



COMPANION ANIMAL NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2024

RABBIT AWARENESS— How to keep your hoppy friends happy!

As June is the month of Rabbit Awareness Week we wanted to discuss the importance of good husbandry and welfare for our bunny friends, and to highlight key things that you can do at home to ensure they live a long and healthy life. Rabbits make lovely pets. They are highly intelligent, very sociable (happier in pairs, or more) and are great fun to watch 'binkying' about, but of course need plenty of room to do so! It is important to know however that rabbits are not easy pets, they require a lot of commitment and have complex husbandry needs to prevent health issues.

- ◆ **Housing** – Outside rabbits need plenty of space to run around and should not be restricted to small areas either during the day or overnight. Having separate areas for sleeping, toileting and a large run for playing and eating is the ideal environment to keep them happy. Their housing should be as big as possible to encourage your rabbit to run around as they would in the wild. If you are considering keeping indoor rabbits it may be that you dedicate a whole room to them or let them 'free roam' the house, making sure to litter train them. It is also important to make sure that the house is 'rabbit proofed' and safe from potential hazards which they may chew, such as electric cables or house plants that may be poisonous to them. Non-slip flooring is also ideal, ensuring they cannot hurt themselves while racing about.
- ◆ **Hygiene** – Rabbits are exceptionally good at keeping themselves clean but can sometimes have issues with this which can result in a serious condition called 'flystrike'. This usually happens if the rabbit is obese, or has dental issues as they cannot clean themselves properly, causing their faeces to get stuck around their bottom. This then attracts flies who lay eggs which hatch into maggots. This condition is very distressing to witness and requires immediate veterinary assistance, as if untreated the rabbit will become very unwell and may die.
- ◆ **Urine scald** – a skin irritation caused by urine sitting on the fur or skin for a long time. This can get very painful if left untreated.
- ◆ **Litter trays** – if you have multiple rabbits, each one should have their own litter tray away from their bedding areas and should be cleaned daily and litter replaced. Litter trays are also useful for enrichment i.e. sandbox for digging or for keeping hay in. Practice good husbandry and clean out your rabbit's toileting area daily to prevent them sitting in soiled bedding. In warmer weather cleaning them out and checking their bottoms twice a day as a minimum for signs of matting or faeces is essential.
- ◆ **Weight & diet** - If your rabbit is overweight and struggling to groom themselves, it would be in their best interest to reduce their high calorie feeds such as muesli and to feed good quality hay, pellets and leafy greens and increase their exercise or run time to encourage weight loss. Be careful not to reduce their diet too fast though as they have an extremely sensitive digestive system. Remember rabbits are greedy and have a very sweet tooth, so it is important that we as their owners control their diet!
- ◆ **Exercise** - When incorporating exercise into your rabbit's life you can get creative! They enjoy playing with tubes and cardboard boxes for hiding. Treat balls filled with hay are fun and keep the essential fibre in their diet. Encouraging them to be more active by creating levels for them to climb up.

PETER'S FIRST MONTH IN PRACTICE



It's been great getting familiarised with lots of fresh faces since starting at Dalehead last month. The team have been very welcoming and I've been made to feel at home from the outset with offers of help always on hand whenever I've needed them. I enjoyed spending a few weeks working with Megan before she went off on maternity leave and it's been lovely to hear about the arrival of her healthy new baby boy.

The veterinary world is a very small one and I had heard lots of positive things about Dalehead prior to joining - so it was nice to experience first-hand how high the practice's standards are and how great the team here really is. Many of my colleagues from my previous job had expressed how jealous they were of the practice's location...although one close friend from a practice in East Yorkshire got a bit confused and wanted to know why I had decided to move to Seattle!

Turning up for work on 1st April - I was half-expecting to be the subject of a few April Fools jokes and had come prepared with a sample pot of Tartan Paint for the new consulting room. Fortunately, it wasn't required and I could quickly get on with the job of familiarising myself with serious things like the computer system and how everybody likes their tea and coffee!

Joining the practice around Easter meant there were always lots of lambing sheep arriving - it was incredible to see how the farm team operated through such a busy period, I've also enjoyed meeting lots of working farm collies.

Things in the Companion Animal department have been busy too and I've really enjoyed the varied caseload... from helping sort out paperwork for people to take their pets abroad to fixing broken bones. The unpredictable and varied nature of the cases we get to treat in this job keeps it really interesting.

I've been impressed at the practice's efforts to make time for regular meetings to discuss cases and new developments - I think it's really helpful in making sure we can keep up to date and offer the best care to patients. It's also clear that there's a real team ethic at the practice which makes it easy and pleasant to work here. I'm very much looking forward to the journey ahead.

Myxomatosis

Myxomatosis is a viral infection that affects rabbits. Unfortunately, we have had several fatal cases this year in unvaccinated rabbits, so would like to take this opportunity to increase awareness.

It is caused by the Myxoma virus which is carried by insects; in the UK this is primarily the rabbit flea. Rabbits can also contract the disease from each other, as the virus is excreted in the discharge from the nose and eyes of affected rabbits.



The typical clinical signs seen are swollen eyes, ears, nose and genitals. A clear discharge from eyes, nose and genitals that dries and crusts around the swelling. In the latter stages of the disease, rabbits will have difficulty breathing and often develop pneumonia.

A diagnosis is usually done on clinical presentation, and most commonly ends in euthanising the rabbit. Treatment can be attempted with antibiotics to reduce the risk of secondary infections, and supportive management, but unfortunately this is often futile. Vaccination of other rabbits in the group can be done in the face of an outbreak, but by the time one rabbit presents with signs, there is a very high chance others in the group will have already been exposed.

The main, and most effective, preventative measure is vaccinating. Yearly vaccinations are recommended to keep the immune system boosted. The vaccine does not require a course, just one vaccine a year. It is also advisable to try and limit your rabbits contact with their wild cousins - these will be unvaccinated and often carrying fleas. If they come into your garden and have nose to nose contact with your rabbit, this heightens the risk. If you have any concerns or questions about your rabbits, please speak to one of our companion animal team!



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!

