

practice news...

Our vet Emma has started working towards her Small Animal Certificate. She will be travelling up to Swindon once a month to attend lectures on such areas as cytology and respiratory disease (jealous anyone!!) She is enjoying the training very much but dreading the assignments!

NEW ULTRASOUND SCANNER!

St Boniface has invested in a new fabulous ultrasound scanner! This is a top of the range instrument and has already been put to good use in the diagnosis of liver problems, heart problems and, more joyfully, pregnancy! John our small animal vet is overjoyed with this addition, 'this is a seriously useful bit of kit - it has transformed the quality of information we get from ultrasound scans.' If you fancy having a look at the machine and some scans mention it when you next pop in to the practice.

FREE WEIGH IN FOR YOUR PET...

At this time of year we are all looking to shed those festive pounds - and our pets are often the same! You are welcome at St Boniface any time for a free weigh in for your pet and a chat about their weight. Down the line, excess weight can have real health implications for your pet - heart problems, arthritis, diabetes, all sorts of things. It's not easy to get that weight off but come and have a chat to our nurses - Sarah, Fiona or Lisa for tips on weight loss.



St Boniface Veterinary Clinic
47 Mill Street, Crediton, Devon EX17 3AA

St Boniface Veterinary Clinic

BREEDING feature...



by Verity J. Griffiths BSc(Hons), MA, VetMB, GPCert(SAS), MRCVS, Southfield Veterinary Centre

So you want to mate your bitchbe prepared!

The idea of having a lovely litter of beautiful bouncing puppies is a dream for many who own a female dog. But, a word of warning... there are a lot of things to think about first!

Having a litter is very time consuming and do you really have the time to look after the pups until they are old enough to go to their new homes which is usually after about 7 or 8 weeks? Do you know enough to help your bitch during the birth or when to call for help if she got into difficulties? Could you afford a caesarean should she require it? Do you have the knowledge to rear the litter correctly and give advice to prospective owners including worming, vaccination, socialisation, nutrition and neutering?

There are many questions and the list goes on! If your dog is not a pedigree dog, health screening is not generally performed, although it would be a really good idea to first have your bitch examined by your vet, to check she has no obvious problems which she could potentially pass on to her pups. To be a responsible breeder you have to consider why you are mating your dog. Always consider health issues, temperament of the parents and plan ahead so that the pups are bred in a suitable environment. A bitch should generally be over 18-24 months old but less than 7 years old and the dog should be over 2 years old and check first whether he is proven i.e. fathered a litter before.

If your dog has a pedigree, make sure you do as much as you can to support and improve

the breed. Your breed club can help you with this. So before breeding consider doing all of the following:

Check your paperwork, make sure she has no endorsements placed on her records; if she does you may not be able to register the pups with the Kennel Club. Check what health checks are recommended for your breed e.g. hip and/or elbow scoring, eye testing and DNA testing. The more you do in preparation the less likely you will have problems with the puppies in the future, though there are never any guarantees. The stud dog will also require all these tests. Your vet can advise how to interpret the results. If you spend time to conform to your Breed Club standards, then they can be most helpful with advice and support, perhaps even helping with finding homes for the litter. This brings us to another question, could you take back any pups, should they not settle in their new homes? A good idea is to build a waiting list for potential owners even before the mating happens.

Last of all, there are many risks involved with having pups, could you cope with losing your much loved pet? I would really urge you to consider very carefully and prepare as much as you can before having a litter, however, wonderful the idea may be. There are too many unwanted pups in re-homing centres, so if you have any reservations, consider having your dog neutered, there are many health benefits for her which would be another article in its own right!

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

Small talk

St Boniface Veterinary Clinic

SMALL ANIMAL NEWSLETTER

All the Latest News from your XLVets Practice...

Breeding ...be prepared!



Preventative Health for your Rabbit...

DENTAL DISEASE The Facts...



Rabbits are now considered to be the **third** most common household pet and make the perfect companion...

Small Talk is published by: XLVet UK Ltd, Carlisle House, Townhead Road, Dalston, Carlisle CA5 7JF

© XLVet UK Ltd No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher. Disclaimer: XLVets does not necessarily share the views of contributors. No responsibility can be accepted for opinions expressed by contributors, or claims made by advertisers within this publication.

www.stbonifacevets.co.uk

Welcome...

...to the Winter edition of **Small Talk!** With Christmas indulgences behind us and a raft of New Year's Resolutions, we have a timely article looking at the role of exercise in weight management of our pets. There has been a rise in popularity of the rabbit and it is now the third most common pet in this country. However, diseases and disorders that may seem trivial in dogs and cats can often be much more complicated in the rabbit and frequently are the result of inappropriate husbandry – the article on preventative healthcare in rabbits should make valuable reading. Teeth will be a focus of attention in all our practices as we approach spring, so there is a heads up on what to look out for. Finally, for those a little more adventurous, is a discussion on what to consider if you plan to breed from your bitch. Hopefully the articles will be informative, but equally they should prompt further questions, so do not hesitate to contact us for advice on any issues that they raise.

Tim Hutchinson BVSc, CertSAS, MRCVS, Larkmead Veterinary Group



Remember Exercise should be fun, both for your pet and for you. You can get fit together and enjoy a healthy, active future.

The Importance of Exercise in Weight Management...

by Tracey Blandford RVN, Friars Moor Veterinary Clinic

In any weight loss plan exercise is essential but, knowing where to start can be difficult. First you must make a plan you can stick to and then be realistic about what your pet can manage. Just twenty minutes extra exercise a day improves muscle tone and makes a significant difference to fitness levels.

