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Animal Crackers

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Veterinary Medicine as a Career

There are twenty-six Veterinary Schools in the United States, four of these have not yet graduated their first class. There are between nine and ten thousand students enrolled and about one-third of these are women. It has been estimated that only about 25% of the qualified applicants are admitted each year. There has been a marked increase in the number of schools and students in response to a shortage of veterinarians. There are indications that this could result in a surplus in the next decade or so, but expanding opportunities in the field may change this outlook.

Animal

Over 30,000 veterinarians in the United States are working in private practice, teaching and research, regulatory work, military service, public health, and other professional activities. Veterinarians may specialize in a number of different fields such as internal medicine, radiology, dermatology, reproduction, ophthalmology, cardiology, surgery, neurology, microbiology, pathology, aquatic animal medicine, avian medicine, zoo animal medicine, orthopedics, and others. Actually about 75% of the veterinarians are in private practice and half of these treat only small animals (dogs and cats). There are some practices limited to large animals (horses, cattle, and other farm animals) and the "mixed" practice which includes both small and large animals. There are some individuals specializing in cats and a few with practices limited to birds.

Admission to a veterinary school requires at least three years of college work, although four years may be needed to complete the required courses. Any one who plans to apply for admission to a professional school should check with that school to be sure the proper pre-veterinary courses are taken.

Veterinarians are required to pass state board examinations before they will be licensed to practice. Internships are not required but are available for a limited number of graduates. The University of Pennsylvania grants a V.M.D. degree, while the graduates of other schools are D.V.M.'s.

The Veterinarians's Oath, in part, states "I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of livestock resources, the promotion of animal health, and the advancement of medical knowledge." This is the spirit of veterinary medicine.

Disqualifications

There are times when an owner tries to make his or her pet into a show animal. This usually happens when some well-meaning friend says, "That's such a beautiful animal, it could be winning prizes." A little investigation is wise before proceeding.

Even though a dog or cat may be registered and eligible for entry in shows, there are disqualifying

faults which make it ineligible to win. Many novice owners do not know this and are embarrassed when the judge excuses their entry from the ring.

Each breed has a standard and any disqualifications are listed. In many breeds of cats, faults which are not allowed are kinked tails and incorrect number of toes; five in front and four in back is correct. In dogs, some breed standards have definite upper and lower limits of height and weight, require specific colors, do not allow over- or under-shot bite, have rules about ear carriage (some may not be held erect and others may not droop) and disqualify vicious dogs. A Newfoundland must have webbing between the toes, a Briard must have dewclaws, but dewclaws on the hind legs disqualify a Kerry Blue Terrier. All of these, except viciousness, would not prevent the animal from being an excellent pet.

If you want to show your dog or cat, attend a few shows as a spectator and talk with those who are exhibiting your breed. Study the specific requirements for your breed. A Dog or Cat Show where championship points are given is not a Pet Show, although many of the contestants may be part of a household. Their purpose is improvement of the breed. There are too many animals shown which are poor examples of their breed but qualify under their breed standards. However, you must be sure your animal conforms to the standards before it is shown.

"Hot Spots"

A "hot spot" is the commonly used description of a reddened, moist area on the skin which seems to appear overnight. It is a particularly annoying problem in show dogs.

An irritant causes the dog to scratch, resulting in an open sore. The treatment, of course, is to remove the source of itching and "dry up" the sore spot before it becomes infected.

There are dozens of remedies for local application. All seem to have some value if used promptly. Preparations containing steroids are good anti-inflammatory agents. Recently, much publicity has been given to DMSO (Dimethyl sulfoxide). This has potent anti-inflammatory as well as bacteriostatic qualities. However, it can be irritating and may cause scaling skin. Use it with caution. It is advisable to use only FDA-approved products.

Fleas probably are the most important cause of "hot spots" but anything that makes the dog scratch may result in skin lesions. The best treatment is to remove the cause of the scratching. This often is easier said than done.

If your home remedy does not produce results quickly, consult your veterinarian. The longer the condition persists without correct diagnosis and treatment, the more difficult it will be to control.

Hot Weather Precautions

Heat stroke occurs most frequently when dogs are confined without sufficient ventilation in hot weather. An automobile with the windows closed can become a deathtrap in just a few minutes. Excitement and forced exercise in hot, humid weather may result in heat stroke. Other contributing factors are lack of available water, obesity,

and the anatomic peculiarities of the brachiocephalic breeds (Bulldogs, Pugs, etc.) The most important first aid measure is to lower the body temperature as quickly as possible. This can be done by cooling the animal with a garden hose or a tub of cold water, or by packing it with ice. The quicker the body temperature is reduced, the better the chance of avoiding permanent injury.

Prevention requires a well-ventilated crate while travelling in hot weather. Ice bags may help make the short-nosed breeds more comfortable. If excessive panting is noted, do not force the animal to exercise—keep it as quiet as possible. Offer water frequently. There is some question about the value of salt tablets for dogs. If they are eating a normal diet and drinking adequate water, it probably does not help to give extra salt.

Dogs kept in air-conditioned homes and kennels seem to have a decreased tolerance to heat when out in the sun. Do not expect them to be as active in very hot weather and exercise them in the cooler part of the day.

Remember that chronic heart disease predisposes to heat stroke. Very young and old animals also need extra attention in very hot weather. The signs of heat stroke are staggering, collapse, and even unconsciousness. Be prepared to act promptly.

Crackers

Dogs and cats can swim, but should be watched when in the water. Panic or exhaustion can result in drowning. Swimming pools should be fenced.

The Pet Bird Handbook by Patricia Sutherland (Arco Publishing, Inc., New York) provides useful information for bird owners as well as those considering a bird as a pet. It gives an important warning; if a bird is wanted for decor, it should be ceramic. Bird ownership is as serious a responsibility as dog or cat ownership and obtaining a bird should not be a casual decision.

Various species of birds are described, including canaries, finches, pigeons, budgies, lovebirds, cockatiels, and parrots. The book's prescribed diets are excellent with the exception of the parrot diet. Our experts feel parrots require half the basic seed mix and half what the book lists as extras, such as sources of protein.

First aid is also covered. Signs of trouble are runny or blocked nostrils, frequent sneezing, diarrhea, sudden loss of weight, disinterest in food, difficulty in breathing, wheezing, or sores. The most important first aid measure is warming the bird. Use a low wattage light bulb or a heating pad to raise the temperature to 90°F, but not higher than 95°F. Immediately call your veterinarian for advice and treatment. In addition to heat, encourage the bird to eat: peanut butter, oranges, or honey and water from a dropper. Avoid antibiotics.

Taming programs are given in detail. The basics are proper management, "bird sense," routine, and patience. An important requirement is daily freedom. For small birds this means flight in a designated space, for large birds (parrots) daily removal from the confinement of the cage. A consistent, systematic, daily routine is essential. A bird can learn to leave and enter its cage in addition to becoming hand-trained. Window screens are imperative—if a bird escapes, the chances of retrieving it are poor. Problems with tame birds include biting and noise. However, the tamed bird can give much pleasure. Parrots often outlive their owners and many small birds live ten years. The book can prepare you and also help you decide if you really want a bird as part of your family.