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Autumn tick troubles!

As the Summer weather cools and Autumn sets in, now is not the time to drop your guard against a whole host of perky parasites! In fact the Autumn is the peak time for ticks!

Ticks are generally found in areas of woodland, heathland and grassland, waiting for an animal or human to brush past them so that they can jump on and feed. They attach using their mouthparts and will feed on blood from their host for several days before finally dropping off.

The main issue with ticks is that they can carry diseases in their saliva which they can potentially transmit to pets. These include:

Lyme disease is caused by *Borrelia burgdorferi*, although only a small percentage of *Ixodes* ticks carry it. Affected pets (and humans) may develop swollen joints and generalised stiffness. They can also develop other symptoms including: fever, appetite loss, lethargy, and rarely, life-threatening kidney disease.

Babesiosis is a tick-borne disease that can affect dogs, but not humans. It is caused by a tiny blood borne parasite (*Babesia canis*) which destroys red blood cells, leading to anaemia and red urine. It is mainly a problem for dogs travelling to mainland Europe – so one to be aware of when travel restrictions ease.

So how can you minimise the risk of tick-borne diseases?

- Daily monitoring for ticks and careful removal of ticks with a tick hook is essential because infected ticks have to feed for several hours before disease transmission occurs, but doesn't replace the benefit of preventative treatments (see below).
- Chemical tick protection – there are a range of products that rapidly kill or repel ticks and which are very important in reducing tick feeding and therefore disease exposure. Please ask us about our range of **veterinary licenced** spot-ons, collars and tablet products, offering you a wide variety of very effective options.

Tick removal top tips!

If you see a tick, you must never just pull it out! The tick's body will detach, but the head will remain in the skin leading to increased risk of tick-borne disease transmission. Also any stress placed on the tick by burning, freezing, covering with Vaseline and physical squeezing, will lead to regurgitation of the tick's stomach contents resulting in an increased risk of disease transmission.

We recommend using a special tick removing tool. We can provide you with these and show you how to use them.

A simple twisting and pulling action is all that is required to remove the tick while minimising disease risk. Specially designed v-shaped tick removers that remove ticks by rotation are very effective at removing ticks.



Close up of removed tick complete with mouthparts

Dental disease – is your pet affected?



DID you know that **dental disease** is one of the commonest conditions seen in dogs and cats?

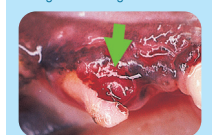
Problems occur if plaque and tartar are allowed to build up on your pet's teeth. Plaque is naturally sticky, and over time, will lead to *inflammation* of the gums – a condition called **gingivitis**. This is frequently accompanied by the accumulation of calculus (tartar) on the surface of the teeth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

Cats can also suffer from gum disease, plus they can also suffer from very painful tooth **resorptive lesions** which are poorly understood.

The good news is that very many dental problems can be **prevented!** So – don't let toothache ruin your pet's life – please let us advise you on caring for your pet's teeth and gums, and how to prevent dental problems.



Progression of gum disease



Resorptive lesion in a cat

Autumn alert!



The shortening days and the cooling weather herald the end of summer and arrival of Autumn! With the trees turning to glorious golds and the weather turning crisper, Autumn is a truly beautiful time of year. However, it is not without its hazards and featured below are some things to be aware of to ensure our pets stay happy and healthy at this time of year.

Parasites: The Autumn is a peak time for parasites and we've featured a couple of the main culprits below:

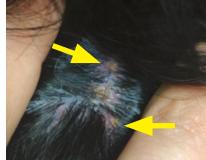
Harvest mites are a problem seen in the late-summer and autumn months. These tiny mites live in long grass and swarm onto passing pets, where they typically congregate on the face, ears and feet. They appear as bright orange dots and are usually a cause of great irritation as they feed on your pet. Turning to **fleas** – as the weather cools, flea numbers decrease outside, but as the central heating goes on, so numbers increase inside your home! Our homes have everything they need: warmth, carpets and soft furnishings to breed in and a readily available source of food in our pets. So it's essential to keep up your anti-parasitic treatments!

