

## Help for wildlife....



During the long winter months, food can be in short supply for garden wildlife. Offering a selection of foods to birds and hedgehogs will help them survive until Spring. Dawn and dusk are when most birds feed, so make sure your bird tables are full at these times.

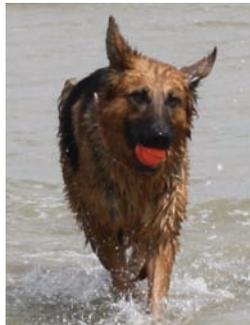


In addition to traditional bird tables, hanging different feeders to supply a range of seeds, nuts and high energy foods such as suet is ideal.

Fresh water is also essential and should be changed daily, with a bird bath or shallow dish for our feathered friends, and similar at ground level for hedgehogs, who really struggle to find water when the ground is frozen.



To help hedgehogs maintain a healthy weight in the lean months you can leave a dish of dog or cat food (either biscuits or meat is fine) but avoid the traditional bread and milk as this can cause them severe stomach upset.



## Cold weather aches and pains

Cold winters can make your pet's joints feel stiff and painful. This can manifest as a reluctance to go on long walks, a stiffening when getting up after lying down or a specific lameness.

The joints most susceptible to arthritis are those permitting limb movements – called synovial joints. The ends of the bones which meet at these joints are covered by smooth articular cartilage. In pets with arthritis, this protective cartilage is damaged, resulting in exposure of the underlying bone, causing pain and inflammation. Secondary new bone is commonly deposited around the joint and may be seen on x-ray (see lower right image).



In many cases, arthritis causes a low grade, constant discomfort. Whilst some pets will develop an obvious limp, many pets, especially cats, will simply slow down, be stiffer getting up and generally rest more; all of which is easy to put down to 'old age'.

Although arthritis cannot usually be cured, the good news is that we now have an expanding range of treatments to help your pet. First of all, **weight reduction** is absolutely vital. Often sore joints lead to reduced exercise causing an increased waist line! However, even a small loss will make a massive difference to mobility. Have a chat to us about how to help your pet slim down!

**Exercise:** Many arthritic pets struggle on long walks, so little and often is the key. Vary where you go so they always have somewhere new to explore; mental stimulation is as important as physical, especially for older animals. Try swimming as well, pools for dogs are now very common and it is a great way to strengthen muscles and burn calories while not stressing out sore joints. Simple changes at home can make such a difference: putting mats on slippy floors, providing a super supportive bed and using ramps will all really help.

Many pets also benefit from anti-inflammatory **pain relief** and also increased dietary intake of **glucosamine and chondroitin sulphate** either as a supplement or in the way of prescription food. If you are worried that your pet may have arthritis, please come and see us for a check-up!

### X-rays and arthritis

Radiography is commonly used to investigate joint problems.



X-ray of a normal elbow joint



**Arthritic elbow joint** in a dog with lots of "fluffy" new bone (yellow arrows) around the joint, indicative of marked arthritis.

## Q: Where do fleas go in the winter? A: Your home!



Did you know that the worst time for flea infestations is actually the Autumn and Winter months? Fleas thrive in warm conditions and thanks to central heating, they don't need to hop south for the winter, they just need to move into your living room.

Fleas can make their way into our homes in all sorts of ways; on our pets, on us, or just hopping in by themselves. Did you know that fleas can jump 20cm into the air – so your front step is no barrier to them! They lay their eggs in protected places like under furniture or in the cracks of laminate floors and those eggs can survive for months, waiting to be activated by warm conditions (remember that central heating?!) and the presence of pets spending more time inside. This is why flea infestations can appear to come out of nowhere!

**So, it is vital to protect against fleas all year round!** Come and have a chat to us about the best ways to do this and you can stop your home from being a flea's winter paradise!

## Staff news

Huge congratulations to **Emma**, who joined us earlier this year as receptionist at Crowborough, and is now moving to our Tunbridge Wells branch to train as a veterinary nurse. Emma has already been a huge asset to our team, and we look forward to watching her progress as she joins our nursing team.



## Staff Focus: Practice Partner Tom Doyle gains Advanced Practitioner status



I've always enjoyed treating eyes, and a few years ago began to take a closer interest in ophthalmology. After many years out of vet school I began studying again, gaining a "post graduate certificate", attending conferences with other eye vets, practicing surgery, and "seeing

practice" with specialist small animal ophthalmologists. My colleagues have also been very obliging in sending interesting eyeballs (and their owners) in my direction and putting up with my enthusiasm for new eye equipment. Earlier this year I gained "Advanced Practitioner Status" in Ophthalmology, awarded by our Royal College to general practitioners with extra qualifications and skills in a particular area. I see a huge variety of problems, from thorns and cat scratches to the surface of the eye, to eye-threatening ulcers to complicated medical eye cases. It's great to be challenged with new cases, and most importantly to be able to offer a higher level of care to our patients.

## Appointment Times

**Tunbridge Wells: 01892 520296**

**Monday to Friday:**

9–11am, 2.30–4.30pm, 5–6.30pm

**Saturday:** 8.30–11.00am

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**Crowborough: 01892 661650**

**Monday to Friday:**

9–11am, 2.30–4pm, 5–6.30pm

**Saturday:** 8.30–11.00am

**Wadhurst: 01892 782382**

**Monday to Friday:** 9–11am,

2.30–4.30pm

**Monday and Thursday:** 5–6.30pm

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## New Health Plan



Our New Health Plan is launching this October. Please call into your nearest branch to pick up a leaflet or talk to staff for more information. It offers more choice and better year round coverage for pets, whatever their lifestyle!

Photo: iStockPhoto



## Brrr – it's cold out there!

With the colder weather setting in, it's a good idea to start making plans to avoid some Christmas calamities and keep our pets healthy throughout the festive season.

**Winter walks:** In order to avoid pets expanding their waistline, getting out and about as the weather cools is essential. However make sure that your pets are adequately prepared; when outside they may need to wear waterproof and warm jackets, especially if they are older or have thin coats. Some salt mixtures on paths, and also snow building up between the paws, can cause limping and pain. So, do check your pet's feet regularly and make sure they are washed and clean on return from a walk. Whilst out and about, make sure you play some games to give your pet mental as well as physical exercise.

**Toxic alert:** Anti-freeze poisonings increase at this time of year because we use it more in our cars. Although it is highly toxic, it tastes very sweet and pets, in particular cats, will drink it readily. Make sure your car isn't leaking any fluid and keep cans or bottles of it well out of reach and cleaned on the outside. Even a few licks can be fatal.



**Outdoor pets:** Rabbits and guinea pigs are ideally brought into a heated garage or shed, or moved inside. Make sure they have plenty of bedding and that their water supply is fresh twice daily. Check your small furries at least once a day to make sure they are bright, eating and well. If you have a rabbit or guinea pig who lives alone, now is the ideal time to think about getting a friend of the same species so they have someone to cuddle up with!



**Foliage alert:** Some plants such as ivy, poinsettia, holly berries and mistletoe can also cause stomach upsets. Lily petals and pollen are very toxic to cats. They may brush against the pollen and lick it off their fur, which can cause kidney failure.

**Festive alert:** Pieces of string, tinsel and bones from turkeys should be kept well out of reach to avoid an intestinal blockage and the possible need for life saving surgery. Baubles and lights, if broken and eaten, will cause serious damage to your pet. Similarly we see lots of problems at this time of year from pets eating things like chocolate, christmas cake and mince pies.

So – enjoy the festive season and follow these tips to keep your pets safe and healthy. As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch!

