

WARBY STREET VETERINARY HOSPITAL

# Summer Newsletter



December 2008 - February 2009.

## SNAKE BITE

It is starting to feel like Summer again in Wangaratta. Unfortunately along with daylight savings, BBQ's and holidays come the snakes!

We have already seen several cases of snake bite this year and there will certainly be a few more before the cool weather returns next Autumn. The important thing for pet owners to know during this time is how to reduce the risk of snake bite and also what to do if you think your dog or cat has been bitten by a snake.

Although some animals will be inherently at risk from snakes because of where they live there are usually a few things that you can do to reduce the risk of your pet encountering a snake. Many snake bites occur while a dog is being walked and is allowed off the lead. Simply keeping your dog on a lead during its walks will greatly reduce their risk. This is especially important for breeds such as terriers which are known to go after snakes rather than back down from a fight. Keeping your backyard tidy and reducing places for snakes to hide such as long grass and wood heaps is also a good practice to adopt. There are also products on the market that emit vibrations to deter snakes from your premises that we have available. When they are not working, farm dogs should ideally be kept in a secure yard free of places for snakes to hide or kept on the chain. Dogs allowed to run freely around the farm have a significantly increased risk of snake bite.

If you think that your dog or cat has been bitten by a snake, timely examination and treatment are imperative. There are some simple tests that we can conduct to determine if a bite has occurred. It is always best to have your animal checked for a small cost than to wait and see what happens. If your dog has been bitten by a snake it will generally begin to drool, vomit, shiver or collapse. The pupils in the eyes are generally dilated and the dog will be wobbly on its feet or unable to walk. These signs progress to collapse and death. There is usually a window of about 1-2 hours after the bite where we can successfully intervene. It is possible that there will be an initial collapse after which the dog looks much better again. However, the signs will return and progress. Cats will often show similar signs, but may simply appear lethargic and depressed making suspicion of snake bite by the owners more difficult.

Snake bite is a very treatable problem and in many cases when treatment is instituted early enough the animal makes a good recovery ready to fight another day!

### MICROCHIPPING

Microchipping is now mandatory for all new registrations in Wangaratta  
Microchipping is on special for **\$31.50** at present, a saving of **45%**

# Patterson's Curse



Whether known as Patterson's Curse or Salvation Jane this plant is a major problem weed that can be very damaging to stock and horses. Like many of the other agricultural problems in Australia it is an introduced species, being native to areas from the south of England to the Mediterranean. It was originally introduced both by contamination of seed and by settlers who used it as an ornamental plant. The most notable of these was a Jane Patterson from which it has taken both of its names. It has become a widespread pasture weed over much of NSW, the ACT, SA, Tasmania and Victoria. It is easily recognizable by its purple flowers that can often seem to form a carpet over large areas of pasture land in the late Spring and early Summer. It is a flowering annual plant and unfortunately is very drought resistant and produces a huge amount of seeds that are spread by wind, water and as a contaminant of hay each year. The major problem with Patterson's Curse is in periods of drought when less hardy pasture species fail and the Patterson's Curse plant thrives, often making up the major part of a paddock. Stock or horses in this paddock have little choice but to eat the plant, which is harmful and in worse cases fatal. In 2002 Patterson's Curse was estimated to cost the wool and meat industries over \$125 million.

The toxic part of the Patterson's Curse plant is the pyrrolizidine alkaloid compound. It is metabolized by the liver and the products accumulate in the body over time. These metabolites are the actual toxic product and cause progressive damage to the liver. This damage can progress to liver failure and death especially if the animal continues to ingest the plant. The plant is not very palatable and animals will avoid it if they can. The problem occurs in drought when there is little else to eat and the Patterson's Curse plant is present in large amounts. Cattle and horses are very susceptible to the poison. Sheep are about 30-40 times less prone to disease than cattle.

The liver damage progresses slowly in the animal, but the onset of clinical signs is usually sudden when the liver's coping mechanisms are finally overcome. The signs usually involve inappetence, photosensitivity (rashes on exposed skin), a drop in milk yield, and loss of weight. The onset of these symptoms may occur many months after ingesting the pasture. Horses may appear to be blind and most animals are unresponsive to external stimuli. Head pressing and worsening weakness proceeding to collapse are usually the outcome in poisonings. The disease is usually fatal and can only be treated with supportive care and removal from the offending pastures. In subclinical cases animals "do poorly" and fail to put on weight, produce lower volumes or milk or poor wool clips.

Prevention of poisonings is obviously far better than trying to treat cases of the disease. The purple flower generally makes it easy to spot how bad an infestation there is. Attempts should be made to stop animals ingesting the plant. If they must be in a paddock with the plant and there is little other food then supplementary hay must be used to prevent animals eating the plant. Eradication of the plant can be done by hand with very small numbers of plants. However, spraying is usually necessary. The seeds can last for up to 5 years in the environment so it is often difficult to get rid of the weed. There are a number of biological controls that have been started to try and use the plant's natural insect parasites to reduce the spread. The CSIRO is optimistic about these controls, but it will be at least a decade before major inroads are made into controlling this problem.

## *"King Valley Run"*

A service provided every Tuesday charging TRAVEL fees from Greta, Moyhu or Milawa.

## *"Beechworth & Myrtleford Valley Run"*

A service provided every Thursday charging TRAVEL fees from Markwood, Everton, Beechworth and Myrtleford



# Christmas Holidays and Pets



As the holiday season approaches it is a good time to make sure we can make it as safe and trouble free for our pets as possible. After all no one wants to be in the vet surgery when they'd rather be at home watching the cricket or swimming in the pool.

