

Winter Birds



Garden birds are extremely vulnerable during the winter months and providing food and fresh water is one of the most helpful things

you can do for them. During cold winter nights birds, can sometimes lose 10% of their body weight just keeping warm, which means they quickly need to find food during the day, just to replenish their reserves for the cold night ahead. Prolonged cold spells can lead to a very high mortality rate in birds.



In addition to traditional bird tables, hanging feeders suspended from trees (or a free standing pole) are a popular way of feeding birds. Seed feeders are tubular, transparent containers with holes, through which, the birds are able to access a high calorie seed mix, Nut feeders are made of steel mesh and are ideal for unsalted peanuts.

Bird tables can be stocked with seed mixes and a selection of household scraps such as cooked potato, cake crumbs and soft fruit. It is also important to ensure that birds have access to fresh and not frozen water since many birds die in severe weather due to dehydration. A suspended water dish is a good way of achieving this and, if it is very cold, use tepid water.

Further information on caring for garden birds can be found online at www.rspb.org.uk



Can you pinch an inch?!

With the onset of winter weather, it's very tempting for pets to snuggle up at home, go on less walks, and in the process gain some extra weight – which can lead to a variety of health issues.

How can I tell if my pet is gaining excess weight?

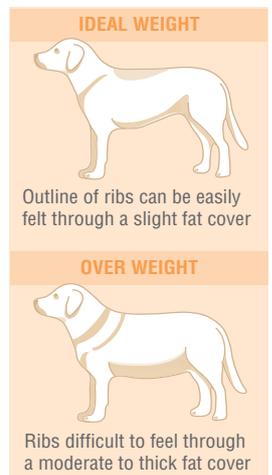
In dogs a simple test is to run your hands over their chest – you should be able to easily feel (but not see) their ribs without pressing too hard. They should also have a “waist”, when viewed from both above and the side. By contrast, if you can pinch an inch or more, and if your pet's stomach sags down and bulges out, then a diet may be in order. It's also important to keep an eye on your cat's waistline as well!

So – why is it a problem? Unfortunately, excess weight places extra demands on many organs of the body. Carrying extra weight can lead to, or worsen, many conditions including: • arthritic joint problems, • heart disease (putting the heart under increased strain), • raised blood pressure, • diabetes (a particular risk factor in cats), • decreased stamina and heat intolerance – to name just a few!

How can you try to ensure your pet remains the right weight?

Losing weight can be challenging for all of us, and our pets are no exception; so the most important thing is to try to ensure your pet is on the most suitable diet in the first place. Additionally, your pet's dietary requirements change throughout their lives and our knowledgeable team are happy to advise you on the most appropriate diet for your pet.

We are here to help! The good news is that if your pet has piled on some extra pounds, either during lockdown, or going into the winter months, please get in touch and we can advise you on their ideal weight. To achieve weight loss, pets need a combination of specially formulated calorie controlled diets and more exercise. There are many health benefits to keeping your pet a healthy weight, so if your pet has added a few pounds or seemed to have slowed down, please give us a call. We can help your pet slim down and tap into a huge range of health benefits associated with weight loss.



Pesky parasite problems!

As the nights draw in and the weather turns colder, now is NOT the time to drop your guard against pesky pet parasites! Whilst it's definitely the case that ticks are mainly active in the warmer months, the same cannot be said for fleas which are really an all-year-round problem. Similarly – worms represent a persistent issue for our pets, and roundworms can also affect human health in rare cases.

Fleas love centrally heated homes and when the weather gets colder outside then moving inside becomes attractive for fleas too! Just one or two fleas in a warm home can easily turn into an infestation. In many cases new flea problems are caused by flea eggs from *old* infestations hatching out and re-infesting your pets!



Worms are a hidden problem in most pets and the main ones to consider are: roundworms (spaghetti like in appearance – pictured), tape worms (long, white and segmented) and lungworm (*Angiostrongylus Vasorum*) – where larvae can migrate to the lungs and cause significant lung tissue damage. Roundworm eggs – which may be deposited in parks and gardens, also pose a risk to humans if accidentally ingested.



So what can be done? We are here to help! Don't relax your guard this winter – have a chat to our lovely team about how to protect your pet from parasites on a year-round basis!





Winter worries!

The cold winter months bring particular challenges for our pets, and as their owners, we need to be aware of the problems they can suffer at this time of year. Here we look at some of the commonest winter hazards:

Winter walks: When you are out and about, it's important to make sure that your pets are adequately prepared; they may need to wear waterproof and warm jackets, especially if they are older or are short coated breeds such as whippets. Some salt mixtures on paths, and also snow building up between the paws, can cause limping and pain. So, do check your pet's feet regularly and make sure they are washed and clean on return from a walk. Also, whilst out and about, make the most of the shorter days by playing games while you are out to give your pet mental as well as physical stimulation.

