

### **Farewell to a Colleague and Friend.**

Simon and Lindsay came to us last summer to say they wanted to retire. Lindsay took her last surgery shortly afterwards. They joined the practice 27 years ago, after working in Helston and spending some time in travelling in New Zealand. Simon has been a dependable, valued colleague and friend and has been a great help in making Ottery clinic what it is today. He will step down from all small animal veterinary work at the end of February and farm practice from the end of March.

Thank you, Simon, and Lindsay and we wish you a happy and full retirement.

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### **Hello to our New Vet, Nigel Clarke.**

Nigel has a degree in agricultural sciences in addition to his veterinary degree. He worked in mixed practice in England and in Tasmania. He has worked for DEFRA/APHA for some years but has always aspired to get back into mixed practice. While at ALHA he continues to work 'out of hours' for small animal practices in Exeter and Exmouth. Nigel has spent a little time with us already. He will start full time on March 6th and is very keen to embrace this opportunity of getting back into general practice.

Nigel, Helen Springett and Dr Ali O'Brien will be sharing the vet rota at the Ottery Clinic while Stuart Ikin will maintain his place in the Sidmouth Surgery.

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### **Rabbits.**

Rabbits make very rewarding pets. They are intelligent, fun and inquisitive creatures with strong personalities. They can live up to 10+ years and so are a long-term commitment like a cat or dog. Illnesses develop quickly with rabbits. As prey species, often they do not look ill until they are really unwell to avoid attracting attention.

#### **How do you know your Rabbit is unwell?**

It is important to contact the vets as soon as you notice if your rabbit has not eaten or is off their food, if they are quieter than normal or sitting still and hunched up.

#### **Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD).**

This is a viral infection which infects both wild and pet rabbits. Most infected rabbits die very quickly, often without any warnings or signs. The clinical signs of the disease include loss of appetite and bleeding from the nose. VHD is highly contagious. Transmission can occur by direct contact with infected rabbits including wild rabbits and indirect contact by environmental contamination i.e. from urine and faeces of infected rabbits. VHD is a deadly disease that can affect any rabbit over 6 weeks old (rabbits younger than 6 weeks are resistant to the disease). There is no effective treatment apart from ensuring your rabbit is vaccinated.

#### **Myxomatosis.**

Many people will have seen this disease; it affects both wild and pet rabbits. This disease is spread by insects such as fleas and mosquitos. The virus causes large swellings in the skin of the face, ears and anus. This makes it difficult for the rabbit to eat, drink and see. Death can take up to 12 days but a small percentage may recover.

#### **Vaccinations.**

Rabbits can be vaccinated against both VHD and Myxomatosis. Vaccinations can be started from 6 weeks of age. Vaccinations do not last forever and immunity will wane over time. A yearly booster vaccination is essential to maintain protection throughout your rabbit's life.

### **Fly Protection.**

Flies can be annoying to humans but for rabbits they can be deadly. Flies are attracted to rabbits if they have soiled bottoms and they will lay their eggs here. They will hatch out into flesh eating maggots which are painful and can be fatal for your rabbit if left untreated. Check your rabbit's bottom every day to make sure it is clean and clean the hutch frequently. Products such as Rearguard® can help prevent issues in rabbits who are prone to dirty rears.

### **Teeth.**

Rabbit's teeth are continuously growing, up to 1-2mm per week! If domestic rabbits don't eat enough fibrous food to wear their teeth down, they overgrow causing problems. A diet with plenty of hay, a selection of fresh fibrous food and a small amount of commercial pelleted rabbit diet is ideal. A rabbit's diet is vitally important in promoting good dental health.

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## **Neutering - Know the Facts!**

Neutering is the general term used for the surgical removal of the reproductive organs in both male and female dogs and cats. Castration is the removal of both testicles in the male cats and dogs, spaying is the removal of the ovaries and uterus in females. If you decide that you would like to get your pet neutered we would generally suggest that cats are neutered from 4 months old, male dogs castrated between 4-12 months according to their breed and temperament and bitches spayed from 5 months of age. The operation should not be performed if the bitch is showing any signs of being in season or of a false pregnancy.

There are many benefits of neutering these include:

- ✓ It prevents females from coming into season, avoiding the mess and disruption associated with this, females can bleed for up to 3 weeks during their seasons.
- ✓ Neutering avoids the risks of unwanted pregnancies and false pregnancies.
- ✓ It removes the significant health risks associated with pregnancy as well as the possibility of potentially fatal womb infections (pyometras)
- ✓ Neutering prevents cancer of the mammary glands in later life, this effect is greater if spayed before their first season.
- ✓ In male dogs and cats, neutering can reduce roaming and urine marking, thus reducing the risk of being involved in a road traffic accident.
- ✓ It prevents the risk of testicular cancer in males.
- ✓ It can help to reduce aggressive and unwanted sexual behaviours.
- ✓ Prostatic diseases are much less common in neutered dogs.

There are some disadvantages too, these include:

- ✗ Any major surgical procedure performed under general anaesthesia always entails a risk to life. The risk is very, very small but we would never say that the risk is zero.
- ✗ Weight control is more difficult in the neutered pet. Neutered pets do not have to get fat but close attention to diet and exercise is necessary to ensure that they do not do so.
- ✗ Urinary incontinence is more likely to occur in later life in spayed bitches. In general, this is more likely to occur in larger breeds and certain breeds e.g. Doberman, Bearded Collies. When it does occur, it is usually possible to control with medication.

## **Snakes.**

At this time of year snakes are more active in areas such as the commons. Please be aware of this when out walking your dogs. The European Adder is the only venomous snake native to the UK. The adults are about 50cm long, pale grey/green to dark brown with characteristic black/brown zigzag patterning down its back (not obvious if very dark).

Adder venom is a complex mixture of proteins. It has a direct effect on the heart and blood vessels. Onset is usually rapid, within 2 hours, so speed is essential for treatment. Puncture wounds may be visible with localised, painful swelling that may spread and bleed. Signs include swelling around the bite site, shock and collapse. Keep your dog still; and as quiet as possible and leave the bite site alone.

If you think that your pet has been bitten by a snake, contact the surgery as soon as possible.

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## **It's Nearly Easter!**

There will be lots of chocolate around so it is best to be aware of the dangers chocolate can cause for your pets.

Chocolate contains a product called theobromine, which is toxic to cats and dogs. The darker the chocolate is, the more toxic it will be. If ingested chocolate can cause diarrhoea and dehydration. Animals may become hyperactive and develop hyperthermia, bad cases can start fitting. Treatment would include inducing vomiting if recently eaten and rehydrating your pet.

Make sure you keep the Easter eggs out the dog's way!

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### **Sidmouth.**

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### **Ottery St. Mary.**

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