



## The Seaforth Howler



### Editorial

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#### By Dr Rob Miller (Veterinarian)

Mitzi Finey, a dedicated and long standing client of Seaforth Veterinary Hospital passed away peacefully in early July. Mitzi a long time cat lover and outspoken character will be missed. Some of her father's artwork hangs in our consult rooms and often attracts favourable comment. This issue of the Howler is dedicated to Mitzi.

In this issue we look deep into our pets' eyes and what can go wrong with them.

Jane has just completed an interesting survey of our clients. Read about these results and what it means for you.

India talks about basic care of the rabbit, an every increasingly popular pet. They make lovely pets and are full of character.

Starting in September this year we will be

running catered Client Information Evenings. We will kick off the series by looking at Tick & Flea issues as the tick season gets under way. See page 3 for details.

The behaviourists are coming! Well actually they are already here and live upstairs at Seaforth Vets. Kersti and Jaqui discuss the scope of what they can do for your cat, dog or bird!

We wind up with Media Snippets and advances in skin care for dogs.

Have a good read.



### The eyes have it!

#### News Column

- **Congratulations to Sam on her pregnancy. The baby is due in Nov!**
- **Mizti Finey, a long standing client of ours passed away in early July. She will be missed**



#### By Dr Rob Miller (Veterinary surgeon)

The eyes of your cat, dog or rabbit are just as complex as the human eye and as such they are prone to all the diseases that we are.

Luckily our pets are born with two eyes, so if one is injured vision is still possible in the other, allowing the damaged eye a chance to repair. One can imagine the vital importance of this in the wild: without vision they would surely perish.

However, two eyes are not just there to provide a spare. Two eyes allow stereoscopic vision, that is, depth perception. This is essential for hunting, judging a jump, anything where distance assessment is important.

The beautiful big eyes of cats allow good night vision. Domestic cats are crepuscular, ie they sleep by day, and hunt by night. This is why it often seems that cats do nothing but sleep! They are really readying themselves for a wild evening: a particularly good reason to keep your cats in at nights to protect our wildlife. Being animals of the night, cats eyes are well adapted to night vision. Hence the big dilated pupil that allows in maximum light. In low light levels colour is difficult to discern. Cats being night creatures have little colour perception. (It is a myth that dogs do not have colour vision. They do, but not to the same degree as we humans).

The eye focuses an image on the retina, the light sensitive inner lining to the back of the eyeball. Passive focus comes from the curvature of the clear part of the outer eye (the cornea) and active focus from the lens (which can change shape to produce a sharp image on



the retina). Did you know that the image on the retina is upside down? The brain translates the messages and produces a corrected upright image.

Damage to the outer surface of the eye results in ulcers to the cornea. At times these can be quite difficult to heal. Using incorrect medication can rapidly make things worse, hence it is important we examine the injured eye before dispensing medication. "But can't I just have the same medication I had just 2 months ago?" we often hear from clients, but we must examine the eye before deciding on what is appropriate. It would be poor practice to do otherwise, and could permanently risk your pet's vision! We test for ulcers using fluorescein dye. After we instil the dye we examine the eye under ultraviolet light to pick up ulcers. Steroids must never be used with ulcerated eyes. Chronic ulcers can lead to perforation of the eyeball and in worst case scenario, complete loss of vision. It is very important to recognise and treat them early for a best prognosis. Ulcers are initially treated with medication but if they degenerate (which is why revisits are essential) they can take weeks to heal, and surgical intervention is often necessary. One such procedure involves scratching the eyeball with a sharp needle! Sounds horrible, but this stimulates the eye into repair mode. Cats and dogs are particularly prone to ulcers as they stick their muzzles into everything! They can get injured from twigs, grass etc. They also like to fight and you can imagine a slash across the eyeball can result in a catastrophic injury. Bulbous eye breeds, eg Pugs and Cavalier King Charles Spaniels are particularly prone as the eye is exposed. Only the other day a dog attack resulted in a tooth right through the eyeball of a Cavalier, requiring the removal of the eye!

