



## Seasonal Itches!

As the weather improves and we head out of lockdown, spare a thought for our pets who often start to itch more – here we look at a couple of possible causes:

**Skin allergies** are reasonably common in dogs, especially at this time of year. Pollens from plants, grasses and trees irritate the skin. The most common places for sore spots to develop are typically the feet, stomach, armpits, groin and ears. Underlying skin allergies are also a very common cause of ear disease (see back page article). Affected areas are usually pink and variably itchy.



Allergic irritation and foot chewing in a dog.



**Fleas** are another seasonal culprit! They can be found in abundance on wild and domesticated animals, jumping effortlessly onto your pet. Affected pets will often groom excessively, making fleas paradoxically hard to find! A tell-tale sign is often evidence of small black granules of flea "dirt" (see below).



Flea infestations in cats often lead to over grooming, commonly with crusting.



Specks of flea "dirt" (flea faeces) in the coat strongly indicate a flea problem.

So, if your pet is showing signs of skin problems, come and see us for a check-up! We can check for fleas (and a range of other possible parasites) and advise you on the best preventative products. Diagnosis of allergies is more tricky, but blood tests and skin testing can help us identify the cause. It is usually difficult to *cure* allergies, but modern treatments can be very effective in making pets less itchy.

## Should I have my pet neutered?



As life slowly starts to return to normal after a tumultuous year, one of the things to consider as a pet owner is the subject of neutering. In fact – as well as preventing unwanted pregnancies, there are a wide range of other benefits to neutering and we've outlined some of these below:

**Dogs:** In female dogs, heat periods (or seasons) usually occur twice a year and last about three weeks. In both sexes, the urge to mate can lead to roaming, which can result in them becoming lost, injured or worse. There are also health benefits to neutering such as a large reduction in the risk of them developing mammary (breast) cancer if the neutering is done at a young age and also the prevention of otherwise life-threatening infections in their uterus, which occurs in around 1 in 4 entire bitches.

In male dogs, castration eliminates the risk of testicular cancer and makes prostate problems less likely as well. Also, for some it can have very positive effects on their behaviour.



**Cats:** Female cats will start their first season from as early as four months of age and may come into heat every three weeks during the breeding season (in the spring and summer months). By neutering your cat early, as well as avoiding unwanted litters of kittens, you will also reduce the risk of mammary cancer later in life, which is often aggressive in cats.

Un-neutered male cats are more commonly involved in fights, putting them at increased risk of viruses such as FIV and Feline Leukaemia. They also mark their territory by "spraying" objects inside and outside your house with strong smelling urine.

As you can see there are a wide range of benefits to neutering your dogs, cats, rabbits and guinea pigs. Contact us for further information or to book your pet in for an operation.



### What about 'small furries'?

**Guinea Pigs** are sociable animals and should be kept in groups or pairs; males reach sexual maturity at 9-10 weeks, females even earlier at 4-6 weeks so it is essential that the male, at least, is neutered to prevent unwanted pregnancy. Housing guinea pigs with rabbits is not recommended.

**Rabbits** will also generally benefit from being neutered. Both sexes make much better, calmer pets and are also much more likely to live peacefully with others. Entire rabbits will often fight, even if related. Also over 80% of older un-neutered female rabbits may suffer with, and often die from, uterine cancer.

## Don't get caught out by Kennel Cough!



As the weather improves and pets and their owners get out and about more, so the risk of Kennel Cough increases. In fact – wherever dogs meet (out on walks, at the beach, training classes, dog shows and of course boarding kennels), this highly contagious cough is readily spread.

More correctly called "infectious tracheo-bronchitis" the condition can involve several viral components, plus a bacterium – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. It causes a harsh

cough, an inflamed throat and sometimes nasal discharge. The signs can be dramatic, and it is not uncommon for owners to become concerned their pets have something stuck in their throats. The cough is often self-limiting, but can still persist for several weeks.

To give your dog the best protection against Kennel Cough, a vaccine is available to reduce the risk of developing the disease and reduce clinical signs. This is given *in addition* to your pet's standard vaccines. Please contact our helpful team for further information.

## A word in your ear!



Ear disease is surprisingly common in pets and often results in head shaking and ear scratching, commonly accompanied by redness and discharge. However, unlike the problem in people where “ear aches” usually affect the inner and middle ear, most ear problems in pets occur in the *external* ear canal – where the condition is termed *otitis externa* (or canker).

Anatomically, the outermost part of the ear is the pinna (or flap). The pinna of cats are particularly mobile, enabling them to accurately locate sounds. Dog pinnae vary widely depending on breed. Interestingly, both cats and dogs also use pinna position as a means of non-vocal communication.

