

## Companion Animal Newsletter - July 2018

### HAZARDS IN THE GARDEN

The summer months are a fantastic time of year for us to get out and enjoy the garden with our pets but whilst we are busy tending to our borders, is there a hidden peril lurking which could be dangerous to our furry friends? In their summer newsletter, the Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS) alerted us to two potential hazards in our gardens which we wanted to share with you for the welfare of your pets.

#### Metaldehyde - Slug and Snail Bait

The VPIS report that during 2017 the biggest cause of poisoned pet fatalities reported to them related to metaldehyde based slug and snail bait. Only a very small amount of metaldehyde needs to be ingested to cause clinical effects, meaning that dogs in particular can ingest enough to cause severe issues. Slug and snail pellets should be spread thinly over the affected area but gardeners can also lay bait incorrectly in small clumps which makes a dangerous amount easy to ingest for our inquisitive pets!

One of the reasons this type of poisoning is often fatal is due to the rapid onset of its effects; in as little as 30 minutes. Convulsions can be severe and by the time veterinary help is received the seizures can be uncontrolled and prolonged. Common symptoms of metaldehyde poisoning are:

**Hyper-salivation, vomiting, discoloured blue/green diarrhoea, ataxia (the loss of full control of bodily movements), panting, tremors and twitching.**

The affected animal **MUST** receive veterinary treatment **QUICKLY** to stand the best chance of full recovery. If not seen straight away, the vet may not be able to slow the effect of the poison through safely induced emesis (controlled vomiting) or administering activated charcoal. As mentioned, the greatest concern is delay in controlling convulsions and being able to prevent the complications associated with prolonged seizure activity.

#### Foxgloves and Guinea Pigs

Although foxglove poisoning is usually rare in animals due to their bitter taste, guinea pigs seem to be the exception to the rule and are very vulnerable to the toxic effects of the plant. They only need to ingest a small amount to have problems. Be aware of the proximity of exercise runs and hutches to foxgloves (including overhanging plants), if the guinea pig is free roaming again think - can my guinea pig have access to foxgloves?

The VPIS reports that in 47 cases of ingestion of foxglove by guinea pigs, all but 1 of the animals became unwell and the fatality rate was just below 40%. Death could be sudden or over a time of 24 – 36 hours.

**Clinical signs include lethargy, tremor, ataxia, diarrhoea, inappetence, abdominal pain, muscle weakness, collapse and paralysis.**

Veterinary treatment tends to be supportive and symptomatic including fluid therapy, analgesia to alleviate abdominal pain and close monitoring of change to heart rate and rhythm.

*(ref: veterinary poisons information service – spring/summer Toxic Times 2018).*



# SHOULD I NEUTER MY RABBIT?

We consider neutering our cats and dogs, but pet rabbits can also be neutered. We want them to live happy lives with us, and neutering them can improve their long term health and welfare. Rabbits may appear cute and cuddly but, due to living hard and fast in the wild, can be extremely territorial and aggressive. Our pet rabbits still maintain all their wild cousins' traits. Read on to discover what you may need to consider for your rabbit.

## Neutering - Benefits For Both Sexes

- It allows us to keep them in pairs or groups without the risk of pregnancy and reduces the risk of fighting and subsequent injury.

## Benefits For Female Rabbits

- **Reduces territorial and aggressive behaviour which is sometimes directed at their human handlers!**

Female rabbits can be particularly aggressive during springtime, to maintain their territory for breeding. Even two un-neutered females may fight hard over territory in breeding season, which can end in serious injury when replicated in the enclosed environment of a pet rabbit.

- **Prevents phantom pregnancies.**
- **Removes the risk of uterine and ovarian tumours.**

Incidence is thought to be quite high as rabbits age. They can live longer these days with better husbandry, so this keeps them healthier as they age.

## Benefits For Male Rabbits

- **Reduces urine marking and spraying.**

Un-neutered male rabbits will happily spray mark any surfaces, including the owner!

