

# Robin Lewis & Associates MsRCVS

19 Station Street, Penygraig,  
Tonypanyd CF40 1EA

Tel. 01443 430944

VETERINARY SURGEONS

SUMMER 2012

# NEWS

## Fledgling birds

THE spring and summer months can be a stressful time for some of our favourite garden birds.



The young of our common garden birds leave the nest (or fledge) before they are able to fly properly.

Fledglings will

have grown most or all of their feathers and are very mobile, being able to walk, run and hop onto low branches and other perches.

They spend a few days on the ground whilst their feathers finish developing, before they start properly flying. Fledglings are fed by their parents who are rarely far away, hidden from view, keeping a watchful eye over their youngsters.

So, if you find a young fully feathered bird out of its nest, it's likely to be a fledgling and there is no need to be worried. The parents are probably close by, waiting for you to leave before retrieving their young. Young birds which are in immediate danger from a predator or traffic (such as near a busy road or footpath), may be placed out of harms way, a short distance away. Birds have a poor sense of smell, so briefly handling a young bird will not usually cause its parents to abandon it, but **do** make sure you leave it in hearing distance of where it was found.

A fledgling should only be removed as a last resort – for example if it is injured or has been genuinely abandoned. In this case put it in a dark, warm box and bring it to us or your local rescue centre.

Further information on fledgling birds can be found on the RSPB website at: [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

Photo: Andy Bright

## Don't get the summertime blues!



AT LAST – summer's here! But whilst we enjoy the lovely summer weather, it's worth sparing a thought for our pets. Here we look at a few steps you can take to keep them fit and well.

**Slip slap slop!** Cats just love sunbathing, however pets with *white* ear tips and noses are particularly at risk from sunburn and subsequent cancer (see photo bottom right). This risk can be reduced by keeping them out of the sun or applying waterproof sunblock to these areas during the summer months.

**Grass seeds** of the meadow grasses are an issue at this time of year. They are commonly trapped in dogs' ears, or may become embedded in the feet or other areas. In view of this, thorough inspection of the coat is advisable following walks.



**Bee and wasp stings** are another seasonal problem. Some pets are allergic to them and may require prompt veterinary care.

**Fleas and ticks** – do remember to keep up your guard against these pesky parasites and finally – **NEVER leave your pet in a car on a hot day.**

**Flies** pose a big problem for rabbits as the weather warms up. Flies are very attracted to rabbits if they have soiled bottoms – here they lay their eggs which rapidly hatch out into flesh eating maggots. It is important to check bunnies' bottoms on a daily basis and call us at once if you are worried. Also remember that pets in outside runs need a *shaded area* to get away from the sun.



Ear tip of a cat showing early cancerous changes. If your pet is showing any skin changes, please arrange a check-up

## Make sure your pets stay worm free!



DOES worming your pets seem like a constant battle? Unfortunately you can't vaccinate against worms, so regular worming treatment is the only way to ensure your pets stay worm free! Until recently, our main concerns regarding worms have been with **roundworms** and **tapeworms**. However a new and serious threat to dogs is **lungworm** infection with *Angiostrongylus vasorum*.



**Roundworms** are spaghetti like in appearance and live in the small intestines. The adult worms shed thousands of tiny eggs which pass out in the faeces and contaminate the environment. Dogs and cats are re-infected by unwittingly eating the eggs. The eggs also pose some risk to children if accidentally swallowed.

**Tapeworms** also live in the small intestines and shed segments containing eggs, which pass out in the faeces. The eggs may then be eaten by an *intermediate host*, including small rodents and fleas. Cats catch and eat small rodents and both cats and dogs swallow fleas as they groom, so re-infecting themselves with tapeworms.

**Lungworm** – caused by the parasite *Angiostrongylus vasorum*, only affects dogs. Adult lungworms live in the pulmonary arteries and right ventricle of the heart. Affected dogs can



show a wide range of symptoms – some severe, including coughing, fits, blood clotting problems and lethargy. However many pets may show no obvious symptoms. The lungworm parasite is carried by slugs and snails which act as an *intermediate host*. Dogs sometimes eat snails, but even snail slime trails left on grass and dog toys can be infected with lungworm eggs.

The good news is that worms can be controlled by following a few simple rules: **worm your pet regularly**, **use regular flea control**, try to **prevent dogs eating snails and slugs**, and **clean up faeces**. Finally, please let us advise you on the best worm and flea treatment for your pets.



