

COMPANION ANIMAL NEWSLETTER—APRIL 2021

BREEDING SPECIAL

With the increase in demand for puppies and kittens in the last year, we have seen an increase in the number of pet owners deciding to breed from their animals. Breeding from your bitch is a big decision with lots to consider. We hope this gives you a brief overview of what is involved and if it raises further questions, remember we are always on hand to answer any queries you may have.

Mating, Pregnancy and Whelping In the Bitch

BREEDING FROM YOUR BITCH

The majority of bitches reach puberty when they are 6-7 months of age. But this can vary from 4 months to 2 years dependent on breed and the individual. Puberty is marked by 'coming into season'.

There are 2 stages to the season each lasting 9 days although this can also vary.

During the first stage (pro-oestrus), the bitch's vulva is swollen and there is a blood stained discharge. The bitch will be attractive to males but will not mate.

In the second stage (oestrus), the vulva is further enlarged and turgid and the discharge becomes more straw coloured. The bitch will accept the male during this stage.

Ovulation should occur 2 days after the onset of the second stage i.e. approximately 11 days after the first signs of the season are seen. As these timings are variable, a progesterone blood test can be useful to know when to take the bitch to the stud dog. If a fertile mating doesn't occur, the bitch will enter metoestrus which lasts approximately 90 days followed by anoestrus which lasts about 2 ½ months. The figures are approximate and some breeds will only cycle once a year.

It is best for a bitch to have her first litter between 18 months to 2 ½ years and preferably not after the age of 5 if being bred for the first time. Most bitches will begin their breeding career at about their 3rd heat.

PRE-NATAL CARE

Management of the bitch: The bitch should be examined for suitability for breeding and certain breeds should be screened for genetic disease (hip scored, eye scored etc). Time should be taken to select an appropriate stud in plenty of time prior to mating, avoid using a stud dog which is a lot bigger than the dam. When choosing a sire it is best to use an experienced sire if the bitch is not and use a proven stud that is of good temperament and has already sired good strong puppies. Sometimes a dog and bitch may refuse to mate; it is advisable to have a reserve dog if this occurs. Please ask for advice from us on choosing a sire. If using an experienced breeder, it is usually best to leave them to supervise the mating.

FALSE PREGNANCY

This is the condition where the bitch shows signs of pregnancy, nursing and lactation but has no puppies. The signs occur approximately 1-2 months after the bitch has been on heat. The signs can vary from nesting behaviour, nervousness, guarding toys to producing milk. Once an individual has suffered from this condition it can occur after every subsequent season and often worsens in severity. Remove any objects which are being nursed, increase exercise levels and reduce the carbohydrate content of the diet. False pregnancy can be effectively treated with hormone medication—please ring the surgery for an appointment with the vet. We advise spaying after the false pregnancy to prevent further episodes.



PYOMETRA

This is an infection resulting in accumulation of large amounts of fluid in the uterus usually 1-2 months after a season. The affected individual is often depressed, drinking and urinating excessively with a distended abdomen often accompanied by vomiting. They often have a raised temperature. They may or may not have a discharge from the vulva. It usually occurs from 6-7 years old in un-neutered bitches. It is essential that veterinary care is sought as soon as possible as the condition is life-threatening.



MAMMARY TUMOURS

75% of bitches develop mammary tumours as they get older. If lumps are felt, they should be inspected by a veterinary surgeon. They may require removal as some growths can spread to other parts of the body. Spaying before or after their first season dramatically reduces the chances of mammary tumours occurring.

HEAT CONTROL

There are many advantages to controlling heat in bitches.

- The chances of developing mammary tumours, uterine problems and false pregnancies are much reduced
 - To prevent unwanted pregnancy
 - To make the pet consistently more companionable
 - To avoid the messiness of seasons and prevent the need to keep the bitch confined for 2-3 weeks twice a year.
- Heat can be controlled by spaying or by injecting chemical hormones regularly. It is advisable to discuss the options with us before the first season occurs. We advise against using chemical hormones long term.

