

Companion Animal Newsletter - MARCH 2018

Rabbit Review - ARE RABBITS FOR ME?

In each newsletter we are going to take a look at different aspects of rabbit care, so to get the ball rolling, let's look at deciding whether rabbits are the right choice of pet for you and your family? With Easter on the horizon, pet stores see the sale of rabbits soar, but STOP! Remember - a rabbit is for life not just for Easter!

Rabbits make wonderful pets but the same amount of consideration should be taken when making the commitment to buy a rabbit as is taken when buying a cat. Rabbits will need affection and attention every day and cannot be left for more than 24 hours (ideally no more than 12 hours) without being checked and fed. They are happier in pairs or groups, need safe, secure housing which allows them to display their natural behaviour (a hutch which is at least 6ft x 2ft x 2ft with an attached exercise run of 8ft long x 6ft wide x 2ft high), and vaccination against myxomatosis and RVHD (Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease). The average cost of keeping a pair of rabbits is £11,000 over their lifetime. Do you have the time, the space and the money to give these animals a suitable home?

If the answer to all of these questions is yes, then rabbits could be the ideal pets for you! We say rabbits (plural) because rabbits evolved to live in groups, they are sociable animals and are happier kept in pairs or more. Rabbits kept in pairs or groups have been shown to be healthier than those kept alone. In winter they share body warmth to keep out the cold, they groom each other reaching those places hard for the individual to manage, like the eyes, they rely on each other, particularly in times of stress. In the wild, rabbits depend upon each other for 'safety in numbers' and this instinct is still present in domestic breeds, they feel more confident if living with other rabbits.

Grooming the eye area



It is also important to stress that whilst social animals, rabbits are also territorial so you will need to have your bunnies neutered in order to avoid fighting. Neutering your rabbit will be a similar cost to neutering a cat.

The male rabbit should be castrated to avoid the following problems:

- Unwanted litters
- Spraying urine over territory (and owners!) very much like tom cats
- Aggression caused by testosterone levels can be reduced or eradicated following castration
- Testicular and prostate cancer

The female rabbit should be neutered to avoid:

- False Pregnancies
- Uterine cancer

Introducing rabbits to each other who are not litter mates or between 8 - 10 weeks of age is a gradual process and we will cover steps to this in a later newsletter but for more information about buying and keeping a rabbit, please contact the surgery and speak with one of our vets or qualified nurses and check out the Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWAf) website at:

rabbitwelfare.co.uk.



Rabbits are happier kept in groups or pairs

Exercise for your Cat

Good exercise can help promote healthy weight loss. It is important not to do too much especially with older cats that could have sore joints and reduced mobility. Joint supplementation should be continued with pets that have arthritis so that joints don't become painful and your pet less active.



How to encourage activity in cats:

- Playing with a flash light beam on walls and floors for the cats to chase.
- Toys: Battery operated toys such as mice, wand toys mimic natural movements of birds and rodents to interest cats. Catnip pouches to stimulate the senses.
- Treat balls, boxes and fun boards, all make cats work to get small treats (food from daily allowance or diet treats). You can make your own treat box by taping the lids down on a small box and cut a small hole in the side. Your cat can then bat this around with their paws to get biscuits out.
- Foraging method: Put bowls in different places and on different surfaces to encourage cats to actively hunt for their food. If the cat suffers from arthritis, food and water should be at floor level so they don't have to jump or climb which can put pressure on their joints. Water should be readily available near resting places.
- Harness and lead to take cats for small walks building up to 3 walks of 10 minutes.
- Let them play in a big cardboard box with air holes, that they can run in and out of.



Exercise for Arthritic Cats

Exercise needs to be low impact and regular short sessions are most beneficial. Low impact means no jumping, climbing or fast pace on hard surfaces. If you were going to walk, walking on soft ground is essential.

How you can help him at home? Massage and Physiotherapy.

Gentle massage and passive movement are techniques of physio which you can do yourself. Let your cat's comfort guide you so you know how much he enjoys and the pressure he will tolerate.

Effleurage massage: For the fore leg or hind leg starting at the toes, with your fingers together, slowly push up with a medium pressure towards the upper leg region to help blood circulation. Repeat for 60 seconds.



Kneading Massage: to increase the blood flow and warm up the muscles in preparation for passive movement and active exercises. Using your fingers behind the muscle and thumb on top of muscles, perform slow, medium pressure, circular movements up and down the muscle groups. For the muscles over the shoulder or pelvis or along the spine, use fingers only and together starting at the bottom bone (adjacent to the tail), perform small circular movements up towards the back and over the muscles alongside the spine. 60 seconds for each muscle group.

