

Winter Birds

The depths of winter are tough for our garden birds. Food is scarce, the cold weather punishing and even water can be hard to find during a freeze. Putting food outside will really help get them through the long winter months.



In addition to traditional bird tables, hanging feeders suspended from trees or free standing poles 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, whilst **nut feeders** are made of steel mesh and are ideal for **unsalted** peanuts.



Place them in areas where the birds have a good view of the whole garden to watch for predators and near a hedge or tree so they have somewhere to escape to.

A variety of seeds and nuts will be appreciated. Peanuts will be popular in the winter as they are full of fats but only use plain ones, especially for birds, they won't appreciate salted or roasted! Feeders and bird tables should be regularly cleaned to reduce the risk of disease spread.

A water bath will also be popular, both for drinking and bathing, which birds will do even in very cold weather to keep their feathers clean and healthy. Ensure it doesn't freeze by breaking the ice every morning, or you can buy bird safe anti-freeze to add to the water.

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



Worms – what to look out for!

Worms are something all pet owners need to be aware of, and treat for periodically. There are three main worms we are concerned about, and can treat – tapeworms, roundworms and lungworms. Roundworms and tapeworms inhabit your pet's intestines, interfering with food absorption and may also be a cause of gut inflammation, failure to thrive and diarrhoea. Lungworms, as their name suggests, spend much of their time in the lungs.

Tapeworms are ribbon shaped worms. Tapeworms live in the intestines and use hooked mouth parts to attach themselves to gut wall. As the adult worms mature they drop off segments (filled with eggs) into the faeces. Tapeworm eggs may be eaten by *intermediate hosts* – these include **fleas** and **small rodents**. This is why cats that catch a lot of mice will commonly be infected by tapeworms. Dogs and cats swallow fleas by grooming themselves and become infected in this way.



Roundworms are spaghetti like in appearance and live in the intestines. Many puppies and kittens are born infected with roundworms because they can cross the placenta and are also in the milk. For this reason it is really important to regularly worm the mother during her pregnancy. The eggs are also shed in the faeces and are easily picked up on walks. Roundworms can also infect people and have the potential to cause serious health problems, especially in children. Occasionally you might see roundworms in your dog's vomit or faeces, looking like strings of spaghetti.

Lungworm: This parasite is becoming increasingly common in our dog population. Dogs are infected by eating slugs or snails carrying lungworm larvae. Lungworms are swallowed as tiny larvae which migrate to the right side of the heart where they develop into adult worms. The adults live and lay eggs inside the vessels of the lungs and the right side of the heart, causing symptoms such as coughing and exercise intolerance. Larvae migrate into lung tissue, causing blood clots, bleeding problems and even sudden death. The larvae are coughed up and pass out in the faeces where they are eaten by slugs and snails, so continuing the lifecycle.

The good news is that there are a variety of veterinary prescription products which are best placed to protect your pets. Please let us advise you on the best products for your pets.

Rogues gallery of worms!



Tapeworm segments
– e.g. *Taenia taeniaeformis*



Typical Roundworms
– in this case *Toxocara canis*



Electron micrograph of an adult lungworm
(You won't see them as they live in the lungs!)

Dental disease – is your pet affected?



Did you know that by the age of just three years old, the vast majority of our pets are suffering with dental disease? Poor dental health is painful, causes tooth loss, and infections can spread throughout the body.

Problems occur if plaque and tartar are allowed to build up on your pet's teeth. Plaque accumulation leads to *inflammation* of the gums – called **gingivitis**. This is frequently accompanied by the accumulation of calculus (tartar) on the surface of the teeth and very bad breath. Worse still, if left unchecked, this process can result in **severe gum disease**, dental pain and eventually tooth loss.

In addition to gum disease, cats can also suffer from very painful **tooth resorptive lesions** which are currently only poorly understood.

The good news is that very many dental problems can be **prevented!** Please let us advise you on caring for your pet's teeth and gums.



Gingivitis



Severe gum disease

Progression of gum disease



Resorptive lesion in a cat



Caring for your senior cat



Elderly cats can seem to have the ideal life; snoozing in a cosy bed, eating when they fancy and occasionally demanding attention. They can appear so content, it is easy to assume that they are well in themselves, but their peaceful appearance can be deceiving!

In their twilight years our feline friends can suffer from a range of conditions but they are experts at hiding the signs of illness. So, looking out for subtle changes in their behaviour can really make a difference.

