



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH  
The Royal (Dick) School  
of Veterinary Studies

## Exotic Animal and Wildlife Service Newsletter – WINTER 2014/2015

We hope all of our clients and their animals had a wonderful festive season and are looking forward to an exciting New Year ahead.

We have recently joined the Rabbit Welfare Association's 'Rabbit Friendly Vet List'. This allows anyone who contacts the association looking for a rabbit savvy practice to see that we are listed. We hope to welcome many new rabbit owners in the area to the practice. The Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWAF) is Britain's largest organisation for rabbit lovers. It has existed since 1996 and is the combined effort of the Rabbit Welfare Association and its charity partner, the Rabbit Welfare Fund. It works to improve the lives of domestic rabbits across the UK through education and communication. Sadly, despite being the third most popular pets in Britain, rabbits are still one of the most neglected domestic animals. The RWAF firmly believe that rabbits deserve better and so do we!

We have decided to embrace social media and now have our very own Facebook account. Our page will be updated regularly with useful information about the wide variety of species we see. We aim to promote disease awareness, highlight the importance of preventative health care, provide husbandry tips, as well as featuring some of our cute or more interesting cases, one of which wheezy Wilma also features in this newsletter. Sadly we cannot answer direct questions about pets on there – we would always suggest they were seen by a vet but we hope it will be a fun, knowledgeable page to follow. Check us out and be sure to 'like' and share with your friends

Recently the opening times here at the hospital have changed. The hospital is now open until 6pm every week night so our appointments times have adjusted slightly. Our late finishes have been brought forward a little and we have opened up more late afternoon consultations so overall we still have just as many appointment slots available to see your pet(s). To book an appointment call our reception team on 0131 650 7650 option 4

Our three client evenings held over the summer went well, with a chicken evening, held jointly with Wing and a Prayer Rescue (<https://www.facebook.com/WingAndAPrayerRescue>). The stars of the show were some friendly hens that had come along for a demonstration on how to health check your hen. This was a great success and we intend to have another chicken night later on this year. A parrot evening and a tortoise evening was also held with a number of clients attending. These events are a great way to learn but also share experiences with other owners and we have another three scheduled for the spring.

What's in this month's newsletter:

1. News.
2. Staff profile.
3. Case Study.
4. Patient Profile.



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### **Tortoise Evening**

Last year's pre-hibernation evening was a huge success and we hope clients learnt a lot from it and all tortoises went into hibernation well. On Wednesday 8th April we will be holding a post hibernation evening. Speakers will be David Perpnan and Gidona Goodman.

### **Ferret Evening**

For the first time in a few years we will be holding a ferret evening on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May. Speakers will be David Perpnan & Emma Keeble.

### **Rabbit Evening**

These nights are always a massive success and we hope this time will be no different. This years will be Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June. Speakers will be Emma Keeble and Jenna Richardson.

**These events will be held at the veterinary teaching building (New Vet School) room Lecture theatre 1, from 7pm to 9pm. Refreshments will be available. Attendance is free, but please let us know you intend to come (Telephone the Vet School reception on 0131 651 7300), so we can work out how many biscuits to bring!**

## **Staff Profile**

### **KEVIN EATWELL**

Kevin has worked for over 18 years with exotic animals. His initial love was for birds, having kept ducks as a small child and progressing through to a variety of finches, softbills and parrot like birds. After graduating he started work in a mixed practice which opened a branch in a large pet superstore (the first in the UK) and was exposed to a wide variety of species including small mammals, birds and reptiles. He needed to expand his knowledge and experience to keep up with this new demand. Ever since then has been working towards additional qualifications and gaining experience working for zoological gardens, wildlife rescue centres and clinical practices, becoming increasingly involved in the care of everything exotic. Kevin joined the team here six years ago and is able to pass his knowledge and experience on to future generations of vets and nurses. The wide variety of animals and clients that come to the Dick Vet, constantly provide novel cases.

There is always something new to learn: which is one of the wonderful challenges of working in our department. Kevin's animals at home have increased in number to include a small breeding group of tortoises.





