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**WHERE THERE IS GRASS, THERE ARE GRASS SEEDS!**

While the warm weather and pleasing rainfall we have been experiencing lately have many advantages in terms of the growth of our pastures, lawns and gardens, one big disadvantage is the abundance of grass seeds.

If your pet is shaking their head or holding their ear down or has a red and swollen eye, chances are there is a grass seed in there somewhere. The problem can get very painful as the sharp edges of the seed rub against the sensitive tissue inside the eye or ear canal. The ear canal is L-shaped so you probably won't be able to see the grass seed with a torch – we use a special instrument to see around the corner.

Unfortunately most animals do not like their eyes or ears being examined, especially when they are sore, so we may need to give your pet a short acting sedative to have a thorough look and extract the offending grass seed. Your pet may need ear or eye drops to deal with the inflammation and infection caused by the grass seed.

Dogs or cats (especially those with long hair) are also likely to develop grass seed abscesses, especially between their toes and inside their armpits. Abscesses form when the grass seed works its way through the skin and sets up an infection. These can be very painful and inflamed so it is best to treat them early. Finding a grass seed inside a long-established abscess requires extensive surgery and can be like finding a needle in a haystack! It is a good idea to keep long haired pets trimmed quite short over the warmer months so you can see and remove any grass seeds that are getting stuck in your pet's skin before they form abscesses.

While dogs seem to be the animals most affected by grass seed problems, it is not unusual to see cats affected in similar parts of the body. Sheep seem prone to getting grass seeds in their eyes, while horses seem to get irritated around the base of the tail. Regular inspection and brushing (of horses, not sheep!) will help to identify and reduce the problem.

The other common problem we see in pets at this time of year is scratching. There can be many reasons for pets to scratch but the most common reasons are fleas and allergies. We will cover fleas in next month's article. Allergies may occur with change in season (e.g. pollen in spring), or can be due to contact with allergenic plants and grasses. Food allergies are actually quite rare. If your pet is licking at their paws, rubbing their ears or has red skin on their belly, it is possible they are suffering from an allergy.

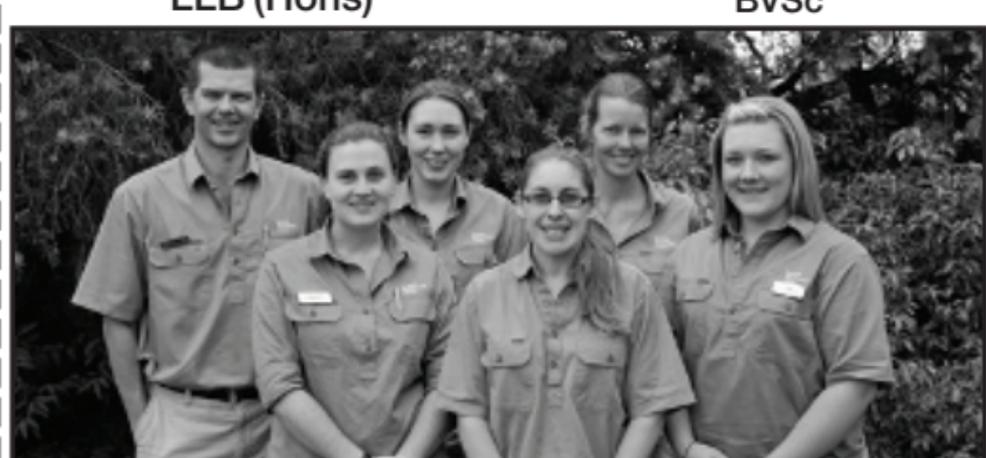
There are a number of options available to reduce the discomfort caused by the allergy – special shampoos or skin lotions, medication to reduce the severity of the immune response and antibiotics for secondary infections caused by scratching the skin raw. Sensitivity testing is available to try and determine exactly what is causing the allergic reaction in your pet.

Insect bites can cause an immediate and severe allergic reaction in some animals – especially Staffies! – with swelling of the face (eyes, lips and nose) seen most commonly. This allergic reaction requires immediate veterinary attention.

Hopefully you won't have any problems with grass seeds and allergies over the rest of spring and summer, but if you need any help or advice, please contact the friendly team at Cowra Veterinary Centre.

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