However, far more common is conjunctivitis. Again cats and dogs often get foreign material in their eyes, rub them, and suddenly have a nasty conjunctivitis. And NO before you ask, it is not contagious to you or your family. We can usually settle such eyes within a few days but treatment is typically 1 week's duration. In the older pet recurrent conjunctivitis can signal dry eye, a condition where poor tear production leads to a gritty, inflamed and very sore eye. Again treatment for this is simple but one must first test for it.

Eyelash abnormalities are not too uncommon in the young animal, especially in the dog. Entropion, where the eyelids roll in and rub against the cornea is quite irritating and needs surgical repair. Ectopic cilia are eyelashes that grow abnormally from the inner aspect of a lid and can rub painfully on the eye's surface. Simple repetitive plucking can eventually result in healing, but electronic epilation produces a more rapid and permanent solution.

Cataracts can occur in the old and not so old. This is where the lens becomes densely clouded and the pet cannot see through it. Usually the light sensitive retina remains intact. An ERG is used to assess if the retina is still active (like an ECG for the eye!). If it is the lens can be removed / replaced and vision restored. Such delicate surgeries are carried out by experts in the field, whom we luckily have access to at Crows Nest. Delicate eye surgery requires surgery under a microscope. One needs very steady hands! Do veterinary ophthalmologists practice abstinence? This I do not know, must ask!

What about blindness? Blindness can be central, ie due to brain dysfunction or peripheral, ie retinal or optic nerve related. Probably the most common cause of central blindness is a tumour. These days brain imaging using MRI or CT scanning makes localisation of lesions much easier and many are treatable due to advances in surgical neurology.

## Client Survey Results

**By Jane Molchanoff (Admin Manager, Seaforth Vets)**

A huge thanks to all our clients who responded to our recent email survey. The "Client Impressions and Needs" survey was our first attempt at an on line survey and was a great success. It was completed by more than 140 clients who agreed to have the survey link forwarded to their email address. The aim of the survey was to ensure we are aware of your impressions of the services we currently provide, as well as understanding your needs and thoughts about any additional services and facilities that may be of benefit to you and your pets.

We were overwhelmed by your positive impressions of our staff. Words such as "caring", "professional", "helpful" and "compassionate" were repeated amongst the individual comments received via the survey. This gave all our staff a wonderful feeling of accomplishment. We are very lucky to have such a dedicated and long standing team and it is great to know that you appreciate us! Other positives from the survey include our efficient vaccination reminder service (now available via email), interest in the development of nurse consults and free information sessions for clients covering issues such as first aid for pets and senior pet care.

One issue we really learned more about as a result of the survey was your concerns about our parking area with more than 50% of respondents commenting that it is both small and difficult to access.

Unfortunately we are unable to increase the current number of parking spaces due to the obvious restrictions now surrounding us, but we can improve accessibility and visibility when entering and exiting. We have already begun this process, widening the "gateway" into the parking area and replanting the garden bed with smaller plants allowing better visibility as you enter from and exit to Ethel Street. We are also looking into generally "upgrading" the exterior of our surgery by resurfacing the carpark, improving our signage and adding a new look to increase our visibility from the road.

We really appreciate the time our clients spent sharing their views and opinions with us, and the feedback provided will definitely help us work toward our goals of providing comprehensive and compassionate care for your pets and the best customer service for you. Any and all contributions from clients are always most welcome and can be emailed to me at [jane@svh55.com](mailto:jane@svh55.com).



## *Caring for your Rabbit Part I*

### **By India Brooker (Veterinary Nurse)**

Rabbits are a wonderful pet. However it's important to know before you purchase a rabbit that it has many of the same requirements as a cat or dog including vaccinations, parasite prevention and de-sexing. Most importantly, rabbits have extremely fragile spines - always ensure that your children are supervised when handling your rabbit.

#### **Vaccinations**

We strongly advise that you have your rabbit vaccinated yearly against Calicivirus which causes fatal blood clots in the internal organs. This is typically done from 12 weeks old onwards, but can be done younger, then requiring a booster at 12 weeks.

Unfortunately in Australia we cannot vaccinate rabbits against Myxomatosis, as they can in the UK.

Both Calicivirus and Myxomatosis are spread by mosquitoes so it is important to ensure your rabbit enclosure is insect proof.

