

## JIM'S PET PAGE



**LAURA FIANDER VN**

Laura is a qualified veterinary nurse in charge of nursing at Blake Veterinary Groups Burnham on Sea surgery.

We thought we would give Jim a rest from writing his article this month, so I have put together some advice on how we can best look after our pets as they enter their twilight years.

### **Senior Years**

Ageing is inevitable. We all grow old. As a guide line, our dogs and cats are said to have reached a senior age from around 7years old. It is around this age that you will begin to notice gradual small changes in your pet's appearance, behaviour and general attitude.



There isn't anything that we can do to stop ageing but we can help to make your pet as happy and as comfortable as possible through its senior years.

### **Signs of Ageing**

There are many things as owners that you can look out for as signs of ageing.

These signs may include:

- Cloudy eyes and vision deteriorating
- Impaired hearing
- Stiffness

- Dull coats with grey appearing around the muzzle area
- Weight gain and loss
- Increased drinking
- Increased or decreased appetite

Again we can not prevent these signs above from happening but we can try and slow their progression and help prevent daily life for your pet becoming an increased struggle.



## Helping your pet through its senior years

There are many things that you as owners can do to help your pet as it grows old.

- If your pet's vision becomes impaired we can not always improve it but you can help by making sure you don't make any big changes to your pet's environment and your pet will learn to cope and adapt with progressive blindness.

Cloudy eyes are often due to cataract which is a degeneration of the lens in the eye. Removal of such cataracts can cause dramatic improvements in vision.



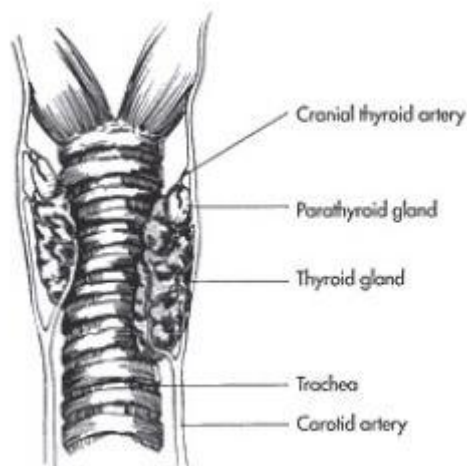
**Cataract in dogs' eye**

- Many pets lose the effectiveness of their hearing as they get older. We as owners just have to learn to be patient with them and understand that they don't always hear as well. Don't necessarily assume they are going deaf – he may just be ignoring you. I always think that rattling a biscuit jar is a very sensitive way of assessing a dog's hearing ability! However, although our pets hearing starts off much more sensitive than ours, they can become quite badly affected and we need to be sensitive to that. Of particular concern is the risk of traffic on the road - especially in the case of cats who are much more at risk if they are out unaccompanied.
- It is important that we still exercise our pets even when they do become less excitable and stiff as exercise will increase joint mobility and stop everyday life becoming difficult. Small but regular amounts of exercise will reduce stiffness and increase circulation.
- Coats will grey as each individual animal ages but to keep their skin and coat healthy, groom them regularly and give the occasional bath. Remember to ensure effective parasite control. There are now products available which can treat a variety of both internal and external parasites with a simple spot-on formulation.
- Weight is often a good indicator of other ailments. It is a good idea to pop into your vets and weigh your pet regularly to see if its weight is staying constant. Sudden changes in weight may be a reason for further investigation.



- **Common illnesses**

**Hyperthyroidism in cats** – this condition involves an over active thyroid gland the thyroid gland often becomes enlarged. Common signs are weight loss and increased appetite. This condition is best diagnosed by taking a blood sample for analysis.



**Diabetes** – this condition involves carbohydrate metabolism problems. Blood sugar levels keep increasing as cells are unable to take up glucose due to insulin deficiency. This condition can be easily detected by testing urine.

**Kidney Failure** – This condition is a result of loss of kidney function. Symptoms include lethargy, vomiting, diarrhoea, poor appetite and increased thirst. This disease can be diagnosed by analysing urine and blood samples.

**Blood pressure in cats** – Like humans cats can also suffer from high blood pressure and this in many cases is quite serious. It can lead to changes in their eyes and sometimes result in blindness. We would recommend any cat over 7years old to have their blood pressure checked regularly.



#### **Measuring blood pressure**

At Blake Veterinary Group we are in the process of launching Wellness checks. These checks give you the opportunity to bring your pet in and to chat with the nurse about any changes that you have noticed but the checks also give you advice on how we can best look after an elderly pet.

There is a Cat Wellness check and a Dog Wellness check available. If you are interested in finding out more please ring Blake Veterinary Group on 01278 451592 Bridgwater or 01278 794794 Burnham on Sea and ask to speak to Laura. Checks booked in before the Monday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2010 will receive a discount. We look forward to hearing from you.