Many people will be heading away on holidays soon. It is important to remember that if your pets are going to the boarding kennels or cattery that they need to be up to date with their vaccinations. This needs to include kennel cough vaccination for dogs. For your pets to be fully protected we recommend that any necessary booster vaccines are given at least 2 weeks prior to their holiday at the boarding kennels. Although the kennels will probably accept your pets if they have been vaccinated very soon before their holiday they may not be fully protected. Please contact the kennels to determine their requirements and give us a call if you have any queries about what your pets need. If you have friends looking after your animals make sure they will check them a couple of times each day as the hot weather can lead to any illness progressing quickly if untreated.

Christmas time is always a time for BBQ's, stone fruit and overindulgence. Please bear in mind that many of the things we enjoy over the holidays can be hazardous to our pets. Peach and Nectarine seeds are a common cause of serious intestinal blockage and expensive abdominal surgery to remove them. Corn cobs can also be swallowed by dogs along with satay/kebab skewers, both of which can cause serious damage. Please be careful and make sure that these hazardous foreign bodies are put in the bin and don't fall into the wrong paws. In addition many BBQ foods can cause stomach upsets in our animals and in worse cases fatty scraps can cause pancreatitis, which will require hospitalisation for as long as the Boxing Day Test! Remember other normal human foods such as onions and chocolate are toxic to our pets and should be avoided.

Many people are also travelling with their pets at this time of year. A lot of animals travel well, but some have real difficulties with fear or motion sickness. If your pet is not a good traveller mild sedatives and anti-nausea medication can be a useful solution. You should also make a stop every 2 hours and let your dog have some exercise, but ALWAYS keep them on a lead. These stops are good for your pet, but also good for a rest for the driver.

On a more serious note, Christmas is often a time for new puppies and kittens and sadly a time for many subsequent surrenders of these animals to the RSPCA. We urge you to seriously think about the responsibility of a new pet. This is especially true if you are intending it as a gift as your good intentions may not match up with what the recipient would like in an animal.

We hope these few tips help you out over the holidays.

## Why Not Get Your Pet Desexed Now?!

The RSPCA is currently subsidising our routine desexing!

**\$25 off male desexing**

**\$30 off female desexing**

Please call the clinic on 5721 7177 to book you pet in!

*Thankyou to the RSPCA for their wonderful support.*



# PINK EYE

## Control and Prevention

Pink Eye in cattle is a highly contagious infection of the eye. It is caused by a bacteria called *Moraxella bovis* that is transmitted from cow to cow by flies, grass seeds and dust. The late spring and summer are the season for pink eye because of the hot weather, dust and flies. This bacteria produces a toxin that attacks the surface of the eye (cornea) and the surrounding membranes (conjunctiva) causing severe inflammation. Seven strains of the bacteria have been identified with some being more damaging than others. There are a number of strategies available for controlling pink eye and there is now a vaccination that can help to protect your cattle.

Pink Eye is often brought on under several predisposing situations. These include crowding of cattle (yards), bright sunlight, dust, flies and physical irritation to the eye (such as thistles and grass seeds). These are the conditions that predominate in the Australian summer. European breeds of cattle especially those with pink eyelids tend to be much more affected. It is best if practical to reduce these predisposing factors as much as possible. Obviously the farmer has little control over dust and flies, but the timing of yarding cattle for management procedures, pasture weeds and genetic selection for dark eyelids are areas that can be targeted. If cattle are to be yarded in hot dry conditions wetting down dusty areas can significantly reduce the threat of pink eye.

Some cattle are carriers of the bacteria in their noses and eyes. These cows show no signs of infection, but are the reservoir for spread to the other members of the herd by flies. Once infected the cow will develop redness and profuse tear discharge and tends to squint. A white spot will develop on the cornea indicating the site of an ulcer where the bacteria's toxin has damaged the eye. Blood vessels then grow out across the eyeball to repair the ulcer. Eventually the eye ends up with a blue spot where the ulcer has healed, which may or may not disappear with time. Infections can be much more severe and lead to pus inside the eyeball itself and eventual rupture of the eye.

Cattle with pink eye need to be treated with antibiotic ointments to kill off the bacteria and help speed recover and reduce the discomfort of the condition. The earlier the condition is detected and treated the quicker it will resolve and the lower the effect on production. Orbenin or Opticlox eye ointments are the treatment of choice (Cloxacillin). About 1/4 to 1/3 of a tube should be placed in the eye. The treatment will last 48 hours and needs to be repeated if no improvement is seen within the 48 hours. An eyepatch to keep out dust can be effective after ointment is used too. It should be noted that mustering cattle in hot, dry conditions to treat pink eye may actually increase the infection rate in the herd because it puts all the animals close together with flies and dust as well. You need to weigh up how many cattle are already affected compared to how many could become infected. Some cattle, especially calves can be treated in the paddock.

Long term control should involve efforts to reduce fly populations (fly traps, dung beetles) and thistle control. There is also a new vaccination that can prevent infection that we can order for interested clients. A good source of information is:

[http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/103904/pinkeye-in-cattle.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/103904/pinkeye-in-cattle.pdf)

### Newsletters online

**Would you like to receive our quarterly newsletters via Email?**

**If so, fill out the form below and drop it in to us at Warby Street.**

Name: .....  
(first name) (surname)

Email Address: .....