

## Welcome

Welcome to Darwin Veterinary Centre's inaugural newsletter. We've decided to embrace the twenty first century and send out a newsletter conveying topical pet issues, practice news and details of special promotions that we hope are of interest to you. All the articles will be written by our practice staff, rather than being copied from commercial sources, which we hope will make them relevant to our clients, and objective. We'd love to hear your thoughts and feedback, so please don't hesitate to contact Sonya if you have any ideas for subjects you'd like us to cover, or just to tell us what you think!



### 20% off Dog and Cat Dentals during February

Have you been told by one of our vets that your pet's teeth could look a lot nicer? Have you been putting it off because you were concerned about the cost of anaesthetic, or simply the time got past you? If so, our February Dental promotion may be of interest to you.

Tartar on teeth is a serious health concern for cats and dogs, and is always better removed. The bacteria that shelter under the tartar cause gingivitis, undermine tooth roots, causing abscesses and even early tooth loss. Bacteria can also leave the mouth and travel by the blood stream to affect important organs such as the heart (causing early heart murmurs) and kidneys (causing early kidney failure).

We are conscious that dental work is a cost, and that you may have concerns about an elective general anaesthetic, but the health cost of leaving tartar in your pet's mouth can be far greater. If you have been putting it off, why not take advantage of our February Dental Promotion - this will not only save you money, but will also offer you the peace of mind of knowing that your pet has a healthy mouth.

If you would like to book your cat or dog in for a dental and take advantage of this offer, we advise early booking, as last year, all places were booked-up within one week!!

If you are unsure whether your pet needs a dental, please feel free to take advantage of our (no-obligation) FREE DENTAL CHECKS, run by our dental nurse, Louise.

## Winter Worries

As the nights have now drawn in and the chilly winter weather is upon us, it's a good time to think of our pets and how to protect them.

- If your dog is thin-skinned, such as Greyhounds, Dachshunds and Whippets, or elderly, consider investing in a cosy **waterproof winter coat**, to keep your pet warm and dry on walks. If your pet has arthritis, preventing their joints from chilling with a coat, can be advantageous.
- After Christmas there can be lots of goodies containing large amounts of raisins and other dried fruit, such as Christmas cake and mince pies around our homes. It has recently been discovered that **grapes and raisins** can be extremely poisonous to dogs, and although the toxin has not yet been identified, the 'bloom' on the fruit's surface is believed to be the culprit. The effects are not dose dependent, meaning that while some dogs can have no ill effects after consuming large amounts of grapes, others can eat just a few and rapidly die of acute kidney failure.
- **Antifreeze**, containing ethylene glycol, is sadly a common cause of pet poisoning during the winter months, with a 70% mortality rate in dogs, and probably higher in cats. Ethylene glycol has a sweet taste which is appealing to most animals, so watch out for any green or pink substances leaking onto your garage floor or driveway, and keep your dog away from any similar substances while out on winter walks.
- **Reflective cat collars** are great at keeping your pet safe from cars during the dull winter days, but no substitute for keeping your cat in at night, the most common time for cat RTAs. **LED-flashing dog collars** make exercising your dog off-lead much easier at this time of year, and are now readily and cheaply available.
- **Road Salt** is hard to avoid during the winter months, and can cause excessively dry pads, and toxicity if your dog licks it off their paws. The best way to prevent problems with salt is to wipe or wash your dog's paws each time you come in from a walk.
- Be extra vigilant in checking your pet's **nail length** during the cold winter months, when your pet may not be exercising as much. Nail overgrowth is common at this time of year, especially in elderly cats, and can lead to deep and painful paw infections.
- If your pet has a lot of fur on their paws, particularly between the pads, check their paws regularly during snowy weather to ensure the hair hasn't trapped balls of compacted **snow**, which frequently lead to lameness.
- **Forgotten furrries** – pet rabbits and guinea pigs also find this time of year very challenging. Ensure your pet has plenty of hay, both to eat, and to cuddle into on the cold winter nights. Facing their hutch out of the path of prevailing winds, or inside a shed, will help them keep warm, and an old duvet or carpet wrapped round the hutch will ensure that your pet doesn't chill. Check water bottles haven't frozen at least once every day.



## Lungworm Alert

Lungworm infection in dogs, caused by the parasite *Angiostrongylus vasorum*, is spreading across the UK, and sadly has been in the Biggin Hill area for the past 4 years. Initially seen in France, hence the alternative name of French Heartworm, the disease is spread to dogs by slugs and snails which carry the larvae of the parasite. Dogs which eat slugs and snails, or ingest their slime trails, are particularly at risk, but accidental ingestion can occur in any animal, if a bone or favourite toy is left outside, or if your dog eats grass. Dogs under the age of two appear to be more susceptible than older dogs, but sadly dogs of all ages and breeds can be affected, sometimes with tragic consequences.

