

25 years
of caring for your pets!
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SUMMER 2011

LUCAS NEWS

Veterinary Surgeons

Itchy scratchy...

There are lots of causes of itchy-ness in pets, but after parasitic problems, did you know that allergies are fairly high up the list!

Inhaled allergies are a big problem at this time of year. In the spring and summer months a surge in pollen levels (from trees weeds and grasses) can lead to seasonal allergies in humans and pets alike! Many dogs, cats and horses suffer at this time of year, but their symptoms differ from humans. Whilst we sneeze, pets tend to show *skin* symptoms – becoming *itchy*. In dogs, the paws and ears are often affected first, but generalised itchiness can follow.

Flea allergies are another common problem. Cats in particular may become allergic to the saliva of fleas, leading to very *intense* skin irritation and hair loss. Many pets are also allergic to **food** components in their diet – leading to diarrhoea and/or itchy skin.

Sadly allergies cannot usually be cured and may require management for life. Pets either have to avoid contact with the allergen, or will require medication to alleviate the symptoms. The good news is that a simple blood test can now tell us a lot about the underlying cause of the allergy, allowing us to devise a suitable treatment. Food allergies usually respond well to simply changing the diet, whilst effective flea control will help flea allergies. Inhaled allergies are more difficult, but novel forms of medication can be very helpful.

If your dog or cat appears to have itchy skin or recurrent ear or paw problems – it could be an allergy, so please see us for a check-up!

Pet passengers... Are fleas and ticks an issue?

AT LAST – the warmer weather is on the way! But beware – any *flea eggs* lurking in carpets and bedding, or outside in parks and gardens, will start to hatch and develop into adult **fleas**! Worse still, adult fleas are very able hoppers and will quickly make their home in your pet's coat, where they will repeatedly feed on their blood. Fleas can cause a multitude of problems including skin itchiness, rashes, infections, hair loss and in extreme cases – anaemia. And if this isn't bad enough, they can bite us as well!

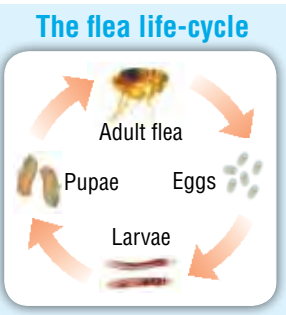


Most troubling of all, a single adult flea can lay around 50 eggs per day! These fall off your pet and are deposited in carpets, bedding and also in outside areas. Whilst the eggs can sometimes remain dormant for many months, in *warm* weather they will rapidly hatch out and develop (via larval stages) into adult fleas. As a result, it is easy to see how a small number of flea eggs can lead to a flea problem of epidemic proportions in just a few weeks!



Ticks are another problem to contend with at this time of year. In contrast to fleas, ticks live in areas of long grass, woodland and heathland, waiting to attach themselves to passing pets. Once attached, ticks feed on your pet's blood, sometimes for several days.

Ticks can cause problems in two ways: firstly they can sometimes cause quite marked tissue reactions at the attachment site and secondly, while feeding, they can transmit dangerous infections such as Lyme disease and Babesiosis. Don't let pesky parasites make your life a misery! Make sure you are up to date with flea and tick treatments – please let us advise you on the best form of flea and tick control for your pet!



Be a parasite detective!

Fleas: Specks of flea "dirt" (faeces) in the coat indicates the presence of fleas.



You can confirm these specks are flea faeces by performing a **wet paper test**. If you hold a piece of moist white paper near your pet and scratch his coat, you may see fragments of flea "dirt" fly onto the paper where they dissolve yielding a characteristic reddish blotch which confirms the presence of fleas.

Ticks: Parting the coat reveals a tick in situ with buried mouth parts.



Cat photo: Jane Burton

Kennel cough – is your dog protected?



DID YOU know that wherever dogs meet they run the risk of picking up Kennel Cough? This is a highly infectious cough, rapidly causing symptoms of severe coughing and breathlessness as well as high temperatures, sore throats and loss of appetite. In the worst cases 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.

The condition is caused by a mixture of viruses and a bacterium – *Bordetella Bronchiseptica*. Although your pet's regular booster vaccinations should provide protection against the viral components of the cough, only intranasal vaccine drops can offer protection against *Bordetella*. We recommend that dogs are vaccinated against kennel cough before going into kennels or at any time when the disease is rife. Please contact us if you would like any further information!

