



SUMMER 2008/09

# Your Vet



## EAST PORT VETERINARY HOSPITAL

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### Veterinary Surgeons:

**DR GARY TURNBULL**  
BVSc (Hons)

**DR PRISCILLA TURNBULL**  
BVSc (Hons)

**DR REBECCA TUCKER**  
BVSc (Hons)

**DR AMY LEE**  
BVSc (Hons)

**DR CAROLE COMERFORD**  
BVSc (Hons), BSc



### Other Staff Members:

Stacey Theofanou, Helen Pearson, Rebecca Spring, Kate Bisco, Emma Crocket, Amie Burgess, Annie Thomson, Wilhelmina Ridding, Nikki Moulston

### Consultation Hours:

#### Consultation by appointment.

**Monday to Friday:** 8.00am-6.00pm  
**Saturday:** 8.30am - 12.00 noon.

### After-Hours Service:

Our after-hours emergency service is staffed by our own veterinarians 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year. To utilise this service, phone the hospital on (02) 65835677 and leave a brief message with your contact details and the nature of the problem. Our on-duty veterinarian will return your call within minutes.



## "Flee flea!"

Fleas can be the bane of many a pet's life and over summer the problem can dramatically escalate. Warmer temperatures enable the flea to complete its life cycle more quickly resulting in a population explosion.



How can you tell if your pet has fleas? Examine along their back especially around the base of the tail. You may see the fleas themselves - tiny brown creatures, 2-3 mm long scuttling through the coat. Often fleas are not seen but telltale flea dirt (flea faeces) is found. This resembles tiny crumbly pieces of dark soil. Soil and flea dirt can be differentiated by a simple test. Give your pet's coat a good brush and shake out. If any suspect dark bits come loose, place them on a moistened white tissue. Flea dirt, which is essentially digested blood, will dissolve to a dark reddish brown colour whereas soil stays as a solid granule.

Fleas affect our pets in many different ways. Some animals can carry a large flea burden with no ill effects. Others may be allergic to the saliva from a flea bite and respond to just a single flea with excessive itching and discomfort. Pets suffering from fleas often have associated hair loss and secondary dermatitis, particularly at the tail base and along their back. Cats may over groom in symmetrical strips along their flanks and down the back of their legs.

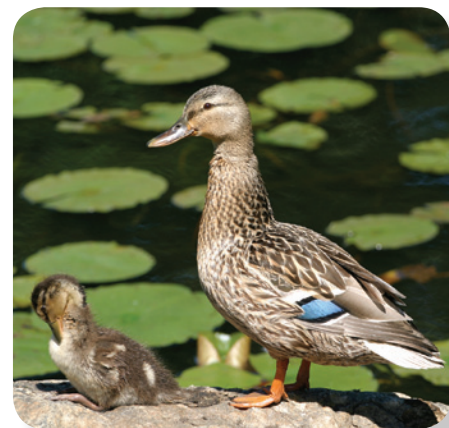
All cats and dogs should be protected from fleas during summer. Ask your vet about some of the excellent products available. As 80% of the flea population often reside away from the pet, the fleas on your pet may be just the tip of the iceberg. Unless the environment is managed, your pet will be continually reinfested from their contaminated surroundings. Wash their bedding regularly - preferably the 60 C cycle - and vacuum frequently. This removes the early lifecycle stages from the environment. It also helps to use a product containing an 'insect growth regulator' which acts like a birth control pill for the flea. Attacking fleas from both directions will hopefully ensure a flea free summer.

## Birds and Botulism

We all have happy childhood memories of feeding the ducks at the local pond. Unfortunately this traditional pastime can contribute to a potentially fatal disease in the pond's birdlife - particularly over the summer months.

*Botulism* is caused by the ingestion of a toxin from the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*. These bacteria live on decaying plant and animal matter and produce spores which can remain dormant for years. When conditions are right, the spores germinate to become toxin-producing bacteria. Our summer months, with low levels of stagnant water combined with rotting organic matter such as dead plants, picnic scraps and bread fed to the birds, provide the perfect growing conditions for *Clostridium botulinum*. Such conditions also increase the population of maggots and aquatic invertebrates which may contain high levels of botulinum toxin.

