



in safe hands

Paws & Claws News

Spring 2006

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One in the eye for Gizmo

Gizmo was a tubby little Staffy-red heeler cross, with a grumpy, agitated manner. He arrived at the surgery early in May for a general health check, vaccination and annual heartworm injection.

His grandparents, who were looking after him, were a little concerned about his left eye, as he had been squinting and tearing for the past few days. When I stained the cornea I quickly discovered he had a small, shallow ulcer in the centre. Simple enough to treat with antibiotic coverage ...or so I thought.

Gizmo's owners, Merle and Stewart, rang in distress a few days later. Despite Herculean efforts Gizmo was so fractious it was impossible to apply the ointment I had prescribed. Even with two people holding him down he simply would not allow his head to be held still for the antibiotic to be placed in his eye.

Back to the surgery where I stained his eye again to check the ulcer. It had enlarged and was deepening so we made the decision to perform minor surgery to close the eye to allow healing. His owners took the opportunity to also have an in-house blood test done to check his general health. Gizmo's breath was entirely anti-social and his teeth were heavily covered with plaque so we planned a dental scale and polish at the same time.

The eye pressure was checked to ensure it was normal then sutured closed. Then I attacked his teeth, first his right side, then the left, where I discovered one reason for his difficult nature. The very back tooth on his upper left arcade, which happened to be directly below his left eye, was dark grey in colour and very mobile.

I pulled gently on it and it came out quite easily — along with the large abscess that was fulminating beneath the tooth! The poor little soul must have been in quite a lot of pain for some considerable time but he was such a stoic creature that it had been impossible for his guardians to tell.

To add to his woes the blood tests revealed that he was pre-diabetic and a diet was instigated to help him reduce weight and hopefully avert the danger of diabetes. It's not just overweight people facing a diabetes epidemic.


That evening Gizmo waddled sadly out the door, sporting an elegant Elizabethan collar to stop him scratching at the sutured eye.

When his guardians dutifully returned to have his stitches removed they reported his angst with the collar. He had been relentless in his efforts to scratch at the eye despite their every attempt to distract him. Consequently, the eye had improved but not completely healed. I advised them to monitor him to ensure it didn't degrade beyond repair. They returned two weeks later as he had not ceased his determined efforts to scratch his eye, which had begun to look quite enlarged and 'popeyed.'

Rechecking revealed his eye pressure was very high, more than twice the normal limit. With a 'normal' dog these circumstances would call for conservative treatment — drops in the eye four times daily. Given Gizmo's unusual personality his guardians chose to have the eye removed.

They asked that he remain with us for several days after surgery to provide a controlled environment in which he could be monitored and the risk of further damage limited. We placed poor little Gizmo onto Metacam for pain relief and antibiotics to prevent any infection post operatively, and scheduled him for surgery the next day. Within 48 hours of having that pesky eye removed Gizmo was transformed back into the happy, sweet natured little creature that he had been several months prior to his ordeal.

He returned home by the end of the week and his grandparents were more than pleased with the outcome. He has very quickly learnt to navigate with only one eye and now rarely needs to scold walls and doors for leaping out unexpectedly.

When he returned for suture removal he was his jolly little self and, despite his head being held, sat quite still for the procedure ...except for his tail. 

Peachester safe from Hendra virus

Many locals will be aware of the recent publicity surrounding the case of Hendra Virus the Range Veterinary Practice was involved in treating. I know that some people, particularly horse owners, are still a little worried about the possibility of another outbreak.

There is no cause for alarm. The outbreak was limited to a single horse, was quickly contained, and the blood test results have cleared both the people and horses involved.

Hendra is of course a serious disease and it's unfortunate that the initial response of the officials charged with controlling notifiable diseases was not as prompt as it might have been. A Ministerial review is currently underway and we're hopeful the result will be some changes in the way in which the DPI handles these events.

It's also unfortunate that the media chose to focus their stories on the possibilities of transmission of the disease to humans. It was a worrying time, for the owner of the affected horse, her family and myself. Nobody enjoys waiting to discover if you might somehow have contracted a potentially fatal disease in an effort to care for a sick animal.

However, despite all of the publicity surrounding this unfortunate incident, the reality is that the chances of the disease spreading in this case, either to other horses or to humans, was always very small. Hendra can only be transmitted to humans by direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected animal, and there is no evidence that human to human transmission is possible.

Veterinarians do treat incidents like this very seriously because of the potential risks of transmission but it's fair to say that the animals in your care are probably at greater daily risk from spider and snake bite than they are from Hendra Virus. Only a very few cases have ever been reported since the disease was first discovered in 1994.




That's not to say that horse owners should not be aware of the dangers. It's a bit like the government's terrorism publicity — be alert but not alarmed.

Fruit bats (flying foxes) are believed to be a natural host for Hendra and horses are thought to be infected by eating material contaminated by the virus. Wherever colonies of fruit bats exist near horses some simple precautions should be taken.

Try to keep hard feed under cover and always supervise horses when hard feeding. Remove any feed buckets or leftover feed.

If there is a bat colony close to you and you have fruit trees keep horses away from trees and from fallen fruit. If bats regularly visit your own property, don't allow horses to shelter under trees with roosting bats.

And be aware that cats and guinea pigs have also been known to contract Hendra. It's rare but it is possible. If you note shallow, rapid and laboured breathing, sweating, reddened membranes, general uneasiness and incoordination in a horse, or a copious, frothy nasal discharge develops, call us immediately. 

New diagnostic tools help keep your pets safe

We now have a comprehensive range of blood and urine analysis equipment on-site, including haematology and biochemistry. This new device allows us to check 26 different biochemical markers, either as a group — for a general health profile prior to surgery or during illness — or singly, for example when checking pancreatic function in dogs with pancreatitis or lactate testing for colic and fitness levels in horses and dogs.

It also enables us to perform urinalysis for kidney function, such as in cats on renal medication. The new machine is highly sensitive and registers a difference when there is just 5 per cent damage to the kidneys, as apposed to the blood test which only notes a change at approx 30 per cent.

The number of biochemical markers that are available for testing increases regularly which will expand our capabilities. This new addition to our range of high-tech diagnostic and analysis equipment means that the Range Veterinary Practice is now easily one of the best equipped surgery outside of the major cities on the Sunshine Coast.

Paralysis Ticks still active in the cold

The mild winter obviously suited the ticks. We saw more than double the number of ticks in winter than we did all of last summer and the number of cases seems to be increasing as the warmer spring weather advances. And these ticks appear to be quite toxic, with even small ticks causing paralysis. Prevention is always better than cure, and often significantly cheaper, so please continue tick treatment throughout the year, not just in summer.

New blood test developed by Idexx

Idexx labs have developed a new blood test to aid diagnosis of atopy in dogs. Atopy is a frustrating disease that causes dogs to itch all over their bodies, sometimes to such an extent that they damage their own skin.

It's due to an allergic reaction to a substance, often something the dog is in contact with during the course of its day. Treatment can be expensive and is often only a band-aid slowing the progression of the disease. If a source can be identified, it allows much better control of the disease, particularly if it can be removed from the animal's environment. The Idexx test checks 48 common allergens in dogs ranging from plants to foods. For more information call us at the clinic.

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