- **Reduces sexual behaviour.**

Male rabbits can become very amorous, which be directed towards any object, including you, and can result in bites or nips.

- **Reduces fighting**

Two un-neutered male rabbits together will fight hard and can cause each other a great deal of damage – including trying to neuter each other! Two neutered male rabbits can live very harmoniously together given the right pairing.

- **Prevent testicular tumours**

Which are less common than uterine and ovarian tumours, but can be found in older male rabbits.



## Welfare

We do not advise keeping rabbits on their own. In controlled studies, that have helped improve the welfare of laboratory rabbits, it has been shown that they value contact with another rabbit almost as highly as food. Wild rabbits never live alone; they are prey animals and live in social groups to help them survive. A wild rabbit 'cast out' after losing a territory may stop eating and just take itself off to die. To reflect this for our pet animals we advise keeping them in pairs or small groups, with plenty of space. A single rabbit may be more stressed, and may be more prone to health problems, so please consider this before buying a rabbit. Neutered rabbits will be more settled and easier to bond and less at risk of damaging each other. Please remember though that, as in any relationship, even the best bonded pairs or groups may still have small spats.

They also make better companions with us when neutered. We've all heard stories of rabbits attacking dogs, cats and visitors, which sound a bit far-fetched, but are actually a true reflection of all those hormones in the un-neutered rabbit. It helps them live hard and fast lives in the wild, but is far less attractive for being a pet! Many rabbits end up in rescue centres or released into the wild by owners unable or unwilling to live with the types of natural behaviour outlined above, when in fact this could be resolved by neutering.

## AGE

We can routinely neuter rabbits whatever their age, provided they are healthy enough to withstand an anaesthetic. An assessment with one of our vets can help guide you with this. For young animals the age may depend on if they are already bonded or not but as a guide:

## Males

- This can be done as soon as the testicles appear, which may be as early as 10-12 weeks. This prevents any chances of pregnancy if bonded with a female companion, as she will need to wait a little longer. This is either done through a single midline incision in the skin front of the testicles, or by a skin incision into each testicle. The incisions may be closed with buried stitches or glue.

## Females

- Are usually done from around 16 weeks, again depending on their size/situation. Early neutering helps prevent fighting as they start to mature. This is done through a single midline incision. It is a little more invasive than castration because it does require us to go through the muscle, but quick and gentle surgery reduces the risk of complications. Incisions will be closed with buried stitches.

## ANAESTHETIC

Neutering requires the rabbit to undergo an anaesthetic. We therefore have to weigh up the risks and benefits to the rabbit. Rabbit anaesthetics are much safer than they have been in the past, but any anaesthetic does involve some risk to the individual; sometimes unforeseen circumstances or complications can occur. We understand a lot more about rabbits' needs these days to undergo these procedures as safely as possible and this is improving all the time. We use; general anaesthetics; intravenous cannulas; lots of pain relief; and, airway devices that allow safe delivery of oxygen and anaesthetic gas during the procedure. All this gives us a lot more control over the rabbit whilst undergoing a procedure.

We want you to have a happy time with your pet rabbits. If you are unsure or have any further questions then please discuss this with one of the vets or nurses on your next visit and we will happily go through things with you. We can also provide you with the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund guide to rabbits 'On the Hop' FREE OF CHARGE – please ask at reception or when you are in with one of our vets or nurses. Or it can be downloaded at:



<https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-care-advice/rabbit-care-booklet/>.

It's full of up to date information on caring for your rabbit. Please also check out their full website for more excellent rabbit information: <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk>

## GRASS SEEDS

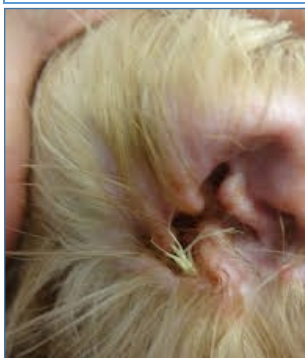
It's that time of the year again when the abundance of grass seeds can become a health issue for your dog or cat! The pointed end on the grass seed means it can easily become embedded in your pet's skin, most commonly in the paw, under the tail, or in the armpit or groin region, but the ears and eyes are also susceptible areas.

