

Practice News

Congratulations to Dr Cat Arthurs on becoming a partner at Towcester Veterinary Centre. She along with the other 5 partners will strive to push the practice along into 2012 with its high quality standards of care for your pets.

We are happy to announce that we are the only vets in Northamptonshire that can now offer 'Keyhole' surgery to neuter your bitch. A laparoscopic spay has advantages and disadvantages compared to normal surgery so please contact the surgery for more information.

We would like to **welcome** some new staff to the team.

Sarah May, a qualified vet who has been practicing for the last 14 years and has a special interest in medical cases will be joining us in January. 3 qualified night nurses, **Tracey, Anna** and **Max**, who has worked previously with both our day and night patients.

Good luck to **Julie Buckley** who is expecting the arrival of her first born in February. We wish her and her family well.

You may have noticed our solar panels on our roof. Yes, Towcester Veterinary Centre is 'going green'.

Topics in this issue:

- *How healthy are your pet's teeth and gums?*
- *Pet Insurance – is your pet protected?*
- *Kennel Cough – is your dog vaccinated?*
- *Fit not fat – fighting the flab!*
- *Don't get caught on the hop!*
- *Spring garden perils for pets*

How healthy are your pet's teeth and gums?

DID YOU know that tooth and gum problems in dogs and cats are very common, with around 85% of pets over three years of age suffering from some degree of dental disease, causing **ill health and pain?**

A **healthy mouth** typically has bright white teeth and pink (or pigmented) gums. However as your pet eats, food particles will naturally accumulate on the tooth surfaces and bacteria in the mouth digest the food particles to form *plaque* – a sticky yellow film seen on the teeth. Over time, accumulation of plaque leads to *inflammation* and *infection* of the gums – a condition called **gingivitis**. Affected gums are more reddened in appearance, and these changes may also be associated with localised mineralisation of the plaque to form calculus (tartar) – see figure 2.

If gingivitis is allowed to continue unchecked, it will in time progress to **periodontitis**; here the problem spreads *below* the gum line, leading to infections deep in the tooth socket, eventually resulting in tooth mobility and finally tooth loss.

Unfortunately once a tooth becomes loose, the problem is usually too advanced to save that tooth. However if gum problems are identified at an *earlier* stage, a combination of a Scale and Polish and ongoing Home Care can make a real difference to your pet's oral health (and also their breath!). Please contact us today for a dental check-up!



The progression of gum disease in pets



(1) Healthy mouth



(2) Gingivitis – with early calculus

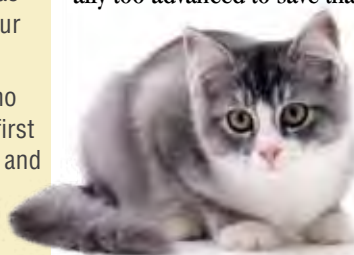


(3) Periodontitis

The Scale and Polish



Removing the calculus using an ultrasonic scaler, followed by polishing the teeth is a very effective form of treatment



Pet Insurance – is your pet protected?

IT'S a sobering thought that in a typical year, roughly 1 in 3 pets will require veterinary treatment, so unexpected veterinary bills can unfortunately occur at any time. Recent advances in veterinary medicine and surgery have meant that treatments that were unimaginable just a few years ago are now a reality; diagnostic procedures such as MRI and CT scans are increasingly routine, and surgical procedures such as cataract removals, spinal surgery and hip replacements are fairly commonplace. In addition, a range of *medical* conditions such as skin disease and arthritis can also be very costly to treat.

On a daily basis we see the heart wrenching decisions some of our clients face regarding the treatment of their pets, but with appropriate pet insurance, we can hopefully ensure that any treatment decisions are made on the basis of *need* rather than cost. So, don't take any chances – make sure you get your pet insured today!



Photos: Warren Photographic

Kennel Cough – is your dog vaccinated?



WITH the onset of warmer spring weather, it's time for pets to get out and about more – however wherever dogs meet they run the risk of picking up Kennel Cough. This is a highly infectious cough that affects dogs, rapidly causing symptoms of severe coughing and breathlessness as well as high temperatures, sore throats and loss of appetite. In the worst cases (such as in young or elderly dogs) it can cause severe and prolonged disease and may even be associated with death. Even in young healthy dogs it can cause weeks of coughing and malaise.

