

Bright Eyes & Bushy Tails
Quarterly Newsletter
5/25/99

Hi all. This quarter's newsletter is dominated by parasites. While not an entirely pleasant thought, "this is the season for fleas and ticks."

Fleas:

There are several different types of fleas, but the most common type is *Ctenocephalides felis* or the "cat flea". There is also *Ctenocephalides canis* (dog flea), *Echindnophaga gallinacea* (poultry flea), *Pulex irritans* (human flea), and *Cediopsylla* (rabbit flea). Even on dogs, *C. felis* is by far the most common type.

Let's start our discussion of the flea life cycle with a dog who already has fleas. After the adult fleas mate, the female flea attaches to the dog and eats a very large blood meal. Approximately two days later, the female flea lays eggs (lots of them). These eggs tend to fall off the dog where the dog rests and spends a lot of time. When the eggs hatch, the first stage larvae feed off the "flea dirt" (feces) from the adult flea feces which fall from the coat the dog. As the larvae grow, they go through two molts, then spin cocoons to pupate. Approximately 3 weeks later (in warm months) new adult fleas hatch (if it's cold, fleas overwinter in the pupal stage until its warm enough to come out to eat). The new flea is very hungry and readily jumps onto the next passer-by, whether that is dog, cat, or human.

The biggest problem with fleas is that mommy flea isn't only laying one egg at a time, she's laying hundreds each time. Each time a flea bites your pet it damages its skin causing bleeding of the skin, and fleas usually graze causing multiple feeding bites in just a few minutes. With 10 or 20 fleas, it can get pretty uncomfortable for your pet.

A common misconception about fleas is that if an animal doesn't itch, it doesn't have fleas. Although the actual flea bite is uncomfortable, the itch comes from an allergy. Only if the pet (or the owner...) is allergic to flea saliva will he or she get little red bumps on the skin and the intense itching. Some pets aren't allergic to flea bites. They don't itch, but it's best to get rid of the fleas anyway (allergies can develop over time). Additionally, fleas can transmit one type of intestinal tapeworm *Dipylidium caninum* to dogs and cats. Fleas have also been shown to transmit the feline parvovirus (panleukopenia) to unvaccinated cats.

Ticks:

It is tick season again as well. I found my first tick crawling on me after mowing the lawn back in mid-April. YUCK! There are two main types of ticks found around these-here parts. The first types are *Dermacentor* species – there are actually several species of this type around. These are the "big" ones we tend to find on our dogs if they aren't protected against tick infestation. Besides being **GROSS** they carry a number of diseases. One is Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF, aka Tick fever) which can infect humans, in addition to dogs and other small mammals. RMSF initially starts with fever, loss of appetite,

arthritis, and coughing. The effects can be very damaging, even life threatening. Another disease carried by *Dermacentor* ticks is Tick Paralysis. Humans, dogs, cats, other mammals, and birds can be affected. A toxin from the tick causes the paralysis, and treatment is attempted by removing the tick. Supportive care is required for a few days while the patient clears the toxin and heals itself. Thankfully neither of these diseases are very common, but they do happen.

The second type of tick present in this area is *Ixodes dammini* (the deer tick). These ticks are extremely small and are very hard to find on us, much less our furry, feathered, or scaled friends. *Ixodes* can carry Lyme disease, which can lead to lameness and fever as well as fatigue and anorexia. There is a Lyme vaccination available for dogs, but its true efficacy is unknown. In general, the best treatment for Lyme disease is prevention—don't let the ticks attach.

Now for our commercial break... Good news fair people, there is a product that will kill fleas and ticks on contact for your dogs and cats. Frontline is a topical product that can be applied once monthly to kill fleas and ticks (it will kill fleas for up to 3 months in dogs). Your pet can still be bathed and go swimming without losing the effects of the drug. While it works well as a treatment (killing fleas and ticks), it works even better as a preventative (before the fleas get into your house, and before the tick attaches to the pet). Now back to our regularly scheduled program...

For the birds:

From our web site, we had a request for a bird behavior comparison. I'll go through a few personality profiles of some of the more common companion birds, including where they are originally from in case you are thinking about getting one (or two, or three).

African Grey Parrots (Africa)

Excellent talkers, playful, require a lot of attention, tend to form individual bonds and can become jealous of other people/animals.

Amazon parrots (Mexico to South America)

Excellent talkers, playful, require a lot of attention, tend to form individual bonds and can become jealous of other people/animals.

Budgerigars aka parakeet (Australia)

Easily tamed (usually), can be good talkers.

Canaries (Australia and Africa)

Breed prolifically in captivity, color mutations are genetically weak, don't like to be handled.

Cockatiels (Australia)

Loud! usually easily tamed, can say limited things, good whistlers.

Cocatoos (Australia, New Zealand, South Pacific Islands)

Require a lot of attention, bond with a human “mate,” are very jealous of others, intelligent, can be noisy and destructive if don't get their way. [But Allan has always liked them anyway; they're his favorite parrot.]

Finches (Australia and Africa)

Colorful, Pretty songs, short life span.

Lovebirds (Africa)

Quiet, hand raised birds are usually relatively tame.

Macaws (Mexico to South America)

Very intelligent, require a lot of attention and large living space, tend to be noisy, good talkers.

Birds can get different lice, mites, fleas, and ticks. This is much more common in wild caught birds, but if your bird has something funny crawling on it, don't hesitate to give us a call.

If I didn't name a bird you are interest in or you would like more information on a bird listed, call or e-mail us!

Reptiles:

Just briefly reptiles can get several species of *Ixodes* ticks. This is relatively uncommon in indoor reptiles, but you'll sometimes see them on reptiles that have been recently captured from the wild. We see a lot more mites (especially on snakes), and these can very difficult to get rid of.

In our next issue....Pet CPR. How you might be able to save your pet's life. Other suggestions are welcome!

Sincerely yours,

Jennifer L. Berger, DVM

Bright Eyes & Bushy Tails Housecall Veterinary Service:
Personalized Medical Care in the Comfort of Your Pet's Home.