MISMATING

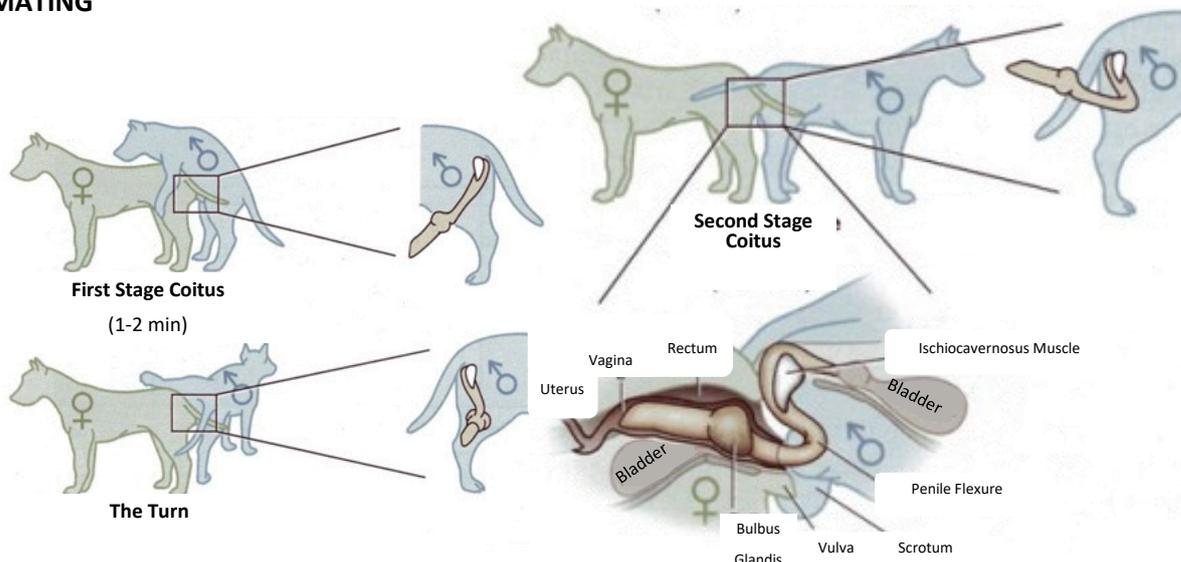
If a bitch is accidentally mated, treatment with 2 injections 24 hours apart, given as soon as the bitch is out of heat, is effective in most cases. If bitches are not intended for breeding they should be spayed.

MATING

Mating should occur in the second stage of season. The dog usually licks the vulva and then mounts the bitch. The dog will then thrust repeatedly and then dismount. The dog and bitch usually remain 'tied' back to back for some time (5 minutes up to 1 hour). No attempt should be made to separate them. A 'tie' is not essential for a fertile mating. Dog sperm can remain viable in the female genital tract for up to 1 week.

Bitches are usually mated twice on day 11 and day 13 after the first signs of a season. However the length of the proestrus is very variable, even for the same bitch from one season to the next, as is the length of oestrus or standing heat. This means sometimes repeated visits to the stud dog are needed for a fertile mating. One way to avoid the necessity of repeated visits is to have blood progesterone tests— please contact the surgery for more information.

STAGES OF MATING



PREGNANCY

The average gestation period in the bitch is 64 days with a range of 58-72 days considered normal. An ultrasound scan can accurately detect pregnancy 4 weeks after conception. Because conception can be delayed, waiting to scan until 5 weeks after the last mating is advised. The average weight gain during pregnancy is 36% and most of the changes in body shape occur by day 56 of pregnancy. Mammary development usually occurs during the second half of pregnancy.

Worming: It is advisable to worm the dam daily from day 40 until 2 days post whelping to reduce transmission of round worms from dam to offspring via the placenta and the milk. Please contact the surgery for more details.

Nutrition: At 5-6 weeks of pregnancy the diet should be changed to a growth or puppy diet to ensure a balanced diet, which should be continued to weaning, If the bitch was overweight at the start of pregnancy feed carefully as obesity can cause problems during birth.

Exercise: A pregnant bitch needs exercise and regular short walks are ideal.

Grooming: As the whelping date approaches, remove any excess hair from around the vulva and underneath to allow the puppies access to the mammary glands.

Housing: During the last 3-4 weeks of pregnancy the animal should ideally be housed in familiar surroundings with minimal contact from other animals and people to reduce possible exposure to infection. A quiet draft free environment with a proper box for whelping should be made available to the dam in the last 2 weeks. It should be large enough to allow the dam to lie out and turn around. A box with a lower side to allow easy access in and out for the bitch should suffice. This should be readily disinfected and the bedding should be absorbent, ideally shredded newspaper, corrugated paper, incontinence pads or vet bed.

MONITORING PARTURITION (GIVING BIRTH)

When the whelping is due the bitch should not be left alone for more than an hour without observation. The whelping can last for up to 24 hours. You should allow 4-5 hours of intensive care of both the dam and puppies. A drop in body temperature can occur 24 hours before giving birth often <100°F (37°C). Therefore monitoring your bitches normal temperature can help anticipate the timing of whelping. They also have a change in behaviour 2-3 days before, seeking dark places, making nests and becoming restless. They may also refuse food.