Arthritis is very commonly first diagnosed in older patients during the winter months. This isn't because the disease first strikes during this period, but because the lower temperatures seize up the limbs and make the symptoms of pain and stiffness more obvious. Look out for pets hanging back on walks, stiffness in the mornings or them being reluctant to go out. Most pets will really benefit from anti-inflammatory medications, but you can also help by giving them joint supplements, lovely soft beds, and many will enjoy resting by the radiator or on a pet-safe hot water bottle!

Winter weight worries: With many pets spending more time indoors during the winter months – they are getting less exercise and need correspondingly less food. We have an article on the front page of this newsletter giving you more information on keeping your pet in-shape and how carrying excess weight is an issue for pets.

Festive alert: Pieces of string, tinsel and bones from turkeys should be kept well out of reach to avoid an intestinal blockage and the possible need for life saving surgery. Baubles and lights, if broken and eaten, will cause serious damage to your pet. Similarly we see lots of problems at this time of year from pets eating things like chocolate, Christmas cake and mince pies. See our facing article on toxic hazards to pets.

Outdoor pets: Also don't forget about smaller pets who live outdoors. Make sure rabbits and guinea pigs have well insulated hutches, plenty of bedding to snuggle down in and check their water twice daily to ensure it hasn't frozen. See our facing article on guinea pigs.

For further information on any of the topics mentioned in this article, please speak to a member of our team.



Kitten photo and dog in snow: Warren Photographics

Caring for your guinea pig

Guinea pigs make lovely pets! They are easy to handle, very sociable and, provided they are well cared for, tend to stay in good health. Here are some tips to keep them fit and well:



Get social! Guinea pigs are sociable animals and should be kept in groups or pairs as they will become stressed and anxious if they are on their own. 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 pregnancies in mixed sex pairs.

Feeding: Guinea pigs require a high fibre diet, and grass hay must be available at all times. Guinea pigs also need approximately one quarter of a cup per adult guinea pig of a commercial pelleted diet, plus leafy green foods to provide vitamin C and other nutrients. They have continually growing teeth, so to keep their teeth healthy, they need free access to hay to chew on.

Diseases: Some pets may be prone to respiratory conditions or eye infections if the incorrect bedding is used. Guinea pigs are also susceptible to mite infestation and symptoms include hair loss and intense itchiness and scratching. Guinea pigs instinctively hide any signs of pain and illness, therefore it is important to check them at least once a day.

We are here to help you with all aspects of guinea pig care, so if you have any questions regarding your guinea pigs, please give us a call!

Winter toxic alert!



As well as a range of health problems associated with colder weather and the festive season, let's take a look at toxins and your pet. Some tend to be seasonal (such as ethylene glycol), but most are a year round hazard to pets.

Ethylene glycol is a common active ingredient in antifreeze used in car radiators, and is a particular risk at this time of year. Although it is highly toxic, it tastes very sweet and pets, in particular cats, will drink it readily. Make sure your car isn't leaking any antifreeze and keep cans or bottles of it well out of reach and clean on the outside. Even a few licks can be fatal.



Lilies are extremely toxic to cats and are often encountered as cut flowers in vases. The bad news is that the pollen, leaves and petals are all toxic – even drinking from the vase is a hazard. Cats are uniquely vulnerable to poisons due to their curious nature and tendency to groom contaminants from their coats and feet.

Permethrin spot-ons: Many canine spot-on flea products bought from supermarkets and pet shops contain permethrins. While these are generally safe for dogs, they should *never ever* be applied to cats, since they are extremely poisonous to cats.

Chocolate: Whilst we love chocolate (and it undoubtedly is very bad for our waistlines!), it poses a significant toxic hazard to dogs and cats. In general the higher the cocoa content the more toxic the chocolate and as little as 50g of plain chocolate can be deadly in small dogs.



Xylitol is another toxic hazard and is a sugar substitute in products such as sugar-free chewing gum. It can also be used in home baking as a sugar substitute. It can be lethal to dogs, leading to life threateningly low blood sugar levels.

Grapes, raisins and sultanas are also now known to be toxic to dogs and cats, so beware of your pet wolfing down the Christmas cake!



Signs of poisoning in pets can often be vague so owners should be vigilant when it comes to their pet's health. Please contact us at once if you notice any signs of unusual behaviour or illness.