Lungworm: courtesy Bayer. Rabbit Photo: Warren Photographic

Visit our website: [www.robinlewisvets.co.uk](http://www.robinlewisvets.co.uk)

## Fact File: Heart Disease



DID YOU know that the heart – the most vital muscle in the body, is a muscular pump responsible for supplying the tissues of your pet's body with oxygen and nutrients.

The key function of the heart is to pump deoxygenated blood to the lungs where it is reoxygenated, and pump reoxygenated blood back round to the tissues of the body – allowing pets to lead a normal active life. Whilst most of our pets thankfully take all this for granted, heart disease is nevertheless surprisingly common.

In **dogs** it is generally more common in older pets, but in certain breeds it is more prevalent at an early age. In **cats**, heart disease is quite commonly associated with thyroid gland disease.



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.

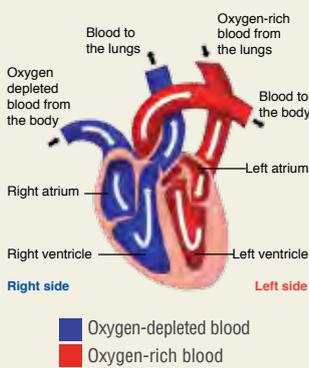
Heart disease is commonly associated with a range of symptoms including: • reluctance to exercise • tiring more easily • coughing • laboured breathing • pale or blueish gums • fainting or collapse.

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 good news however is that new methods of diagnosis and novel forms of treatment are now greatly improving and extending the lives of pets with heart problems.

### How the heart pumps

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 below.

As the heart muscle squeezes and pumps, valves within the heart prevent back flow of blood.



## Is your pet microchipped?

IT'S A sad fact that hundreds of pets go missing every day and many are never reunited with their owners for one simple reason – tragically, they cannot be reliably identified.



However, the good news is that, in addition to the traditional collar and engraved tag (which doesn't always stay in place), you can now have your pet *permanently* identified with a tiny microchip, giving you the best chance of being re-united with your pet, should they go missing.

A range of pets can be microchipped including dogs, cats, small pets, birds and even fish!

A microchip is hardly bigger than a grain of rice and having it implanted is quick and simple. Like a normal injection, it is inserted under the skin at the back of the neck and, once there, it lasts a lifetime. Each microchip carries a unique code which, together with information about your pet and your contact details, are held on a central computer database. Should your pet go missing, when found, the chip can be "read" using special hand held scanners.



A special scanner is used to "read" the unique code, speedily identifying your pet.

Veterinary practices, the police and animal welfare organisations routinely scan all strays, hopefully ensuring that if the unthinkable happens, you and your pet can be speedily reunited.

So – don't take any chances! Get your pet microchipped today!

## Rabbit dental problems – a growing issue!



YOU MAY be surprised to learn that one of the most common health problems in rabbits is dental disease. Rabbits have *continuously growing* teeth, with both the cheek teeth and the incisor (front) teeth growing by as much as 1-2 mm per week!

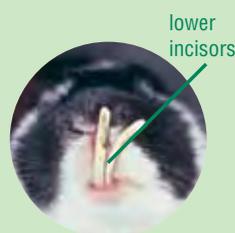
The **incisor teeth** should meet (see photo left), thereby ensuring that as your rabbit chews, they will wear down. If they become misaligned they will continue to grow, and will overgrow past each other leading to eating problems.

Turning to the **cheek teeth**, these are grinding teeth. However if they become overgrown, they frequently develop sharp spikes (see photo – lower right) which can lacerate the tongue and cheeks, making eating very painful. Signs commonly include "slobbers" with saliva wetting around the mouth, a decreased appetite and often marked weight loss.

**So what can be done to help?** Feeding your pet rabbit the correct diet is very important. Their ideal diet includes plenty of hay (high in fibre), together with a selection of fresh food and a small amount of commercial rabbit food. High fibre diets promote dental health, reduce obesity and keep them occupied for several hours each day! Commercial rabbit foods are now available as extruded pellets and this helps to avoid the problem of rabbits selectively feeding – leaving vitamins and minerals uneaten.

If you are worried about your rabbit's teeth, we would be pleased to check them for you and also advise you on diet regimes aimed at promoting optimum dental health.

**Both incisors and cheek teeth may be affected:**



Misaligned and overgrown lower incisor teeth.



Overgrown cheek teeth (arrowed) are sharp, spikey and can lacerate the gums.