#### **Parasite Prevention**

Rabbits are just as prone to internal and external parasites as cats and dogs. Parasites include roundworm, tapeworm, fleas, mites, lice and flies.

It is important to check your rabbit's backside daily to ensure that flies are not being attracted by faecal matter. Flies breed eggs and the eggs become maggots - revolting for you but possibly fatal for your rabbit.

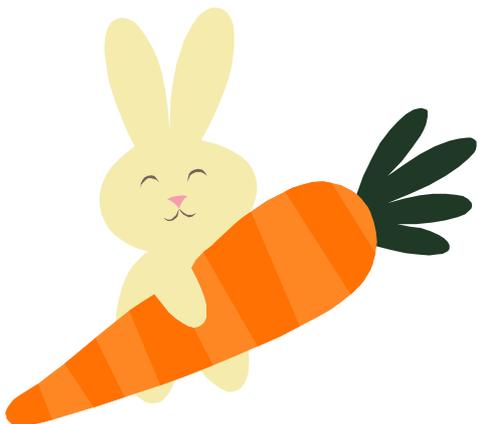
We strongly advise that your rabbit is brought in annually for a health check, and that you routinely worm them with *Panacur All Wormer*, a liquid product that we keep in stock at all times. The only spot-on product that is safe to use on your rabbit to combat fleas, mites, lice and flies is **ADVANTAGE**. Ask us about dosage.

#### **De-sexing**

Litters of bunnies can be up to 10 strong - they really are prolific breeders! Rabbits are capable of breeding from 6mths of age therefore we recommend that you have your rabbits de-sexed between 4 and 6mths of age.

De-sexing of rabbits also makes them less prone to inter-rabbit, and rabbit-owner aggression and injuries. As well, if your rabbit escapes and is not desexed then it will only add to the huge feral rabbit problem in the Australian bush.

In the next Howler I will discuss the feeding of rabbits.



## **Free Information Session**

For Seaforth Veterinary Hospital Clients

**Tick & Flea Prevention + Treatment  
Basic First Aid**

**Time 7.30pm**

**Date: Wednesday 23rd Sept.**

**Venue: Seaforth Veterinary Hospital**

To Register your interest please e-mail

Jane on:

[Jane@svh55.com](mailto:Jane@svh55.com)

## *Veterinary Behavioural Medicine why it is important*

### **By Dr Kersti and Dr Jacqui Ley (Veterinary Behaviourists)**

*Bringing together a knowledge of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Behaviour, and the latest training and behaviour modification techniques*

For well over a decade we at the Sydney Animal Behaviour Service (SABS) have successfully managed many dog, cat, and bird behaviour problems all over Australia. As veterinarians who have additional qualifications in animal behaviour we have helped thousands of owners understand why their pets do what they do. Behaviour problems can develop at any age, and early intervention and treatment can help your pet better cope with the demands of living in human society-and restore that special bond that you have....

Barking, digging, biting, scratching, spraying and grooming may all be normal behaviours for our pets. But sometimes, some animals display these behaviours in an abnormal manner. For example they might exhibit a behaviour too often, such as grooming themselves excessively, or they may exhibit a behaviour in an inappropriate place, (housesoiling) or at an inappropriate time, (barking when left alone). Sometimes the behaviour displayed is abnormal and these include behaviours such as snapping at flies that are not there or circling incessantly.

All animals can have behaviour problems. Behaviour problems in animals are hard to cope with and can be life threatening for the animal, especially if aggression is the problem. Veterinary behavioural medicine can help.

#### **What is Veterinary Behavioural Medicine (VBM)?**

VBM is a branch of veterinary medicine that diagnoses and treats behaviour problems in animals. Behaviour problems are not due to lack of training or inappropriate training or owners not being assertive enough. Behaviour problems are medical

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conditions and they are often due to chemical imbalances within the brain.

A thorough knowledge of behaviour that is normal for each species of animal presented and how individuals react to being scared and anxious is required to understand their behaviour problems. Additionally, knowledge of brain function, learning and memory allows the diagnosis of the causes of the behaviour problem and treatment plans to be formulated to help your pet.