The warm summers and damp winters are thought to be a factor in the movement of lungworm to the north of Europe, and as any gardener will tell you, the past few years have seen an increase in the number of months that slugs and snails are active locally.

The wide range of signs are frequently vague, and can easily be confused with other illnesses or overlooked. They include:

- Reluctance to exercise
- Coughing
- Depression
- Weight Loss
- Fits
- Vomiting
- Weakness
- Paralysis or inability to walk

However, one of the largest problems with recognising this potentially fatal disease, is that all too frequently the disease is silent, with affected dogs appearing totally healthy.

### Hints and tips to prevent lungworm adversely affecting your dog:

- Watch to see if your dog likes eating slugs and/or snails, particularly in the Spring and Autumn when these molluscs are more prevalent;
- Avoid the use of outdoor drinking water and food bowls which often attract slugs and snails;
- Don't leave your dog's toys, chews or bones in the garden, as they can attract slugs and snails;
- Avoid letting your dog drink from puddles where possible.

It is important to know that the routine worming of your pet using tablets such as Drontal, will **not** have any activity against Lungworm. As always, prevention is better than cure.

Monthly treatment with the spot-on Advocate (which is the only licensed product to protect your dog from lungworm, and in addition will protect him or her against fleas, flea larvae, whipworm, hookworm, roundworm, ear mites, fox mange, demodectic mange and lice), is easily the best way to protect your dog.



Photo courtesy of Bayer Animal Health



Photo courtesy of Bayer Animal Health

## Ticks

2013 was the worst year that we've ever seen for ticks in the Biggin Hill area. Many of you visited us having found these nasty parasites attached to your pets and sucking their blood. Some of you even had them attached to yourselves! This is revolting enough, but with the emergence of new tick-borne diseases, such as Lyme's Disease, ticks pose an ever increasing threat to our pet's well-being and that of our families. If your pet attracted ticks last year, or if you know that you live in a tick-prone area (frequently one inhabited by deer or sheep), then March is the time to arm your pet with a Seresto tick-repellent collar. The collar will remain active for eight months, giving your pet full protection throughout the tick seasons of Spring, Summer and Autumn.



If you are unfortunate enough to find a tick on your pet, or even yourself(!), please, please don't pull them off. Use a tick remover to turn the body, this will ensure the mouth-parts release and that it is removed whole. If the head gets left in your pet it is likely to cause problems. If in doubt, bring your pet into the practice where we can quickly remove the offending tick - whole!



## Do you have a favourite local dog walk?

We all enjoy getting out and about with our dogs, particularly when the warm weather arrives and the evenings are long again. So we thought we'd try to put together a compilation of local dog walks, and publish them free online to all our clients later this year, so that you can enjoy them too. We'd love to hear of any local walks that you and your canine friend really enjoy, so that we can include them. You can send us descriptions, parking details, walk length (time or mileage), maps, photos etc and we'll try to include as many as possible.

## Feeding Garden Birds

As we sit inside at this time of year, all warm and cosy, it is worth sparing a thought for our feathered friends. Severe winters are a testing time for many of our common garden birds, and the recent prolonged cold winters have led to higher mortality rates than normal, according to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). On a cold winter's night, our garden birds can use up an incredible 10% of their body weight just keeping warm!

*So what can we do to help?*

Putting out a regular supply of food and water into our gardens can act as a wonderful resource for birds during the harsh weather. As well as commercially available sunflower hearts, nuts, seed mixes and fat balls, kitchen scraps are also much appreciated: cooked potato, cake crumbs, grated cheese, soft and or over-ripe fruit, and solid fats, all make an ideal energy source.

If you enjoy seeing birds in your garden, why not have a go at building your own nest box?



Photo courtesy of Alan Weir

## Weight Loss Research

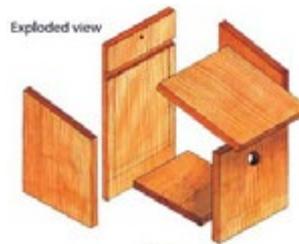
A final year veterinary student at Edinburgh University recently conducted research into the factors affecting weight loss success in dogs attending Head Nurse Kyley's Weight Clinics. The study was conducted anonymously and retrospectively and looked at a whole variety of factors which might influence whether a dog was successful at losing weight when attending such clinics, including: breed, age, sex, neutered status, owner's body size, time scale of diet and what food was fed. The results, which formed part of a final year dissertation, were fascinating: there were only two factors which could be statistically shown to influence the success of dieting dogs – can you guess which?

The owner's body size and whether the dog was fed a prescription restricted-calorie food were the only factors which were found to be significantly associated with successful weight loss!

The practice's Weight-Loss Clinics run most weekdays with Kyley (or 'Herr Commandant' as she is known to several of the attendees!), and are a free of charge service to help you reach your dog's, or cat's, ideal body weight. Don't hesitate to call Kyley at the practice for further details, or pop in at any time to get your pet weighed.