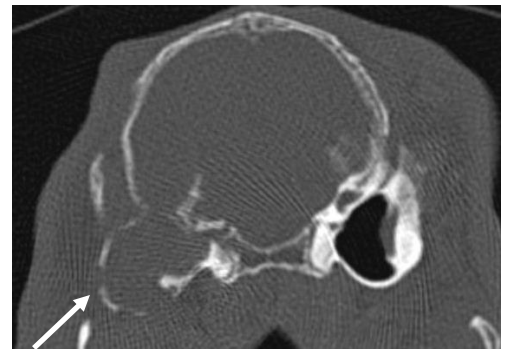
## Ear Infections in Rabbits

The most common patients we see at the clinic are rabbits. A fair proportion of these have lop ears and increasingly we are seeing ear infections in these. Rabbits are good at hiding disease well and so we often identify this as a problem when checking over a rabbit in a consultation. Often the problem has been undetected until then.

Clinical signs can be limited. The rabbit may simply be intermittently off food or a little grumpy and a physical examination may reveal nothing obvious at all. However a number can have a discharge within their ear canal or may have a swelling at the base. This infection can enter into the middle or inner ear leading to nervous signs such as a muscle spasm, a head tilt, or the rabbit can start rolling and its eyes flick backwards and forwards due to the upset balance.

We are incredibly lucky that we have easy access to a CT machine as this is the easiest way to confirm the extent of the disease. Rabbits are generally sedated to keep them still during the scan and we are able to evaluate their ears in detail.

If caught early before there are any bone changes then medical therapy can work to clear the infection and we are currently evaluating a new endoscopic flushing technique for these cases. Those with bone destruction as seen in the CT scan here are surgical cases and require the whole area to be removed. The more cases we see of course the more we think about how we can prevent the problem in lop rabbits.



The left hand side of this CT image shows the destruction of bone seen in some of these cases. This is a surgical case shown here.



Flushing out the middle ear in an anaesthetised rabbit using endoscopy.

There are really two things we can do. First is to increase owners awareness of the problem and (as we do) you start to look for it. If we can identify the problem early then we stand a greater chance of medical therapy being an option.

The second is to try to reduce how often it occurs. We are now recommending that all lop rabbits are assessed twice a year for a health check (one of which is usually their vaccination) to identify disease early, but we are also advising the use of an ear cleaner (designed to dissolve wax) twice a week to try to keep the external ear canal clear. It is also important to note that ear diseases are far more common in those rabbits that have nasal disease or snuffles and we also recommend a CT assessment of these (which is also an excellent way of determining how bad their snuffles is and if its related to a tooth root). Should you wish to start cleaning your rabbit's ears or want a health check to look at it just phone reception and leave us a message or book in.



## Wheezy Wilma

We are lucky to treat a wide variety of patients at the Dick Vet. Working with rescue animals, such as the hens saved by Wing and A Prayer rescue give our staff much pleasure. Chickens are such characters and very interactive. Wilma was an ex barn hen with a breathing problem. We think she had been suffering with this for quite some time before being rescued. From her breathing pattern, we suspected the problem to be in her trachea, (windpipe), so Wilma was admitted, to allow us to look at the lining of her windpipe with an endoscope, (a small camera).



Wilma after her procedure.

Wilma was anaesthetised by an anaesthetic gas, but in order to get a good view down her windpipe we needed to make use of her air sacs. A small tube was placed into her side into her air sacs and she was able to breathe and remain safely anaesthetised through this tube. This left her windpipe completely free so we could assess how severe her problem was with the endoscope.

There was a lot of mucous and debris, which we removed with suction, and also a tracheal stricture, which is a narrowing of the normal diameter of the windpipe. From the procedure, we were able to improve the situation considerably for Wilma.

Tracheal strictures often form secondary to irritation or trauma to the lining of the windpipe, and this is likely to have been something Wilma had struggled with during her days as a barn chicken.

We have continued to go from strength to strength after her procedure and has found her permanent, loving home with Fiona (one of the volunteers of the charity), where she will spend the rest of her days in luxury.

### **EXOTIC ANIMAL AND WILDLIFE CLINIC**

K. Eatwell, BVSc (Hons), DZooMed Dip ECZM, MRCVS  
D. Perpinan, DVM, MSc, Dip ECZM, MRCVS  
E. Keeble, BVSc, DZooMed, MRCVS  
J. Richardson, BVM&S, MRCVS

Hospital opening hours are:

Monday to Friday 8.30am – 6pm.

For an appointment or an emergency please phone: **0131 650 7650**

For the latest news visit our facebook page

(<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Rabbit-Exotic-Animal-and-Wildlife-Service/1521579548115486>) or our website ([www.dickvetexotics.com](http://www.dickvetexotics.com)).