If enough material containing the toxin is ingested by a bird, it will start to show symptoms of botulism. The toxin causes paralysis of the bird's head and limbs, eventually leaving it unable to move or eat. Although many birds may die or need to be euthanased, it is sometimes possible for affected birds to be intensively nursed through this devastating disease. Any bird suspected of having botulism should be taken to your local wildlife carer or veterinarian for assessment. This summer, help keep our water-birds' environment as clean as possible and free of rotting food scraps.



- Rabbit Teeth
- No purrs for the poisonous lily
- Equine air heads



## Brachycephalics with bothersome breathing

*Brachycephalic* means “short skull”, and is the name given to the breeds of dog with short squashed faces. Brachycephalic breeds include English Bulldogs, Pekingese, Pugs, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels and Boxers amongst others. Although their skulls are shorter, these dogs still have the same soft tissue structures as dogs with longer skulls. The excess soft tissue impinges on their airways and can restrict their breathing. Unfortunately, these dogs are also prone to numerous conditions which can cause partial airway obstruction. Conditions such as narrowed nostrils, small tracheas or windpipes, laryngeal disease and elongated soft palates all come under the banner of Brachycephalic Airway Syndrome. This can cause symptoms ranging from snoring through to exercise intolerance, noisy breathing, coughing, gagging and collapse.

Summer time can worsen a brachycephalic's airway disease. The frequent panting required to keep cool can result in swelling of the soft tissue structures around the throat and further compromise already narrowed airways. Excitement and obesity also contribute to excessive panting and heat stress. It is vital that brachycephalic breeds are kept cool over summer. Avoid exercising in the heat of the day and provide cool sheltered outdoor areas or better still, allow access to an air conditioner! Brachycephalic dogs need to be kept lean and trim and should avoid extended periods of excitement.

If your brachycephalic dog develops breathing difficulties then seek veterinary help immediately. There are medications which may help temporarily alleviate his symptoms. In the long term, some patients can be helped with surgery to trim an elongated soft palate or correct narrowed nostrils. However, as brachycephalic airway syndrome is usually a collection of issues, surgery may help but generally does not cure the dog's breathing difficulties.



## Treat my pet! Osteoarthritis, prevention is best

*Osteoarthritis* (OA) is a common cause of debility in cats and dogs. Damage to the cells of the cartilage (the gristle that sits as a cushion between bones in a joint) causes it to soften and ulcerate. As cartilage wears down, the underlying *subchondral* bone thickens and new abnormal bone growths (osteophytes) occur. The major risk factor for OA in pets is obesity. Pets are considered obese if they are 20-30% over their ideal weight. Trauma or injury can also predispose to joint disease.

There is no ‘magic bullet’ treatment for OA. The *most* important part of the treatment is weight loss where required. Although a pet of normal weight may have OA in one joint as a result of past trauma, the majority of pets have OA in multiple joints as a result of increased body fat. A healthy weight loss for your pet is 1-2% of their body weight per week, with the goal of maintaining muscle mass. This can best be achieved when weight loss is attempted in combination with regular exercise. The nature of this exercise must be chosen with care. A fat dog cannot simply launch into an aggressive exercise campaign. Gentle changes, such as walking for 5-15mins twice daily, can make a huge difference to a pet's metabolism. Swimming is an excellent way to strengthen muscles, burn fat and improve range of motion in painful joints. This can be encouraged at safe beaches or rivers, but avoid the surf which can be dangerous for dogs with decreased mobility and strength.

*Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs* (NSAIDs) are popular for use in acute flare-ups of arthritis. Modern drugs are much safer than their previous incarnations but still have significant potential and unpredictable side effects. These drugs are therefore best for short term treatment rather than long term use. *Corticosteroids* tend to increase appetite and weight, making them a less ideal choice for OA these days. *Pentosan polysulphate* is used extensively in Australia as an effective treatment for OA. It is given via injection once a week. After an initial four week course, vets will continue with their own preferred plan. It is a relatively safe drug with few reported side effects. As it may temporarily affect the clotting ability of platelets in the blood, it should be avoided around the

time of any surgery. It should not be used in conjunction with NSAIDs. Nutritional supplements (‘nutraceuticals’) such as chondroitin sulphate and glucosamine receive mixed press. While there is a need for more controlled studies with these products, many vets and pet owners believe them to be of use, and some authors strongly recommend them.

As with so many other diseases, the best treatment for OA is prevention. Maintaining your pet at a healthy weight with regular exercise will go a long way to minimising their risk of OA, and improving their quality of life as they age.

## Rabbit Teeth

Just like our fingernails, rabbit teeth grow continuously. To prevent them from overgrowing, they must be constantly ground down. This occurs as the upper and lower sets of teeth grind against each other and against hard food such as bark, hay and carrots. If not enough hard food is provided, or if the teeth do not align nicely, uneven wear will occur and teeth can overgrow. As the teeth are capable of growing up to 2.4 mm per week, this can result in a grotesquely long tooth (or teeth) penetrating from the mouth. Sometimes the abnormal tooth growth occurs within the mouth and the only sign an owner may see is “slobbers” – an excessive amount of saliva around the mouth, chin and forearms.

Rabbits with overgrown teeth are often in pain and can have secondary infections. Your vet may be able to help with corrective trimming - however the cause of the overgrowth must also be dealt with.





## Emergency! Snakebite

Except perhaps for the great white shark, nothing strikes fear into the Australian heart like a snake. For pet owners living in semi-rural and rural areas, this fear is based on reality. Suburban pets too can be exposed to snakes in their own back yard. In Australia, the most commonly recorded snakes involved in fatal or near fatal bites to pets are Brown snakes (Dugites in WA), Tiger snakes, Taipans, Black snakes, Death Adders and Copperheads. While your vet will know which are the most common in your geographical region, snakes don't read maps, so never assume a snake's identity based only on your location! If your pet kills a snake, carefully take the snake's body to the vet with you for identification.

Venom is a complex chemical soup! *Neurotoxins* cause a rapid paralysis in the victim. This leads swiftly to respiratory arrest followed by cardiac arrest. *Myotoxins* damage muscle cells. This results in release of *myoglobin* which can damage the kidneys. *Procoagulants* cause massive microscopic blood clotting. This leads to a loss of clotting factors in the blood and generalised bleeding. *Nephrotoxins* in some types of venom cause direct toxicity to the kidneys.

Myth and misunderstanding surrounds the treatment of snakebite in Australia. The popular belief that antivenom is not necessary has probably arisen from anecdotal stories of pets that have been bitten by a snake and survived - either with no therapy or with vitamin therapy and other basic medical care. Not every pet bitten by a snake is bitten by a venomous snake, and not every pet bitten by a venomous snake is actually *envenomated*. A pet showing 'pre-paralytic signs' of salivation, collapse, trembling, vomiting, defaecation, urination and panting, sometimes followed by a brief recovery, always needs antivenom. They have received a lethal dose of venom. Another myth is that small pets need smaller amounts of antivenom. This too is false! Antivenom works by binding to and inactivating the venom itself. Thus the amount required to treat the pet depends on the amount of venom injected, not the size of the pet.

If an envenomated pet has collapsed, it needs urgent veterinary care. This can include ventilation with oxygen via a

breathing tube. Intravenous (IV) fluids and various drugs including *polyvalent* antivenom (containing a mixture of antivenoms) may be given. Once the snake is identified, the appropriate *monovalent* antivenom will be used. A pet that has only received a small dose of venom may only require IV fluids, one vial of antivenom, and a night in hospital. A badly envenomated pet may die despite appropriate therapy, or may require as many as 5-7 vials of antivenom, mechanical ventilation, and days in hospital to recover. Since the cost can run to many thousands of dollars, there is good reason to consider pet insurance!