Passive Range of Movement Exercises: to maintain or restore normal range of movement and prevent joint stiffness caused by muscle shortening. These are best performed with your pet laid on his side. Let

your animal's comfort be your guide. Use a slow bicycle movement of the limb to bend and move the leg. Don't overstretch the limbs.

Stretching Exercises: With one hand in front of the leg and one behind, take the leg back very gently (in line with the body) to stretch the shoulder or hip. Hold 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

With the hands as above, slowly and gently take the thigh or foreleg forward to stretch the back of the leg. Hold for up to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

If you would like to make an appointment for your pet to see our physiotherapist Hannah Coates (PgDip) please contact us at the surgery on 01729 823538.

Improving Your Cat's Environment

It's important to provide cats with a home environment to support their natural needs, especially in a multi-cat household. Normal cat behaviors are often regarded by owners as unwanted, for example scratching, nocturnal activity and predatory behaviors. If a cat's environment is not balanced to enhance their normal behavior, cats can become stressed. Stress in cats is often hard to spot as they can become quiet and withdrawn.

Litter Trays

Providing the right number of litter trays in the right location can help to prevent marking and defecation. One litter tray per cat plus a spare is the general rule. They should be located in a quiet secluded place.

Scratch Posts

Access to scratch posts and poles are essential for cats to exhibit normal behavior. If cats have clawing posts close to resting places, near doors and windows they can use these instead of your upholstered furniture and door frames!

Resting Places

Resting places need to be private so your cat can relax and sleep. Often cats like to be up high so as not overlooked. An igloo type bed is also a good option.



Feeding

Food and water bowls should be separate. Cats prefer not to drink at the same site that they eat in, so the position of your cat's bowls can be key to a cat's happiness!

By understanding your cat's natural behavior and needs, you can make a few simple changes within your home to help relax your cat, and in turn strengthen your bond together.

DALEHEAD STAFF CATS - our favourite felines!



LIVESTOCK WORRYING



Easter brings not only the endorphin rush associated with an abundance of chocolate eggs, but also the picturesque seasonal backdrop of spring lambs merrily bouncing about.

If only the reality was idyllic...

Unfortunately, the lambing season brings with it a growing number of reports of sheep worrying and, even more concerning, reported dog attacks on young lambs.

Right Of Way

We are lucky to live in a community where we have so many footpaths which allow us to wander the countryside. However, a majority of these footpaths cross land which contains livestock. There are many down sides for the landowner, but most prominently at this time of year is the susceptibility of young lambs to uncontrolled dogs.

It's a distressing reality that there are dog owners who allow their animals to attack livestock, or have the lack of common sense to recognise they are unable to control their animal or understand their dog's behaviour.

Keeping It Legal

The Countryside and Right of Way Act states that public may only exercise their right to access open land if they keep dogs on a fixed lead of two metres or less near livestock.

Under the dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953, the owner of a dog worrying livestock is guilty of an offence. More recently, livestock are also covered by the Dangerous Dog Act 1991, under which, if a dog attacks another animal, the owner can be given an unlimited fine, or a prison sentence. The owner may also be banned from owning a dog in the future and could be ordered to have the dog destroyed.

While there are laws supposedly protecting livestock, the reality is very difficult to police, unless a farmer catches the guilty dog or has video evidence supporting the incident. A farmer is within his or her rights to shoot a dog which attacks livestock on their land. It must also be highlighted that attacks, while the most instantaneous causes of devastation, are not the only problem. Sheep worrying during gestation also causes abortion and mis-mothering.

A report has been created by National Police Chief's Council along with wildlife crime and rural affairs documenting reports relating to livestock worrying in the last 4 years. For more information please visit www.npcc.police.uk/publication/livestock%20worrying.pdf.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ANNA ASHWORTH RVN, R-SQP, FARM VET TECH



Anna has been shortlisted out of 22,000 nominees as 1 of 3 finalists for the prestigious Petplan Veterinary Nurse of the Year Award! We are incredibly proud of Anna who works tirelessly and with great commitment towards promoting preventative health care on farm.

The finalists are judged by an impartial and independent panel of professionals in the veterinary field, from previous winners to presidents of veterinary associations. The judges are aware how challenging life in a veterinary practice can be and with their combined expertise and first hand experience they hope to choose a deserving winner who is dedicated to helping animals.

The award has been given to companion animal and equine nurses in the past, so we are rooting for Anna to win in order to turn the spotlight onto nursing within farm animal practice. We believe that the importance of Anna's role on farm is key to giving qualified advice and implementing practical strategies alongside your farm vet.

Well done Anna and good luck in the finals - 5th April 2018!



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Check out our website www.daleheadvetgroup.co.uk for more information about caring for your pet, special offers, vet and staff profiles and much more!

