

## Spring fever!

As the days become longer and warmer, the plants around us start emerging from their winter rest to reveal their hidden beauty. But to some pets this is more of a 'siren' than 'splendour', as pollens are one of the main triggers of allergic skin disease.

First to unveil are trees, with hazel and willow the early risers. Trees are followed closely by the spring flowers and weeds, and by late spring the grasses are pollinating too. This annual surge in pollens is linked with many seasonal allergies, and not only in humans! Many dogs, cats and horses also suffer – but their symptoms differ somewhat. Whilst humans sneeze, exposure to these pollens can leave your pet itching and scratching.

*So what can be done to alleviate these symptoms?* First of all it is vital to identify exactly what is causing the problem, and the good news is that a small blood sample can tell us a lot! Knowing which pollen (allergen) is the culprit means it can be avoided or reduced. For example tree 'culprits' could be avoided by changing your walking route, and just keeping the lawn mown will prevent problematic grass pollens. However, it is difficult to avoid all pollens and treatment is often required.

In addition to more traditional forms of treatment, one novel solution is to introduce a little of each allergen into the immune system by means of a *desensitisation vaccine* made up of the problem pollens. So – if your pet is prone to itching it could be an allergy; come and see us for a check-up!

### Surgery Times

#### HEATHFIELD SURGERY

Monday - Friday:

09.00 - 11.30, 14.00 - 19.00

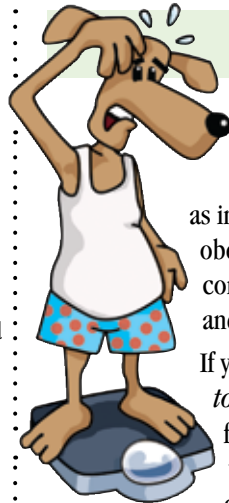
Saturday: 09.00 - 10.00

(open surgery)

#### BURWASH SURGERY

Monday - Friday

17.00 - 18.00



## The battle of the bulge!

THE long winter months are often a time of inactivity and weight gain for many pets.

However, keeping our pets fit and trim is just as important for pets as it is for ourselves, since obesity is known to cause or *worsen* a number of conditions including **arthritis**, **heart disease**, and **diabetes mellitus** – to name just three!

If you suspect that your pet has become a little *too* "cuddly", the first thing to do is to arrange for us to weigh him or her. We will also give your pet a thorough physical examination to check for any *medical* conditions that can also

result in weight gain (such as hypothyroidism – see panel right).

Although conditions such as hypothyroidism can be an issue for some pets, in the majority of cases there are no underlying medical problems and here we can advise you on the best form of weight loss programme for your pet.

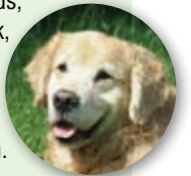
So, if your pet is looking a little podgy get in touch since weight loss can make a huge difference to your pet's health!



X-ray of an arthritic hip joint in a dog. The symptoms of arthritis are often much worse in overweight pets.

### Hypothyroidism

The thyroid glands, found in the neck, produce thyroid hormone which regulates your pet's metabolism.



*Under* production of thyroid hormone is called **hypothyroidism** and is a relatively common condition in older dogs. Lower levels of thyroid hormone result in a *decrease* in the metabolic rate, usually leading to weight gain and generalised lethargy. Other signs often include coat problems and recurrent ear and skin infections.

Diagnosis of hypothyroidism can be tricky, but in confirmed cases, daily treatment with oral thyroid supplements are usually very successful in treating the condition.

## Rabbiting on.....

WITH THE onset of warmer spring weather, now is the time to protect your rabbit from the risk of infectious diseases – specifically Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease.

**Myxomatosis** is a very distressing viral disease that affects both wild and domesticated rabbits. The virus is spread by blood sucking insects such as rabbit fleas and mosquitoes. The virus multiplies on the skin of affected rabbits, causing puffy swellings of the eyes, usually leading to blindness. Affected rabbits become very ill, often suffering from pneumonia and sadly most will die over a period of 10-14 days.

**Viral Haemorrhagic Disease** is another highly contagious and very deadly viral disease. The virus is spread both by direct contact between rabbits, or via contaminated hutches, bedding or food and sometimes inadvertently by humans. Symptoms include loss of appetite, lethargy, nose bleeds and sudden death.

Happily we are now able to offer you protection against both of these deadly infectious diseases – please contact us now to arrange a health check and vaccination.

While we're on the subject of rabbits, don't forget that another danger they face comes from **flies**. If your rabbit is allowed to get at all soiled around the bottom area, flies can lay eggs there which develop into flesh eating maggots within hours causing pain and sometimes death. So don't forget to check, and if necessary clean, your rabbit's bottom area daily and to seek veterinary advice if their droppings are too loose or too hard and predispose to soiling. And if you do see any signs of fly eggs or maggots – please call us straight away.



Rabbit photo: Jane Burton

# The heart of the matter!



DID YOU know that the heart is the most vital muscle in the body? The key function of the heart (see box right) is to pump de-oxygenated blood to the lungs where it is reoxygenated and pump reoxygenated blood back to the tissues of the body – delivering oxygen and vital nutrients for life. Whilst most of us (and our pets!) thankfully take all this for granted, heart disease is nevertheless surprisingly common; around 10% of older

dogs suffer from heart disease and it can affect younger dogs and other pets as well.