## No purrs for the poisonous lily

If you have an interest in floral arrangements and felines then beware - cats and lilies do not mix. The many varieties of ornamental lily are severely toxic to cats. All parts of the lily are poisonous and as little as two to three leaves can kill a cat. After ingestion, poisoned cats become lethargic, anorexic and may vomit. These symptoms can then progress to complete renal failure. Early and aggressive treatment is required to prevent this catastrophic chain of events. Perhaps this is one time when fake flowers are more appealing than the real thing.

Buon Natale  
FELIZ NAVIDAD

PEACE MELE KALUKIMAKA

Seasons Greeting  
NOEL JOY

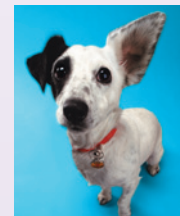
joyeux noel

On behalf of all  
of us, we extend  
our very best  
wishes to you,  
your family and  
friends, for a  
safe, happy and  
healthy Festive  
Season.

## Equine air heads

As bright as your horse may seem - a large proportion of its head space actually contains air rather than brains. Horses have air-filled chambers in their skulls called *sinuses*. They also have large nasal chambers containing warm moistened air on its way to and from the lungs. In addition, there are pockets of air contained within the two *guttural pouches*. The guttural pouch is a fist sized swelling of the *Eustachian tube* (a tube connecting the throat to the middle ear) located inside the head, just below each ear.

The function of all this air is unknown. One popular theory is that it may decrease the weight of the horse's large head. Minimising weight is important when safety depends on being able to flee from danger. Another theory is that the air spaces may help prevent the brain from overheating. Keeping a cool head is important when you are an animal evolved to run fast over long distances.



Laughter  
is the best  
medicine

What do you get when you cross a poodle with a chicken?

Poached eggs!

What did Rover say when he sat on his doghouse?

Roof! Roof!

What happens when it rains cats and dogs?

You have to watch out for poodles!

My killer poodle is 15 years old, but she's still a great watch dog -- as long as I remember to turn up her hearing aid.

"Outside of a dog, a book is probably man's best friend; inside of a dog, it's too dark to read." - Groucho Marx



## Symptoms of disease

### Understanding a cough

Most people – and pets – have an occasional cough. The problem arises when coughing becomes persistent or irritating. Cough may be an indicator of underlying disease and may come on acutely or develop slowly over time. It may present with other symptoms or as a single problem. The cause of the cough needs to be determined in order to decide whether or not it is a serious threat to the pet.

The first question to ask is whether your pet is actually coughing. Some owners may be confused by retching or gagging which have different underlying causes, and all have different underlying causes. If you are sure that your pet is in fact coughing, the question becomes what, when, and how? What does the cough sound like? Is it loud and dry or is it soft and moist? When does the cough occur? When your dog pulls on his lead, when he rises in the morning, or when he rests at night? How often does he cough? Is it sporadic or increasing in frequency over time? The answers to these questions can guide your veterinarian in their assessment of your pet.

The clinical examination is a very important part of the assessment of a cough. The first thing a vet may look at when examining your pet is the colour of the gums.. If there is any tinge of blue (*cyanosis*) this is of concern. The throat will be examined from the *larynx* (voice box) down to the chest. Finger pressure on the *trachea* (windpipe) may cause an abnormal cough. This could indicate problems ranging from *Infectious Tracheobronchitis* (also known as kennel cough or canine cough) to a ‘collapsing’ trachea or enlarged heart. The heart will also be checked with a stethoscope. Your vet will be listening to the heart *rate* (how many beats there are per minute), its *rhythm* (how the beats are spaced apart) and its *character* (whether there are any abnormal sounds in the beat).