Autumn joint alert: The cooler Autumn weather often unmasks arthritic disease and joint stiffness, so keep an eye on your pet's mobility and comfort. Arthritis is a common disease in dogs and cats, and generally worsens with age. The good news is that there are often many ways we can help them, from weight loss to novel forms of treatment. So if your pet seems to be slowing down this the Autumn, speak to us about how we can put the spring back in their step!

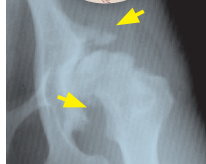
Poisonings are also a concern at this time of year, so keep an eye on what your pet is trying to eat, especially dogs on walks! **Conkers, acorns** and **rotting fruit** are plentiful on the ground but can cause upset tummies. Also be vigilant for any spilt **anti-freeze** (used to top-up car radiators at this time of year); it is highly toxic but tastes very sweet, so cats in particular will readily lick it up.

Wasps and bees are coming to the end of their summer lives and are often pretty slow, which makes them irresistible playthings for dogs and cats but they can still sting, which is painful and causes nasty swellings. These are usually easily treated with injections and the sooner we see your pet the better!

So – enjoy the autumn weather, but make sure your pets stay safe! Please call us if you would like any more information.



The bright orange mites often cluster together and are commonly found between the toes. Below: Harvest mite down the microscope



Arthritic hip joint in a dog. You can see fluffy new bone (arrowed) typical of arthritis



Worming worries!



Unlike infectious diseases which we can vaccinate against, the battle to keep pets worm and parasite free is an ongoing one! As well as skin parasites covered elsewhere in this issue, we now turn our attention to worms! *So what are the major types of worms affecting our pets?*

Roundworms are most commonly found in young animals but can infect adults as well. Many pups and kittens are born infected with roundworms because they cross the placenta and are also in the milk. Roundworms look like long strings of spaghetti but are usually only seen if there is a heavy burden or you give your pet a dewormer. Adult roundworms shed eggs which are passed out in your pet's faeces and infect the environment. The eggs become infective within a few weeks and pets can become re-infected by unwittingly eating the eggs, often whilst grooming. Additionally the eggs can pose a risk to humans if accidentally ingested.



Roundworms are long, white and spaghetti like.

Tapeworms are long segmented worms which live inside the small intestines of cats and dogs. Adult tapeworms shed small *mobile* segments that pass out in the faeces and are often found around the tail areas of cats. As the segments break down, they release eggs into the environment. These eggs may be eaten by *intermediate hosts* – these include **fleas** and **small rodents** such as mice and voles. As a result, tapeworms can be acquired via food (cats eating small rodents) or via swallowing an infected flea during grooming. Pets with tapeworms may not show any obvious clinical signs, meaning that they can be carried silently.



Tapeworms are long segmented worms which shed segments.

Lungworms (also known as *Angiostrongylus Vasorum*) causes life threatening disease in dogs.



Slugs and snails act as 'intermediate hosts' and are commonly infected with immature lungworm larvae. If infected slugs and snails are eaten by a dog, the larvae migrate

to their lungs. Here they develop into adult worms up to 2cm in size. 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.



Electron-micrograph of an adult lungworm (courtesy Bayer).

There are a variety of **veterinary licenced** treatments aimed at keeping your pet worm free, and which are easy to administer. Please contact us to find out how we can help you best protect your pets.

Pet Insurance – is your pet covered?



We know that vet bills are often unexpected and can mount up over time, so having a good pet insurance policy will really combat the worry of being able to afford their care.

So what features should you look for? Here are some tips:

- Choose a 'lifelong' policy – this should cover your pet for the whole duration of an illness, even if it is a permanent problem.
- Ensure there is a substantial amount claimable for every condition.
- Look at other benefits offered – these can include third party cover (essential for dog owners who can be held liable for accidents caused by their pets).
- Check-out the potential for premium increases – some companies will increase them after a claim, whereas others will remain the same.

If you would like further information on the benefits of insuring your pet, please don't hesitate to contact a member of our team.