## DIY Nest Box

Making your own nest box is easy, rewarding and cheap, and can be a great weekend project to do with children. The design below will make a sturdy nest box which you can site in your garden and will last for many years. Squires Wood Merchants near the airport roundabout can supply the plank below, pre-treated, for just £2! Ideally, finished nest boxes should be sited 2-3m off the ground, and face between North and East. We'd love to see photos of your finished bird boxes, and to hear if they attract nesting birds in the Spring.



For more information and further instructions please visit: <http://www.bto.org/nbw/make.htm>

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200

175

Plank size  
150mm x 1170mm

150

Roof

200

Back

300

Front

175

Side

175

Side

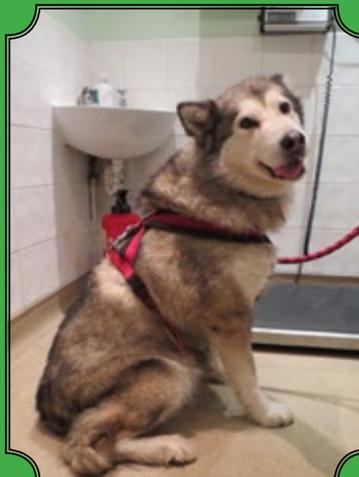
200

Base

120

## Darwin Dieter of the Year 2013

'Nanuq'



We all know how difficult it can be to lose weight, which is why we've awarded 7 year old Alaskan Malamute, Nanuq, the Darwin Dieter of the Year 2013 Award. Over a 7 month period, Nanuq lost a staggering 15kg (equivalent to a Staffordshire Bull Terrier!), reducing from 48kg to 33kg, and regained her curvaceous waist! Nanuq's owners bring her in to Kyley's weight clinic every fortnight, and have been delighted by her progress, "We didn't realise how unhealthy she had become with the excess pounds, but now she's back to a good healthy weight, she's so much more active – it's like having a new dog!"

## Court Circular

### Andrea's Baby

If you've been into the practice recently you may have noticed that one member of our team is currently absent. Nurse Andrea Rogers gave birth to baby daughter 'Lexi' on 26.10.13, and is currently on maternity leave. Together with dad Dan, both Andrea and Lexi are doing really well, and Andrea is relishing her time at home with her beautiful baby daughter. "Lexi's getting so big and changing so much every day", says Andrea, "I can watch her for hours, with all the different faces and noises she makes". We've all been enjoying cuddles with Lexi when she visits the practice, and look forward to Andrea rejoining us in July this year.



### Sonya's Half Marathon

Last October, Sonya ran a half-marathon in London, following a comment from her brother that she was getting "fat, unfit and old". After 9 weeks training, a few set backs due to illness, Sonya successfully completed the 13.1 miles in 2 hours 43 minutes. Many of you were kind enough to send Sonya words of advice and support, and sponsor her efforts. Sonya is delighted to say that with your generous support she raised a staggering £2,520 for Cancer Research UK. She would like to thank everyone for their support, most sincerely. She is also keen to scupper any rumours that she'll shortly be stepping up to a full marathon- she won't!



### Can you offer a home to... Daisybell?



Daisybell was found on the streets of Romania, where she had been attacked by other stray dogs. She was taken in by a local charity, recovered quickly, and was brought to the UK, where she is currently in a foster home. She is loving, energetic, great with children and highly intelligent. She is good with other dogs out walking, but gets jealous of them in a home environment, so would best suit a 'single dog' home, or to be with a submissive male. Her foster mum has worked hard to ensure Daisy will make someone a wonderful dog. If you are interested in Daisy, please call Emma on 07814 055885.

### Can you offer a home to... Tyrone?



Tyrone has been in a local rescue centre for the past 6 months, after his original owner's illness meant that she was no longer able to care for him. This handsome black and white, neutered male, 5 year old, is a gentle giant who just loves to play with people. He is fully vaccinated, wormed and defleaed. If you would like to find out more about Tyrone, please contact Kelly on 01959 573317.

### Can you offer a home to... Maria?



This rather shy little 3 year old tortoiseshell cat is Maria, who is currently being cared for by local charity RAIN. Her original owners moved away, leaving Maria to fend for herself. It has taken several months of TLC to get Maria to trust people again, but she is now ready to find a loving new home. She would be best suited to a quiet home, with no other pets nor small children. Maria enjoys playing, and is very affectionate once her trust is gained. If you think you might be able to offer Maria a permanent home, please call Marion on 01732 457834 or Jan on 01732 455354.



Like us on  
Facebook

2012 saw the launch of Darwin Veterinary Centre on Facebook. We were really touched and delighted that so many of you 'liked' us so quickly and have contributed to our weekday posts. We love seeing your photos and hearing your thoughts, and are constantly amazed at how many of you accurately guess the Weekend Competition and Tuesday Breed Quiz. If you've not 'found us on Facebook' yet, do take a look!

## Contact Details

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