The lungs will be thoroughly examined. As your pet breathes in and out, your vet will be listening for abnormal sounds that might indicate disease. These include loud or harsh breaths, indicating

congestion of the lungs, or crackling sounds which can indicate fluid in the air sacs.

If abnormalities are found, your vet will probably recommend some diagnostic tests. These may include blood tests and chest x-rays - to assess heart size and shape, the lung fields and the structures of the throat. An endoscopic examination and sampling of the airway fluid may be recommended. Where available, CT scans can also be very useful in the evaluation of a coughing patient. Accurate diagnosis is always the best way to determine how to treat a cough appropriately.

## The Wonders of Ultrasound

*Ultrasound* is becoming an increasingly useful diagnostic tool in veterinary practice. It is non-invasive and allows us to view inside such areas as your pet’s abdomen, heart, eyeballs, muscles and tendons. Diagnostic ultrasound utilises very high frequency sound waves to penetrate through body tissues. Different tissues have varying resistance to the passage of sound and therefore allow sound waves to either bounce back or continue travelling through the tissue. The returning echoes are converted into an electrical signal, analysed and then displayed as an image on a screen.

A *probe* or *transducer* is used to produce the pulses of sound waves and then pick up the resulting echoes. The transducer is placed on your pet’s shaved skin along with lots of gel. Bone, mineral deposits and gas tend to show as white on the screen whilst fluid is black and organs such as the spleen and liver are somewhere in between.

Ultrasound not only allows us to look at the outline of an organ structure but can also give us a cross section through the tissue. For example, a liver may be of normal size and appearance on X-ray, but ultrasound will be able to detect if there is a mass or abnormality within it. In addition, moving structures such as the heart and its valves can be assessed, as can blood flow through vessels and organs.

As ultrasound machines are very expensive, many clinics elect not to have their own but utilise the facilities of a specialist referral centre or a mobile ultrasonographer.

### Welcome to our new-look Newsletter!

At East Port Veterinary Hospital, we aim to keep you informed of the best way to care for your pet throughout its whole life. Our Newsletter is a great way to get helpful tips to keep your pet healthy, and is available on our website ([www.eastportvet.com](http://www.eastportvet.com)), via email or at the reception of our Hospital.

#### What’s new at East Port?

##### 1. *We have a new vet!*

East Port Veterinary Hospital warmly welcomes Dr Carole Comerford. Carole has 12 years experience in both mixed and small animal practice, and a special interest in small animal anaesthesia and analgesia.

##### 2. *The pitter-patter of tiny human feet!*

We also have a new, albeit tiny, member of our team – Imogen - Gary and Priscilla’s new baby girl. Born on 16/10/08 at 9½ pounds, she is quite the cutie!

##### 3. *Dr Gary Turnbull attended the WSAVA conference in Dublin.*

Continuing professional education is extremely important to us at East Port, in order to care for your pets with the latest veterinary knowledge. In August, Gary attended the World Small Animal Veterinary Association conference in Dublin, bringing a wealth of information back to Port Macquarie with him.

##### 4. *Dr Amy Lee continues her post-graduate studies in veterinary medicine...*

Amy has had her head buried in books and journal articles this year, bringing some fantastic new knowledge into the practice from Dr Jill Maddison’s sought-after internal medicine course. She is considering sitting her Fellowship examinations in medicine in the near future.

##### 5. *East Port Veterinary Hospital says “goodbye” to Dr Deneille Logan*

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to Dr Deneille Logan. Deneille started with East Port Veterinary Hospital as a new graduate from Queensland University 4 years ago. During her career at East Port, she furthered her studies in Emergency Medicine and it is this field she now joins, moving to an after-hours emergency practice in Newcastle. Although we are sad to lose her, we wish her the very best of luck pursuing her passion.

##### 6. *Deluxe Grooming!*

East Port Veterinary Hospital now offers a full grooming service on Mondays and Wednesdays, with Nikki Moulston. This service includes hydrobathing, clipping and nail trims – the ultimate day spa! To book your pet in, call us on (02) 6583 5677.