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Animal Crackers

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Statistics: There were 8,805 clinic visits at VHUP during the last six months of 1981, of which 6,924 were dogs and 1,509 were cats. Most of the rest came through the Exotic Animal Clinic. Forty-nine percent of the clients were from Philadelphia, twenty-nine percent from outside of Philadelphia and twenty-two percent from other states.

Common problems presented in the six-month period were: fractures, tumors, hit by car, fleas, intestinal parasites, thyroid conditions, atopic skin diseases, Parvovirus, cystitis, blocked cats, cata-

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racts, seizures, epilepsy, glaucoma, pneumonia, and periodontal disease. Medical records now are computerized. There are 800 disease classifications, and the species, breed, age, sex, and distribution of each disease can be re-called. It is estimated that about thirty-five percent of the cases seen in VHUP are referred by practicing veterinarians.

The Well Dog. Every dog owner should take a few minutes each week for a short check-up, because many common problems can be prevented in this way. If grooming is neglected, particularly in a long-haired dog, skin lesions may remain unnoticed until they reach major proportion and require lengthy, often costly, treatment. Be sure the area around the tail is clean. Look into the ears and be sure there is no excessive accumulation of wax and hair. Toenails should be just long enough to touch the ground. Teeth should be clean and the gums pink. The eyes should be clear with no accumulation of matter. If you know how your dog looks and behaves when it is well, you will be able to recognize signs of trouble.

Common signs of illness are change in appetite, fever, and dehydration. One meal refused usually is not important but there may be cause for concern if the appetite is completely lost for a day or two and the dog is listless and not as active as usual. If the dog seems its usual self and refuses a meal, perhaps it is getting hand-outs.

The normal body temperature (taken rectally) is higher than in humans—101.-102.5°F. Fever is an elevated body temperature. It's important to understand that excitement and exercise may elevate the temperature which should be taken when the animal is quiet.

Dehydration occurs when the body's output of water exceeds its intake, particularly when there is vomiting or diarrhea. If the skin has lost its elasticity, fluid replacement is indicated. Check this by picking up a fold of skin and letting it drop. It should fall back into place immediately.

A yearly routine check-up by your veterinarian is a good way to be sure of your dog's condition. This can detect problems you would not find without special tests, such as fecal examinations for parasites, blood tests for anemia, microfilaria or metabolic diseases, and examination for possible heart problems. When the veterinarian examines the dog, a complete history is important. You should learn to recognize what is normal so that you can better describe any suspected abnormalities.

Bathing. There is only one rule about bathing your dog—do it when necessary. Some dogs keep themselves clean and are never bathed, particularly if they live outside. Frequent brushing often will minimize the amount of bathing required. There are dogs which must be bathed often to keep them socially acceptable (odor-free).

Some show dogs are bathed almost daily as part of their grooming, but usually there is no reason to bathe a dog more than once a month. Always precede the bath with a thorough brushing. Bathing is a part of grooming and the frequency must be determined by the "life style" of the dog and its owner.

Overpopulation of dogs and cats is a serious problem. The large number of homeless strays points to the importance of responsible ownership and controlled breeding. Spaying or neutering should be considered for all household pets.

Reproductive Failure happens frequently. The bitch in season that is accidentally mated almost always will conceive. However, many carefully planned matings produce no puppies. Infertility in the bitch is difficult to study because the internal organs cannot be examined easily, the normal estrus cycle occurs only about every seven months and frequently accurate records have not been kept.

Every breeder should have knowledge of the estrus cycle based on scientific studies rather than folklore. In the bitch, there are four periods in the cycle. *Proestrus* usually lasts about nine days and the range is from three to seventeen days. During this period there is a bloody vaginal discharge, swelling of the vulva, and the bitch will not accept the male. *Estrus* is the period when the bitch will stand for the dog and usually shows "flagging" of the tail. It is the stage of the cycle when conception occurs. This stage lasts about nine days but may be as short as three or as long as twenty-one days. *Diestrus* lasts about two months and *anestrus*, when reproductive organs are not active, about four-and-a-half months. The bitch's record should show the age of the first "heat" (this may range from four to eighteen months) and the duration of each stage. The average interval between "heats" is seven months, but this may range between five and eight months in the normal bitch.

"False pregnancy" may occur in bitches which are not bred, and is considered normal. Some bitches will make a nest and produce milk—these may be used as foster mothers for orphan puppies.

Although many experienced breeders consider one mating all that is necessary, present recommendations are that the bitch be bred early in the standing heat and every other day thereafter for a total of two or three times.

Microscopic examination of the cells lining the vagina may be used to determine the best time to breed. Vaginal cytology is especially useful when

artificial insemination is used or when a bitch showing signs of estrus will not accept the dog. However, most normal bitches will accept the male at the optimum time.

If a bitch has normal cycles, normal behaviour, and normal external signs of estrus, yet does not become pregnant, the causes might be an infertile sire, infections, or obstructions in the genital tract. In the case of infections, a culture from the uterus must be taken surgically through an incision in the abdominal wall. Cultures from the vagina will contain bacteria even in healthy bitches. Hormonal problems may be suspected when there are abnormal cycles. A low level of thyroid hormone may cause long intervals between heat periods. Replacement therapy may produce puppies but canine hypothyroidism is often hereditary and it is not advisable to breed these bitches.

Only bits and pieces of information are given here but I've included answers to many of the frequently-asked questions. Successful breeding management requires careful observation of each individual, accurate record-keeping, knowledge of reproductive physiology, and pedigree evaluation to eliminate inherited problems.

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Teeth. The adult dog has forty-two teeth (adult humans have thirty-two). Newborn puppies have no teeth, but twenty-eight deciduous puppy teeth will appear between one and eight weeks of age. Permanent teeth will begin to come in at about four months of age.

Regular examination of the teeth is advisable, beginning at about eight weeks. Sometimes the puppy teeth are not shed and need to be removed. In the normal adult dog, a fingernail scraped over the teeth will pick up no debris. Soft, white material which can be scraped off (*plaque*) may lead to serious problems if not removed. Hard dog biscuits, hard rubber toys, or rawhide bones may help the problem. A toothbrush (baby's) or a rough cloth over a finger may be used to clean the teeth once or twice a week. Ordinary toothpaste will do although there is a special product made especially for dogs. Your veterinarian may prescribe an antiseptic solution.

If plaque persists, it becomes hardened calculus and must be removed professionally by scraping or ultrasonic cleaning. If neglected, it can lead to periodontal disease with foul breath, loss of teeth, and often systemic disease.

A Busy Place

New Bolton Center continues to be a favorite location for a variety of groups to hold meetings and social affairs. On March 10, 1982 forty young farmers from Lancaster County met to hear presentations by several faculty members and then tour the facilities. On March 12, a Continuing Education Course—"Current Trends in Bovine Nutrition"—was held under the direction of Dr. James Becht.

Other groups using the facilities were Dr. Donald Abt's Sailing Club, the Penn Marydel Apaloosa Horse Club, the Delaware Valley Combined Training Association, and the Debonair Flyers. On March 27, Drs. Mark Allam and Richard McFeeley hosted the annual carriage drive to the Cheshire Point races, and on April 17 the annual New Bolton Center Open House was held.