This distressing condition is caused by a mixture of viruses and a bacterium – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. Luckily a vaccine is available, though unlike your dog's normal routine vaccines the kennel cough vaccine is given by intra-nasal drops. We recommend that dogs are vaccinated against kennel cough before going into kennels (where dogs are kept close by one another and can rapidly transmit this infection) or at any time when the disease is rife. Please contact us if you would like any further information.



Spring garden perils for pets

It's lovely to be out and about in the garden in the spring, but beware of unwittingly introducing hazards for your pets as some of the plants and products we commonly use in our garden can be very toxic to animals.

Slug pellets commonly contain the chemical *metaldehyde* and are generally blue or green in colour. Metaldehyde is very toxic to pets and since many dogs will eat almost anything, slug pellets should only be used with great care, keeping pets away from areas where they are used and stored.

Cocoa shell mulch is also to be avoided if you have a dog. Many gardeners apply a thick layer of mulch to their flower beds in the Spring and Summer months. A little known, but potentially lethal hazard is the use of cocoa shell mulch. Dogs are attracted to these shells by their smell, but they contain theobromine which is very poisonous to dogs. As a result, it is safer to use an alternative such as tree bark.



Fit not fat – fighting the flab!

THE winter months are often a time of inactivity for many pets, when it is all too easy to put on a few extra pounds. Whilst it may be too late to make any New Year resolutions, perhaps now is the time to have a critical look at your pet! Is he (or she) carrying a bit of extra weight? Does he have a saggy tummy? Can you feel the ribs (or do you just feel flesh)? Both of these are signs that your pet may be overweight.

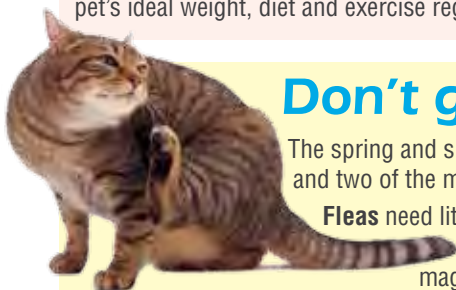
Carrying extra weight places extra demands on virtually all the organs of the body. Excess weight can lead to or worsen many medical conditions including: • joint and ligament problems, • heart disease, • raised blood pressure, • diabetes, • breathing difficulties, • decreased stamina and heat intolerance – to name just a few!

Given the potential health problems associated with excess weight – it is important to address it, and it is here that we can help. If you feel your pet is getting a little portly we are happy to weigh him or her and advise you on their ideal weight. We will also examine your pet to check for any *medical* conditions (such as an under-active thyroid gland in middle aged dogs) that may result in weight gain.

To achieve weight loss, pets need a combination of a specially formulated calorie controlled diet (often down to around $\frac{2}{3}$ their previous calorie intake) and more exercise. The good news is that as your pet loses weight, the benefits of increased healthiness and vitality are usually seen quite quickly. Please contact us for advice about your pet's ideal weight, diet and exercise regime – we are here to help!



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



Don't get caught on the hop!

The spring and summer months are peak season for pesky parasites and two of the most annoying are fleas and ticks.

Fleas need little introduction to most pet owners! Adult fleas are 2-3mm in length and can be seen without magnification. These tiny wingless insects survive by feeding on your pet's blood, causing very intense irritation and sometimes allergic skin disease. Fleas also play a major role in transmitting tapeworms in dogs and cats.

Ticks tend to be a problem in the warmer months and commonly live in areas of heathland, moorland and woodland, waiting to attach themselves to passing pets. Ticks feed on your pet's blood and can cause problems in two ways – firstly they can cause a tissue reaction at their site of attachment and secondly they can transmit serious diseases such as Lyme disease and Babesiosis.

With warmer weather on the way, make sure your pets flea and tick treatments are up to date! Please ask us to advise you on the best form of flea and tick control for your pet.



Spring bulbs are another seasonal hazard and can be fatal if dug up and eaten

by your pets. **Tulips** and **daffodils** are toxic to dogs and cats; although all parts of the plant are toxic, it is the bulbs that actually contain the most toxins. **Lilies** are also very toxic to cats and pose a hazard in the garden and also as cut flowers.

As a general rule, when adding *anything* to your garden, ALWAYS read the label carefully regarding the hazards to pets.