Regular health-checks are a good way of helping to keep your cat in top shape and pick up medical conditions early, when they are easier to treat. Here is a list of things to keep a watchful eye on:

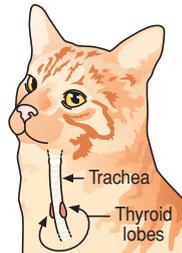
Weight loss: Notice your cat looking slimmer? In senior felines, weight loss is often a sign of underlying illness, but in many cases, the gradual nature of the drop makes it difficult to spot. We are very happy to weigh your cat, and this is a great way to monitor their health if you can't weigh them at home. Weight loss can be a feature of many diseases including **diabetes**, **hyperthyroidism** (over-active thyroid gland) and **kidney disease** and we cover these in more detail later in the article.

Drinking more: **Kidney disease** and **diabetes** are common in older cats and both will cause them to drink more than usual. In fact, cats naturally drink very little, so often a cat who drinks 'well', is actually drinking to excess and should have a check-up.

Eating less: **Dental problems** and **kidney disease** are two of the most likely causes of a reduced or changed appetite in a cat. If their mouth is painful, they won't stop eating, but they may start to prefer wet food or, if watched carefully, not actually chew properly. It can be difficult to fully check their mouths at home, so if you are worried, just bring them down! Kidney disease is also a very common cause of appetite loss in older pets.

Eating more: An over-active thyroid gland (**hyperthyroidism**) and **diabetes** will both make cats eat more and while this is often taken as a sign of good health, it can be the opposite, especially if they are losing weight despite their increased appetite.

The good news is that thyroid disease can be diagnosed from a simple blood test and there are a range of treatment options to manage this condition.



Sore Joints: Did you know approximately 80% of cats over the age of twelve have arthritis. However, it can be difficult to spot because they simply rest more – what we expect of them anyway, and because they are naturally athletic animals, they will often still jump, climb and play, but not as much as they used to. They may be less keen to play or interact with the family, or stop grooming themselves – all these may be signs of pain, so please do contact us if you are worried.

So – if your elderly cat starts showing any of the above signs, please get in touch. The good news is that modern diagnostic tests, combined with an expanding range of treatments, can greatly improve the quality of life of your senior pet.



Winter flea alert!

Did you know the winter months are often the worst for fleas, because although it is cold outside, our houses are warm and just right for them to breed in their thousands? This is why it is important to continue with flea protection at this time of year because just one or two fleas 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!

Common symptoms of bites include itchiness, red rashes, hair loss and severe irritation, which is particularly marked in pets with an allergy to flea saliva. Some affected pets develop secondary skin infections and may require antibiotics and treatment to relieve their itching.

Have a chat to our staff about how to protect both your pets and your house from fleas in winter! For optimum flea control, treatment should ideally be all year round!



Winter survival guide!

As temperatures drop and the nights draw in, the cooler winter weather brings on a range of challenges for our pets. With this in mind, we've put together some seasonal tips:

Winter joint alert: Pets with joint problems often start to struggle in the colder weather. Look out for hanging back on walks, stiffness in the mornings or them being reluctant to go out. Many pets will benefit from pain killers/anti-inflammatory medications and also joint supplements. Arthritic pets often struggle with long walks, so little and often is the key.

Outdoor pets: Rabbits would normally live in a burrow which stays around 10°C, so rabbits (and also guinea pigs) are ideally brought into a heated garage or shed, or moved inside. Make sure they have plenty of bedding and that their water supply is fresh twice daily. Check your small furries at least once a day to make sure they are bright, eating and well. If you have a rabbit or guinea pig who lives alone, now is the ideal time to think about getting a friend of the same species so they have someone to cuddle up with!



Festive alert! The festive season can also pose a huge range of very tempting hazards for our pets! **Chocolate** is a festive favourite, but as little as 50g of plain chocolate can be fatal in small dogs. **Turkey bones** can cause choking, constipation and have the potential to seriously damage internal organs. Make sure fairy lights and electric wires are 'chew-proof' from inquisitive puppies, kittens and even rabbits too. Brightly coloured **baubles and tinsel** are new and exciting objects for pets, who may try to eat them and cause themselves all sorts of internal problems. Seasonal plants such as **holly, poinsettia, ivy and lilies** are all extremely toxic.



Enjoy the winter weather and festive season, make sure your pet avoids many of the edible and in-edible festive treats and contact us if you have any problems!