Diagnosis of allergies can be tricky, but blood tests and skin testing can help us to identify substances in the environment that individual animals are allergic to, and food allergy trials can enable identification of food allergies. Common culprits include various pollens, fleas and housedust mites, as well as food ingredients such as beef, pork and wheat.

The best form of treatment, which is usually *life-long*, is to minimise the exposure of the pet to the allergen. Flea saliva allergies are greatly improved by effective flea control, whilst food allergies may be improved by a new diet that avoids the problem food. Inhaled allergens are more difficult to control, but new forms of medication can be helpful in reducing itching.

If your pet gets itchy for no obvious reason, has recurrent ear problems or has a very sensitive stomach – it could be an allergy, so please come and see us for a check-up!