STAGES OF PARTURITION

Stage 1: 24-48 hours before parturition the bitch will begin nesting behaviour, may act restless or begin to shiver. The temperature begins to drop, cervical dilation occurs and uterine contractions begin.

Stage 2: Uterine contractions increase in strength and frequency and become more obvious to an observer. Expulsion of the puppies occurs through co-ordinated voluntary and involuntary muscle contractions. A clear fluid from the vulva signals arrival of the first puppy. There may be 10-60 minutes between each subsequent birth with no signs of straining.

Stage 3: The final stage involves expulsion of the placenta and foetal membranes. This usually occurs within 15 minutes. This occurs after each puppy is born. It is normal to see a green to brown discharge indicating placental separation. The dam should remove the membrane, clean, stimulate and bond with the new born.

Puppies can be born normally either head first or tail first. Deviation from this can cause problems. Puppies which are half born may be assisted by placing gentle traction downwards and backwards. Break open the sac once the puppy is delivered and clear the mouth and nostrils using a towel. If not breathing shake gently upside down and rub the chest vigorously with a towel, once breathing allow the bitch to lick it clean.

Any problems—seek veterinary assistance immediately.

DYSTOCIA (DIFFICULT BIRTH)

5% of bitch pregnancies require intervention. Animals at higher risk include brachycephalic dog breeds (short noses e.g. pugs). Insufficient contractions and mal-presentation of the puppy are the most common causes of dystocia. If the due date has come and passed, the dam should be examined to evaluate health. An x-ray and ultrasound scan may be necessary to confirm term pregnancy and assess foetal number, presentation and viability.

- Strong active non productive contractions for more than 30 minutes
- More than 2 hours between foetuses or failure to deliver all foetuses within 24 hours

If in any doubt please contact us and we will assist you.

Signs and indications for immediate veterinary care:

- History of previous dystocia
- Signs of illness in the dam
- Flank biting or severe abdominal discomfort
- No sign of labour 24 hours after temperature drops below 100F (37C) at full term
- 24 hours anorexia (not always)
- Bloody or foul smelling vaginal discharge
- Normal brown-green discharge without a puppy
- A puppy or foetal membrane protruding from the vulva for more than 15 minutes
- More than 4 hours have passed after onset of stage 2 labour

POST PARTUM CARE

Ensure each newborn is breathing well, ensure airways are cleared and rub the chest with a soft towel. They should be left with the bitch in a warm dry environment and allowed to suckle when the bitch is not straining. It is important that they suckle from the dam within 24 hours of birth to ensure optimum immunity and nutrition. If any of the puppies are restless or crying frequently, it is often an indication that something is wrong especially if the rest of the litter are content. Seek veterinary assistance if concerned. Using coloured collars as identification, recording body weights daily helps monitor puppy progress.

It is often unclear if a bitch has finished whelping. It is advisable to have her examined by a vet within 24 hours after whelping appears to have finished. A greenish discharge from the vulva is normal post whelping for 24 hours this can be followed by a blood stained discharge for several weeks. If the discharge is foul smelling seek veterinary attention. The bitch should be closely observed for any signs of illness especially during the first 10 days. Check the mammary glands and nipples daily, you should be able to express milk easily. Swollen and hot glands are an indication of mastitis and needs treatment as soon as possible.

The best indication that all is well is a bitch that is eating well and spending her time allowing the puppies to suckle and cleaning up after them. The puppies will open their eyes when they are about 12 days old. The energy requirements of the bitch are very demanding during lactation and she will often lose body condition rapidly whilst nursing. This is because the puppies will double their weight in about 8-9 days. Several meals will be required every day of a high energy puppy food, the bitch may require 3 times her normal food intake. At weaning gradually reduce food intake to normal. Puppies should be wormed from 2 weeks of age. Please contact the surgery to discuss the best worming protocol for your puppies.

WEANING

The puppies can be offered solid food from 3 weeks old, increase the frequency and volume of puppy food gradually. The bitch should be separated from her puppies for progressively increasing periods of time to allow the puppies to wean gradually. They should be fully weaned by 7 weeks old. Dry foods can be soaked in water to encourage feeding initially. Most puppies will leave the mother at 8 weeks of age. Ensure the puppies go to homes where they will be well looked after. It is sensible to provide new owners with information about their diet and worming.



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!