Start your new exercise regime slowly, as their weight drops and fitness improves your pet's activity levels will rise and the walk can be extended. For dogs, start with a brisk walk. Walk quickly on the outward leg and then allow them to sniff and explore on the way back, so the walk is fun, but also achieves its purpose. Add obstacles such as logs to jump, or head to the beach where resistance from sand and shallow water makes them work harder. You could also join an agility class or set up a small obstacle course in your garden.

Fetch or even hide and seek with a favourite toy are other ways to make exercise fun.

A very overweight or arthritic dog can find walking difficult, so it is

best to start with a number of shorter walks, or try swimming to reduce stress on their joints.

Most cats exercise when they are outside playing or hunting but some prefer to stay close to their food bowl. These cats need a little more encouragement. Start by stimulating their natural hunting instincts. Feathers on string or ping pong balls flicked across their line of sight make excellent toys. They might start with just a paw stretched out to grab it but don't give up. A little effort is better than none at all and short bursts of energy all add up. The key is to leave them wanting more so the next time that toy flicks past their eyes they'll be ready. You can also hide some biscuits from their meal allowances and encourage them to hunt for their food. This has the added benefit of relieving boredom as well as encouraging exercise.

Rabbit Preventative Health

by Kathryn Harris BVMS, MRCVS
Minster Veterinary Practice

Rabbits are now considered to be the third most common household pet, and with people living busier lives in smaller homes they make the perfect companion for many families.

However, it is important to recognise that rabbits have special requirements and need very different care to that of our dogs and cats. Rabbits are essentially a prey animal, and this inbuilt fear of being attacked lies at the heart of their habits and behaviour.

Rabbits need to be able to graze all day (just like cows) on grass or hay. They need to have a secure warm shelter to escape to and to protect them from the elements. This shelter should mimic the 'burrow' that they would create and use in the wild. Rabbits love hollow tubes and cardboard boxes, along with shelves to stand on to see all around them.

Rabbits need careful secure handling as, being a prey species, they may worry that anyone picking them up is attacking them. Your practice nurse can give plenty of advice on how to hold, house and feed your bunny.

The main problems we see in bunnies are as a direct result of a poor diet, including dental disease, flystrike, obesity, bloat and bladder problems.

Bunny rabbits can be vaccinated against two common fatal diseases. The most well known of these is myxomatosis; a virus spread by fleas and mosquitoes. It causes the eyes and lips to become so swollen and infected that they can no longer eat.

The less well known disease, but equally fatal is Viral Haemorrhagic Diarrhoea. This virus causes acute bleeding and sudden death, and it can be easily passed between rabbits.

Both of these diseases can be prevented by regular vaccinations which your vet can explain in more detail. House rabbits should also be vaccinated as they can be exposed to these illnesses via their owners and other pets in the home.

Rabbits do get parasites, and the most unpleasant of these is called encephalitozoon cuniculi, passed on from infected wild bunnies via grass and plants or direct contact. It causes neurological changes, often referred to as 'floppy bunny syndrome'. This can be prevented by regular use of a rabbit specific wormer 2-4 times a year. We also recommend washing and drying any plants/dandelions etc before giving them to your rabbit. Treats such as carrots or honeyed snacks should only be given in small amounts, 2 or 3 times weekly.

Rabbits respond well to regular handling and become very loving and curious pets. Daily handling means they can be regularly checked for any signs of ill health such as flystrike (maggots which burrow into the skin) or bloat. We see plenty of geriatric bunnies and can successfully manage age specific problems, such as arthritis, with long-term medication.

I love my bunnies, and I am sure if you have the pleasure of keeping them as pets you do too. If you would like to read more about rabbits, the Rabbit Welfare Fund (RAW) website www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk is a great source of information.

Dental disease in cats and dogs is a problem that is often overlooked until your pet has severe disease present, sometimes seen as trouble eating.

by Sophie Armstrong Bell BVSc, MRCVS, Cliffe Veterinary Group

Dental disease

Dental problems in animals can be due to broken teeth, recession of gums allowing bacteria to decay tooth roots or simply poor dental hygiene leading to an accumulation of tartar with subsequent tooth decay. In many cases by the time dental disease is detected there's little we can do other than remove the damaged teeth and clean the remaining healthy teeth. If we can detect dental problems earlier we can address the predisposing factors to prevent tooth loss.

The best way to detect dental problems early is to look at your pet's teeth. If you

have problems doing this then make an appointment with a veterinary nurse to examine your pet's mouth for you. Things to look for are:

- **Inflamed gums** that look red, swollen, or may bleed
- **Broken teeth** that look irregular or sharp
- **Tartar** build up on the teeth, this usually appears as a brown or yellowish discoloration particularly on the canines and back teeth
- **Halitosis** (bad breath)

If you notice any of these problems, make an appointment with your vet for a full evaluation. Generally, major tartar build up has to be removed by doing a 'dental'. This means a full scale and polish of the teeth under

general anaesthetic. Once the teeth have been cleaned we can then look at preventative measures to try to avoid further build up. This can include changing your pet's diet so the food they eat mechanically removes tartar, using antibacterial agents in their drinking water and, if your pet will allow, brushing their teeth. If there is only minor tartar accumulation then performing some or all of the above preventative measures can remove tartar.

If you think your pet may have dental disease then please, contact your vet. Severe problems need to be addressed for the short and long-term health of your pet. Less severe problems can often be rectified before causing problems.

DID YOU KNOW...

Dental disease affects around 85% of dogs over the age of 3 years...

