



## SHERWOOD NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2011/2012

Last year was one of the coldest winters for many years and surviving the winter months can be a challenge for many pets so here are some of our suggestions on how to make this difficult time of year more comfortable for them.

But first - some practice news.....



Sadly, Kirsty will be leaving us in February to join Fitzpatrick Referrals in Goldalming, a referral centre that is considered to be one of the most advanced and innovative centres for small animal neuro-orthopaedics in the UK. Kirsty joined us straight from college in 2007 to begin her training as a veterinary nurse and qualified in July 2010. So although we are sorry to see her go, we are very proud of what she has achieved here and hope that the experience she will gain in her new position will give her even further success in her career.

Some of you may be aware that Kirsty ran our Puppy Parties on a Monday evening and now that she is going, they are going to be taken over by Clare.

We would also like to thank you for all the lovely cards and presents received this Christmas.

It is that time of year when we start thinking about booking summer holidays. In January there were some major changes in the requirements for going to and from Britain with your pets, so if you are thinking of taking your pet abroad with you this year and do not already have a valid pet passport, please ask for further information at reception.

Further information on the Pet Travel Scheme is available from:

The PETS Helpline on (+44) 0870 2411710 (open 8.30 am to 5pm Monday to Friday).

Or from the DEFRA website

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/pets/travel/index.htm>

Or you can also e-mail the Helpline:

[pets.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:pets.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

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Most cats and dogs will enjoy the luxury of bedding down in a warm interior, but other pets especially the "small furrries" are expected to cope with all that the elements can throw at them.

Below we cover the key points and common sense measures that can ensure all pets will survive the winter with the minimum of stress and in the best of health.

## The Small Furrries



Unfortunately many rabbits and guinea pigs are left to fend for themselves whatever the outside conditions. Paying attention to the following will make a real difference to their quality of life during the winter months:

1. Housing - ensure that hutches are weather proof. Protection from wind and draughts makes a major difference to these vulnerable animals. If the hutches are exposed, moving them to a sheltered location such as inside a garage or shed makes a world of difference. But do be aware that good ventilation is required to minimise chest infections. Also, car fumes in an enclosed garage can be fatal. If hutches are left outside then a flap that can be pulled down over the front of the cage to help insulate and protect the interior from the elements.
2. Insulation - providing plentiful fresh bedding into which these pets can burrow into is the key. But remember this still needs to be regularly changed whatever the weather to stop the build up of ammonia.

3. Food - the amount needed will increase during the winter as cold pets use more calories to keep warm.
4. Water - easily overlooked when temperature plunges below freezing for an extended period. This needs to be checked regularly. Having two water bottles that can be alternated helps. Try filling the replacement bottle with warm drinking water while the frozen one is removed and defrosted.
5. Age and condition - the elderly or young are more vulnerable to the cold so bring them inside. Be aware of debilitated animals, especially if they have lost condition recently. Weighing your pets regularly to monitor body condition should be a part of your home care routine.
6. Predators - winter is a lean time for foxes so hunger can make them more bolder than usual. Ensure hutches are sturdy enough to survive the attentions of a desperate predator.

## Dogs



In reality most UK dogs are indoors during the winter. So when you and your dog venture out into the cold bear in mind the following:

1. General condition - debilitated or arthritic dogs need extra consideration. Even the task of going to the toilet can be trial in deep snow, ice or the freezing cold. Additional supervision is required to ensure they don't get into difficulties or struggle to make it back to the house.
2. Check feet and bathe if necessary after a walk. A variety of salts and chemicals are used to clear ice on roads and pathways. Prolonged contact can irritate feet and pads. Dogs ingesting significant amounts of this material when grooming after a walk, can develop digestive or other metabolic problems. Smart comfortable "designer" dog boots are now available that can protect susceptible feet although a good wash and dry will work equally well.
3. Ice and ponds - dogs on iced ponds are a real danger to themselves and owners who try to rescue them if they break through and fall in.
4. Jumpers or jackets can help keep short-coated or older dogs warm when taking them out.
5. Burns - unguarded home heaters with exposed flames or hot surfaces can be a recipe for disaster when dogs get too close, resulting in singed hair or burns.
6. The temperature in a car will quickly drop once the engine is turned off so if you must leave your dog in the car during cold weather also provide a blanket or bed for them to keep warm.

## Cats

Cats are generally smart enough to avoid the excesses of the cold weather. Although special consideration should be given to elderly cats who are often reluctant to go out to go to the toilet so providing a dirt tray indoors can make life more comfortable and less stressful for them.

While infrequent, one problem that has been reported is where a cat will seek warmth and shelter perched on top of the engine under a parked car bonnet so checking prior to starting the engine is always advisable!



## Antifreeze the Killer

Ethylene glycol found in antifreeze, screen washes and de-icers is reported to be sweet tasting and palatable especially to dogs, which make up the majority of cases reported each year with about 10% of the cases being seen in cats.

Pets presented to us poisoned with ethylene glycol almost always die. Initially the affected pet will show nervous signs and vomiting.

Prevention is the answer so always store these materials in their containers with the lids on. Spilt antifreeze on driveways and garages should be properly cleared up as surprisingly small quantity ingested can prove fatal.

## And finally - don't forget the wild birds!

At this time of year, put out food and water on a regular basis. In severe weather, feed twice daily if you can: in the morning and in the early afternoon.

Birds require high energy (high fat) foods during the cold winter weather to maintain their fat reserves to survive the frosty nights. Use only good quality food and scraps.

Always adjust the quantity given to the demand, and never allow uneaten foods to accumulate around the feeders. Once you establish a feeding routine, try not to change it as the birds will become used to it and time their visits to your garden accordingly.



Further information can be found on the RSPB website [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)