

Sierra Animal Wellness Center

Specializing in Holistic, Integrative Veterinary
Medicine



May, 2016



Clinic Hours

Monday, Thursday and Friday
from 9:00 to 6:00

Tuesday from 9:00 to 3:00

Wednesday from 12:00 to 6:00

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[Pembroke Welsh Corgis Bred by Peggy Roberts, DVM](#)

Foxtail Season is Here!



Foxtails cause the most trouble during the late months of spring and throughout summer. Dogs are especially at risk. Outside cats can also be at risk, but since most cats are fastidious groomers and adept at removing grass awns before they cause problems, the majority of - but not all - foxtail victims are dogs. Foxtails eventually and inevitably make their way into the noses, eyes, ears, mouths, and just about every other opening of dogs' bodies, including the genitals. They can get deep into your dog's nostril or ear canal in no time, and often too

fast for you to notice them. These deadly little plant heads can burrow into your

dog's fur and pierce the skin. Unless they are found early, they can continue to travel throughout the body, creating abscesses, damaging tissue, penetrating organs and causing grass awn disease.

Foxtails get their name from the fluffy accumulation of awns that forms at the tip of each blade of certain annual grasses, resembling a fox's fluffy tail. They may look harmless but are actually barbed, which helps them penetrate an animal's skin and other tissues. The barbs are nature's design to help them burrow into the ground with the seed. These barbs keep them moving in only one direction, forward. And that is what makes them so dangerous. Foxtails have evolved in such a way that they easily "grab onto" anything that brushes up against them, such as a strolling cat or dog. Muscular movements of the animal's body cause the foxtail to continue to burrow through soft tissues.

A dog or cat's body is not able to process or breakdown foxtails. To make matters worse, foxtails carry bacteria. A grass awn infection can be very difficult to diagnose, in part because the infection occurs behind the migrating foxtail. In addition, foxtails are hard to see using traditional imaging techniques, because they are small, covered with infection and scar tissue, and are invisible on x-rays. As you can imagine, once a foxtail is roaming around inside your dog or cat's body, it can be incredibly difficult to find. It is not uncommon for veterinarians to perform multiple surgeries before a foxtail is finally located and removed.



Bruno had multiple surgeries to remove foxtails from his neck, ears, feet, legs, belly and back. He has fully recovered.

Signs Your Pet Has a Foxtail

Foxtails are serious. If your dog or cat is displaying any of the following symptoms, call the clinic right away:

- Foxtails often lodge in dogs' feet and can easily become embedded between their toes. Check for foxtails if you notice swelling or limping or if your dog is constantly licking the area.
- If your pooch is shaking his head, tilting it to the side, or scratching his ear incessantly, it could be the sign of a foxtail - one that may be so deep inside the ear canal you can't see it. Your veterinarian needs to take a look in the ear using a special scope.
- Redness, discharge, swelling, squinting, and pawing could be signs your dog has a foxtail lodged in its eye. If you think this may be the case, seek veterinary care immediately. A foxtail can cause significant damage to the cornea in a short amount of time. The eyes are the most susceptible area in cats.
- If you see bleeding or discharge from the nose, or if your dog is sneezing frequently and intensely, a foxtail could be lodged in a nasal passage.
- If your pet is gagging, retching, coughing, eating grass or stretching his neck and swallowing repeatedly he or she may have swallowed a foxtail. One that has entered the lung can cause coughing and difficulty breathing.

- Foxtails can find their way into your dog's penis or vagina. If you notice your dog persistently licking his or her genitals, foxtails could be the cause.
- Foxtails can also lodge under a dog's skin, which causes visible swelling, painful to the touch and/or pus discharge.
- In addition to the signs already mentioned, an animal with an infected grass awn penetration will show signs typical of an infection including lethargy and loss of appetite.



A foxtail migrated through this girl's neck creating a large abscess

If you suspect your dog or cat has encountered a foxtail that has entered his body please call us immediately and get him or her in to the clinic as soon as possible. It is important to act quickly as foxtails migrate in the body and can cause serious and sometimes even fatal infections.

Prevention

Living in California, we have the dubious honor of having more foxtails than anywhere else in the country, and sadly, more foxtail related injuries, infections and deaths. Foxtails can flourish anywhere and are seen not only in rural meadows and suburban yards but can grow quite happily in parking strips and medians of urban areas.

Prevention and early detection can save your furry friend - and your wallet - a lot of pain. By following these tips you can reduce the chances that your dog or cat will suffer from foxtails:



- The number one thing you can do to eliminate the danger to your furry friend is to eliminate the foxtails in your environment before they dry and scatter. Now is the time to pull those weeds. You can also knock them down with a weed eater or mow them, but these two methods should be done early in the season and may scatter the seed heads all over your yard. Be sure to pick up all the grasses or use an efficient grass catcher. If the seed heads are left to dry out on the ground, they will still be a danger to your pet.

- When walking your dog don't let him anywhere near foxtails. You'll find them along roadsides, in fields, around utility poles, in sidewalk plantings, just about anywhere.
- If foxtails can't be avoided, thoroughly inspect your pet a few times a day. Run your hands over your critter's coat; look into your her ears, under and around ear flaps. Check the face, especially around the eyes and nose and check the mouth. Examine the paws between the toes, and on the paw pads. Check around the neck, especially under the collar, under the legs and on the belly, and around the tail and anus. Even if you think your pet hasn't been exposed, it is still a good idea to perform this check every day.
- Keep your pet's coat clean and well-groomed and mat-free. A thorough daily brushing can help remove foxtails hidden in a long or thick coat.
- Consider a protective device especially created for dogs (sorry felines, haven't heard of any for you, yet): Here are links to two different products that have gotten good reviews, the [OutFox Field Guard](#) and [Foxtail Free Hoodies](#).

If you believe that your pet has encountered a foxtail that you can't easily remove or see, seek veterinary assistance right away.

Good News on the Dental Front

As with humans, we have come to know good dental health is critical to overall health, organ function and longevity. In the past we have offered a dental special two times a year.

Over time we found this led to the clinic being extremely busy during those times, with some critters not able to get an appointment, and others having to wait months for the special even though their oral health needed attention NOW!



Because of this we have made a change and are no longer offering the twice annual special. **Instead, we now offer 20% off needed dental services all year round if the service is performed within 30 days of Dr. Peggy's recommendation.** We hope this will help everyone to provide care to their furry friends when needed while making dental treatments more affordable.

Has it been awhile since we've taken a look at your pet's teeth and mouth? If so, give us a call at (530) 346-6611 and let's set an appointment.

Just for Fun...

"Buttermilk" knows how to have fun...



Playful Baby Goat

In Closing

We appreciate you taking the time to read this edition of our e-newsletter and hope you've found it informative. Please let us know what you think. Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed.

If you have any questions or concerns about your animal's health, don't hesitate to call or email us.

Best always,

Dr. Peggy, Bev and All the Staff
Sierra Animal Wellness Center