Any loss of normal heart function is called **heart**

**disease**, and this can be gradual or sudden in onset. There are many possible causes of heart disease, however the two most common causes are due to either **heart valve** problems, or a problem with the **heart muscle** itself.

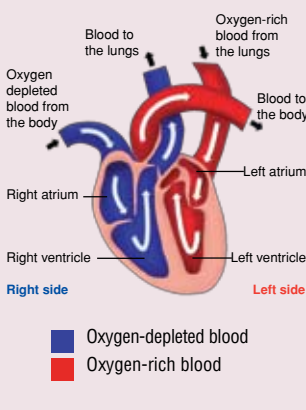
Heart disease is commonly associated with a range of symptoms including:

- Reluctance to exercise
- Tiring more easily
- Coughing
- Laboured breathing
- Pale or blueish gums
- Fainting or collapse

If you are concerned that your pet is showing *any* of these signs, please come and see us for a full clinical examination – as with many illnesses, early detection is the *golden* rule!

## The heart as a pump

In a healthy heart, the right side of the heart receives deoxygenated blood from the tissues of the body. As the chambers of the right side contract, they pump the blood to the lungs where the blood is reoxygenated. The oxygen rich blood then flows back into the left side of the heart. As the chambers of the left side contract, the blood is then pumped to the tissues of the body. This is illustrated diagrammatically below. As the heart muscle squeezes and pumps, valves within the heart prevent back flow of blood.



The good news however is that new methods of diagnosis and novel forms of treatment are now transforming the lives of many pets with heart disease.



## Down the microscope!

IT'S A worrying thought that there are a large number of parasites just *itching* to live on your pet! Here we look at a few of them:

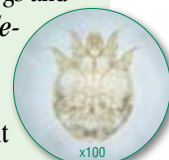
**Fleas** are 2-3mm in length and need little introduction to most pet owners! They feed on your pet's blood causing intense irritation and sometimes allergic skin reactions.

Moving down in size, **fur mites** (*Cheyletiella*) are just about visible with the naked eye, but require microscopic examination for positive identification. Sometimes called creeping dandruff, these mites infest dogs, cats and rabbits. They cause a varying degree of irritation and (like fleas) may also bite owners of affected pets.

**Ear mites** (*Otodectes cynotis*) affect dogs and cats, infesting the external ear canal – see article left. The mites are visible to the naked eye and lead to excessive wax production and great irritation.

Moving down further again in size, **Sarcoptes scabiei** is the mite which causes mange in dogs and foxes. In contrast to *Cheyletiella*, this is a *burrowing* mite – living *below* the surface of the skin where it causes very intense irritation.

Please contact us if you would like any further information on any of the parasites mentioned above. Finally, with the warmer spring weather here (at last!), it is essential to keep one jump ahead of fleas! Please let us advise you on the best form of flea control for *your* pets!



## A word in your ear!

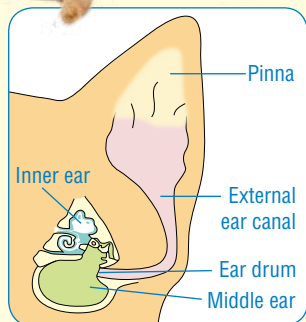
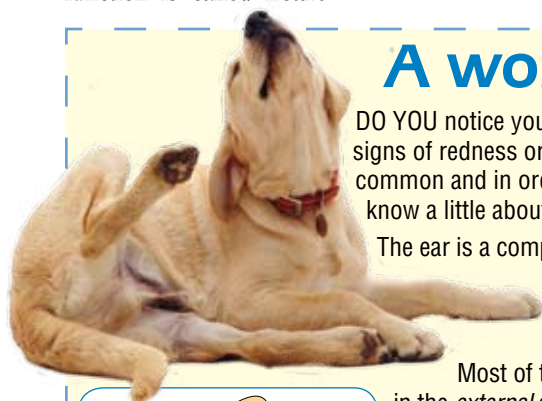
DO YOU notice your pets scratching their ears? Are there any signs of redness or discharge? Ear problems are surprisingly common and in order to understand them better we need to know a little about the anatomy of the ear.

The ear is a complex structure protected externally by a pinna (or flap). A narrow external ear canal carries sound down to the ear drum, where it passes onto the middle and inner ear.

Most of the ear problems seen in dogs and cats occur in the *external* ear canal – a condition called **otitis externa** (or canker). Symptoms commonly include **ear rubbing**, **head shaking** and **reddened skin** lining the ear canal. This is often accompanied by a **discharge** which may be foul smelling.

There are several underlying causes of otitis externa including **ear mite** infestation (common in puppies and kittens – see article right), trapped **foreign bodies** (such as grass seeds) and localised inflammation of the skin lining the ear canals – often seen as part of a more generalised **allergic skin** condition.

The key to success with otitis externa is *early* diagnosis of the underlying cause and effective treatment. Please come and see us if you are at all worried about your pet's ears.



The ear in cross section. Most ear problems occur in the external ear canal