**Referral to a Veterinary Behaviourist**

Sometimes a veterinarian or a trainer will suggest referral to a Veterinary Behaviourist for a particular behaviour problem. This is usually because they have recognized a behaviour of concern and want it investigated by someone who is properly qualified to do this, similar to your GP sending you to an eye or skin specialist when you have a problem. Veterinary behaviourists are veterinarians who have acquired membership of the Australian College of Veterinary Science in VBM by examination.

Some problem behaviours may seem 'not that important' but can be pre-cursors to more serious problems, or may indicate an underlying problem that needs to be addressed. Your trainer or veterinarian has had experience with lots of different dogs, and can recognize behaviour that is different or unusual. Just like people, your pet may have an excessively high level of anxiety, or may have abnormal or inappropriate responses to other animals, people or noises.

**What is involved in seeing a Veterinary Behaviourist?**

Taking your pet to a Veterinary Behaviourist usually involves first filling out a very detailed history questionnaire for your pet. The veterinary behaviourist will then sit down with you and work through the history, asking questions so that they better understand the concerns of everyone involved. They will want to know what has happened, how the problem has developed, and what has been done so far to try to improve the situation. They will then start to develop a treatment plan for you and your pet.

Behaviour consultations usually take a number of hours. Some of this time will be spent discussing possible outcomes, devising a specific behaviour modification program, and helping you to understand why your pets do the things they do.

In future editions of the Howler we will discuss specific behaviour problems. We have extensive experience seeing pets with problems including aggression, barking fears, phobias, separation anxiety, toileting problems, spraying and obsessive compulsive disorders. Please let your veterinarian at Seaforth Veterinary Hospital know what you would like to hear about!



**BY Dr Rob Miller (Veterinarian)**

**Dumbo cats?**

A UK Psychology lecturer Britta Osthaus performed string experiments shows limits of feline intelligence

It will cause outrage among some cat owners, but her research suggests cats are not as clever as some humans assumed – or at least they think in a way we have yet to fathom. (more likely the truth, Ed!)

Osthaus says cats do not understand cause-and-effect connections between objects. She tested the thought processes of 15 of them by attaching fish and biscuit treats to one end of a piece of string, placing them under a plastic screen to make them unreachable and then seeing if the cats could work out that pulling on the other end of the string would pull the treat closer.

They were tested in three ways, blah, blah, blah... Dogs proved SMARTER! (heresy I say! Ed)

*Ed. Actually the cat is waiting for the psychologist to do it for them, they are not stupid! Don't understand cause and effect?*

*What nonsense, my cat knows only too well that certain behaviours result in her food bowl being filled up. Cats often open door, surely cause and effect. Cats are smart QED!*

NB the article concludes... there is just one consolation.

Humans don't understand string theory either!

***If your puppy is dirty, don't do this....***

A PUPPY in Britain had a lucky escape after a four-year-old boy accidentally flushed it down the toilet when he was trying to wash it.

The cocker spaniel pup's young owner, thought the puppy needed a wash after it got muddy playing in the garden, so he put it in the toilet and flushed it.

But his plan went disastrously wrong when the animal was swept away and became trapped in a waste pipe for nearly four hours.

Firefighters and animal welfare officers could not reach it, so Daniel's mother eventually called a plumber, who found the dog lying upside down in a pipe about 20 metres away from their house in Northolt, west London.

The dog - which has been named Dyno after the plumbing firm which rescued it - is now safe and well and back with the family.

The young boy has apologised, blaming his twin brother for getting the dog dirty and saying: "I had to give him a wash. I'm so, so sorry. I won't do it again."

***Eukanuba itchy dog update***

Itchiness in dogs is a major reason for frequent visits to the vet.

In a recent Howler we discussed how dietary control helps reduce itchiness in dogs, particularly those suffering from food allergies.

However recent research has show these diets, in particular ***Eukanuba FP*** diet, also help reduce itchiness in the far more common skin allergy known as atopy.

Atopy is an inhalant allergy where the dog's reaction is not asthmatic as in humans but one of extreme and persistent itchiness. Feeding FP diet for 8 weeks resulted in a marked reduction in itchiness in proven cases of atopy. The key factor in the diet is likely the correct balance and enhancement of the omega 3 and 6 fatty acids.

So if you have an atopic dog and they are not on FP, you may want to consider the switch!