Grass seeds pierce the animal's skin or enter through the cavity (ear/eye) and can migrate deeper into the body. The seed is not usually able to be broken down by the body's defence mechanisms and so remains intact, as a foreign body which will eventually need removing.

The best way to prevent damage from grass seeds is to find them and remove them as quickly as possible when they are close to the surface of the skin and easily accessible. Daily nose to tail checks after walks, including between the toes will help to reduce the threat significantly by removing seeds from your pet's coat. If you suspect a grass seed is lodged too deeply or there is sign of a grass seed present such as a new or unusual lump, reddened or oozing skin then it is best to get it assessed by your vet. Delaying could result in more invasive surgery to find and remove the seed.

The symptoms of grass seed infections in various locations are:

EARS	EYES	PAWS	NOSE	SKIN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shaking of the head</li><li>• Redness of the ear</li><li>• Painful to touch</li><li>• Holding head to one side</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Swollen, red eye</li><li>• Excessive tear production</li><li>• Rubbing at the eye</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Licking at the toes</li><li>• Red, swollen between toes</li><li>• Swelling of the foot</li><li>• Limping or holding the leg up</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Constant sneezing</li><li>• Discharge from the nostrils</li><li>• Rubbing face on ground</li><li>• Difficulty breathing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Swollen, red lump, with possible blood or pus oozing out</li><li>• Dog licking constantly at site</li><li>• Grass seed protruding</li></ul>



If you suspect any of the above symptoms and are concerned about your pet please contact the surgery.



# DON'T BE A HOT DOG

With temperatures at record highs, most of us are donning our flip-flops and enjoying the heat. However, animals can't deal with soaring temperatures so easily, and dogs are especially at risk from severe overheating. It's important to take these crucial extra steps to ensure their safety:

## Keep Dogs Indoors

Unlike humans, dogs can only sweat through their footpads and cool themselves by panting. Soaring temperatures can cause heat stress and be physically damaging or **fatal**.

## Provide Water and Shade

If dogs must be left outside, they should be supplied with ample water and shade, and the shifting sun needs to be taken into account. Even brief periods of direct exposure to the sun during a heatwave can have life-threatening consequences.

## Walk, Don't Run

In very hot, humid weather, never exercise dogs by cycling while they try to keep up or by running them while you jog. Dogs will collapse before giving up, at which point it may be too late to save them. They can quickly become severely overheated, and an exercise session for you can turn into a medical emergency for them!

## Avoid Hot Pavements

Dogs footpads easily burn on heated roads, pavements and sand. Test the road surface with your hand before walking a dog while the sun is out.

## Stay Alert and Save a Life

Keep an eye on all 'outdoor dogs', make sure that they have adequate water and shelter from the sunlight.

## Avoid Parked Cars

Never, ever leave a dog in a parked car in warm weather, even for short periods with the windows slightly open. Dogs trapped inside parked cars can succumb to heatstroke within minutes – even if the car isn't parked in direct sunlight.

If you have any worries about your pet suffering from the heat, please don't hesitate to call us on 01729 823538 - even just for some advice.



## Wildlife Advice



The natural instinct when you see what appears to be abandoned wildlife is to pick them up, but before you do **PLEASE STOP AND THINK!**

### BIRDS

Baby birds will almost certainly be abandoned if touched by human hands, so it is worth assessing the situation first! Many injured birds are picked up unnecessarily, they suffer from shock easily and this can often lead to their death. Only pick injured birds up if there is **no chance** of them surviving in their natural environment.

Follow this simple guide (see left) from the RSPCA to help you make the right decision.

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Check out our website [www.daleheadvetgroup.co.uk](http://www.daleheadvetgroup.co.uk) for more information about caring for your pet, special offers, vet and staff profiles and much more!