Keep a watchful eye out for lumps and bumps!



IN ADDITION to the regular health checks your pet receives when visiting us, it's a great idea to perform some form of routine check yourself. Get your pet used to you looking at their eyes, ears, teeth and giving them a general check-over. This way you will hopefully pick up early signs of problems including any abnormal lumps.

If your pet does develop a lump, there are several possible underlying causes – these include abscesses, hernias and tumours. The most serious of these are tumours which are either *benign* – which tend to be slow growing and remain in one place, or *malignant* – which invade the surrounding tissues and may also spread to other parts of the body.

If you do discover a lump on your pet, it is very important that we examine it as soon as possible in order that we may establish the underlying cause and start any treatment without delay. Timing is everything and delay in appropriate treatment can be the difference between a small mass that is easily treatable by surgical removal and one that is far more difficult to treat. So if you are concerned about a lump on your pet – or any other health problem, please contact us today for an appointment.



Skin lump on the nose of a dog

Lumps may vary considerably in appearance. Some are fairly obvious (such as the photo above), whilst others are harder to detect.

Some lumps move with the skin while others feel 'stuck' to underlying tissues. Some are associated with reddening or bleeding, others are surrounded by swollen or inflamed tissue.

Early detection of lumps is always the "golden rule".



Does your pet drink like a fish?

INCREASED thirst is commonly seen in older pets and whilst warm weather may be a factor, it is an important symptom that shouldn't be ignored, as it may be a sign of a serious underlying disease. Pets may appear relatively normal or show a variety of other symptoms.

In cats it can be particularly noticeable, since most cats spend years showing no interest in water, and then suddenly you are regularly filling their water bowl.

Increased drinking may point to a range of problems including: kidney or liver disease, diabetes mellitus, Cushings disease in dogs and hyperthyroidism in cats (to name just a few!). Additionally, older unspayed female pets are predisposed to pyometra – a life threatening uterine infection that commonly has increased thirst as one of its presenting signs.

So if you think your pet is drinking more than normal, please bring them in for a check-up. As well as giving your pet a thorough clinical examination, **urine and blood tests** are usually very helpful in making a diagnosis. Once the problem is identified, we can hopefully get treatment (tailored to the specific condition), speedily underway.

The good news is that although there is no cure for old age, we do have treatments for many of the conditions mentioned above which will hopefully ease the symptoms and prevent or slow the progression of the disease. Please call us if you are at all worried!

Summertime: The heat is on!

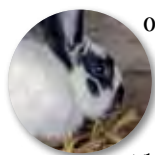


Every summer guinea pigs and rabbits die of heatstroke.



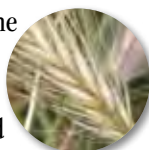
Always provide plenty of water and position any runs (and hutches) in the shade.

Flies also pose a huge problem for rabbits in the warmer months. Rabbit rear ends often become damp and this moist area attracts flies which lay their eggs there.



These in-turn hatch out into maggots, which burrow through the rabbit's skin and into the underlying flesh. During the summer months, rabbit rear ends should be inspected on a **daily** basis for fly eggs and maggots. Please call us at once if you are worried.

Grass seeds are another summer problem – the grass awns of the meadow grasses are easily trapped in the coats of pets – especially dogs. They then migrate and become lodged in



a variety of places including the ears and between the toes.

It is always a good idea to groom your pets regularly, and especially after walks, to keep a close eye out for grass seeds.

The **sun** itself can also pose a hazard. Pets (especially cats) with white ear tips and noses are particularly at risk from sunburn which in turn can lead to cancerous changes in the sunburnt areas. High factor sunblock applied to the at risk (white) areas helps to minimise this risk.



Ear tip of a cat showing early (reddened) cancerous changes.

If your pet is showing signs of skin changes, please call us at once.

Also watch out for **bee** and **wasp** stings that may require prompt veterinary attention since some dogs are allergic to their stings.

Finally, please remember that the temperature in **cars** can rise rapidly and death from heat stroke can follow in minutes, so pets should **never** be left unattended in cars.