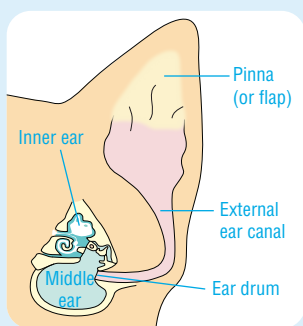
Sound is collected by the pinna and then travels down the narrow external ear canal to the ear drum, where it passes into the middle and inner ear. In the healthy ear, the opening to the external ear canal is lined with smooth pink (or pigmented) skin, with no evidence of any narrowing, redness or discharge. It's a good idea to check your pet's ears regularly to pick up any ear problems early.

Virtually all otitis externa (or canker) is triggered by an *underlying* cause which can include:

- Ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*) are commonly seen in puppies and kittens and are usually associated with a crusty brown discharge – see photo right.
- Localised allergies affecting the skin lining the external ear canal are another common cause. These are often part of a more generalised allergic skin condition also affecting other body areas
- Foreign bodies – such as the **grass awns** of the meadow grasses are a particular problem in the summer months and can easily get stuck right down by the ear drum – see photo right. They often present with sudden onset head shaking.

In many instances of ear problems, *opportunistic* bacterial and fungal infections colonise the ear canal which can both obscure diagnosis of the underlying cause, and also complicate treatment.

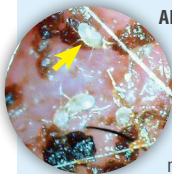
In common with many conditions, the key to success with otitis externa is *early diagnosis and treatment*. If your pet is showing *any* of the symptoms described above, please bring them in for an examination since the sooner we can start any required treatment, the better! If left too long, ear disease becomes very difficult to treat.



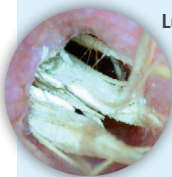
The ear in cross section. Most ear problems occur in the external ear canal



**Above:** Otitis externa in a cat with ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*) with a typical crusty brown discharge.



**Left:** close up of ear mites (yellow arrow)



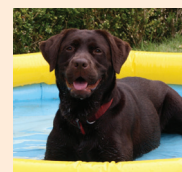
**Left:** Photo of a grass awn lodged at the base of the external ear canal. Pets with trapped grass awns will often present with severe head shaking.



## Summertime at last!

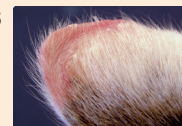
As we head out of lockdown, and at long last start to embrace our new-found freedoms, we can also (hopefully!) look forward to some beautiful summer weather with warm sunny days and balmy BBQ evenings. But we do also need to consider our pets, who can often find the warmer summer months quite a challenging time.

**Keeping it cool** – it is vital to ensure your pet keeps cool in hot weather. Dogs should only be walked early or late in the day to avoid heat stroke. If you have space, dogs love cooling down in a paddling pool. Frozen ice treats are also a good way of cooling your dog down on a hot day. Remember, **NEVER** leave your pet in a warm car – with their furry coats they can over-heat extremely rapidly.



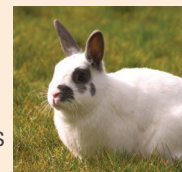
**Guinea pigs and rabbits** are also at risk of heat stroke and it is vitally important that they have access to lots of shade at all times, plus ample cool water – preferably in a bowl (not a bottle).

**UV Alert!** Cats with white noses and white ear tips are at risk of getting these areas sunburnt and this can lead to cancerous changes. High factor special pet safe sun creams applied to the at risk (white) areas, helps to minimise this risk.



Ear tip of a cat showing early cancerous changes

**Flystrike** is a very serious problem. Rabbit rear ends often become damp and this moist area attracts flies, which lay their eggs there. These eggs hatch out into maggots which can cause life threatening infections. Rabbit rear ends should be inspected daily for fly eggs and maggots, and soiled bedding should be cleaned out daily. Additionally, there is also a preventative treatment which can be of help – please contact us for more information.



**Tick alert!** It's important to check your pet after every walk to spot if any **ticks** have become attached. These can be anywhere – around the head, under the belly or in armpits. Ticks can be removed using a special tick device or in the surgery. There are a range of tablets, collars and spot-on products to kill ticks. Using prescription strength veterinary only medication (which very rapidly kills ticks) is key to preventing a range of deadly diseases that ticks can transmit.



## Rabbits: don't get caught on the hop!



Just like other pets, rabbits benefit from regular vaccinations and health checks to keep them fit and well. Did you know they can be **vaccinated** against two potentially fatal infectious diseases?

**Myxomatosis** is a viral infection spread by blood sucking insects such as rabbit fleas and mosquitoes. This is a horrible disease and can lead to blindness, difficulty eating and often death.

**Viral Haemorrhagic Disease** (VHD) is another highly contagious and deadly viral disease. The virus is spread both by direct contact between rabbits, or via contaminated hutches, bedding or food. Symptoms include loss of appetite, lethargy, nose bleeds and sudden death. There is now a new deadly strain of VHD, called VHD-2.

We recommend vaccinating your bunnies against all of these horrible diseases and can advise you on how to do this most effectively, just give us a call!