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The door is always open at **Willows**

We were delighted to welcome more than 240 visitors to our open day, giving the community an in-depth look at the specialist treatments carried out here and the services on offer.

Earlier this year, Willows became one of the few vet centres in the UK to introduce a specialist radioactive iodine (RAI) therapy unit as part of a major extension and further extension of the building facilitated a dedicated operating theatre for minimally invasive procedures, a range of specialist treatment rooms and more than 40 new kennels.

During the Open Day, we were also joined by Guide Dogs, Cats Protection and Dogs for Good to help promote their local divisions. Daisy and her owner Miss Parkes-Deputy Head from Hollywood primary school, also joined us to promote the amazing work that Daisy does with the children in school.

We were very lucky to meet some of the children from Hollywood School too, they had made some amazing posters to say thank you to the team at Willows for supporting Daisy with free of charge preventative healthcare.

The team here at Willows were very happy to meet so many local clients and we had great fun in turning it into a family friendly event suitable for everyone.

Find out how Willows are helping insured clients that are subject to RSA insurance restrictions
<https://www.willows.uk.net/rsa>

Rabbit Awareness

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Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) occurs annually during the month of June and is a coalition of experts, organisations and welfare charities who have come together with the mission to improve rabbit welfare! This year's campaign hopes to encourage rabbit owners to move away from feeding muesli, and towards a high-fibre, hay-based diet.

Why is muesli an inappropriate diet?

In the wild, rabbits eat a high-fibre diet consisting of grasses, twigs and roots. Their digestive system has evolved accordingly, becoming so highly specialised that it is able to move ingested food in two different directions! It separates indigestible fibre, which stimulates the rabbit to eat and is passed as faecal pellets, from digestible fibre which it forms into caecotrophs (Figure 1).

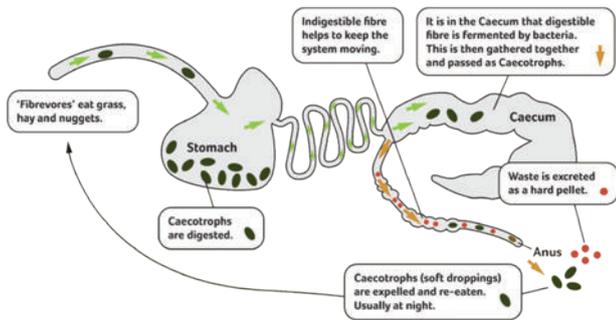


Figure 1: The digestive system of a rabbit, demonstrating the separation of indigestible from digestible fibre. Courtesy of burgesspetcare.co.uk

Caecotrophs (Figure 2) are expelled twice-a-day and contain all the nutrients that have been extracted from their diet, including protein and vitamins, making it essential for your rabbit to eat them. You should rarely (if ever) see caecotrophs in your rabbit's enclosure as they should eat them as soon as they are produced, directly from their bottom!



Figure 2: Example of a caecotroph, which should be eaten immediately by the rabbit when expelled. If uneaten, caecotrophs can become stuck to the rabbit's backend, causing health risks such as flystrike. Courtesy of cottontails-rescue.org.uk

Muesli contains high amounts of sugar and starch, and low amounts of the fibre essential for their gut health. Providing muesli to a rabbit is like offering a child a bowl of sweets alongside the rest of their diet – they will choose to fill up on the food higher in sugar, despite it not being what is best for them.

The consequences of a muesli diet

Several recent scientific studies at the University of Edinburgh have demonstrated the negative impact that muesli has on a rabbit's health. Feeding muesli means the rabbit does not eat a balanced diet, leading to multiple complications and potentially life-threatening diseases.

Ask at reception for your FREE copy of the RWA's complete guide to rabbit care (whilst stocks last).



Rabbits who eat muesli...

- Eat less hay
- Do not eat their caecotrophs
- Drink less water

This increases their risk of the following health issues:

- Obesity
 - Dental disease
 - Gut stasis
 - Urinary tract disease
 - Flystrike
 - Sore hocks
- ...plus many further complications!

Moving away from muesli

The transfer from muesli to a nugget rabbit food should be done gradually over the space of 14-28 days, as sudden changes to diet can cause stomach upset or distress. If a rabbit has never eaten much hay before, they can sometimes be reluctant to start but the benefits are numerous and even include emotional fulfilment, allowing rabbits to express their natural behaviour of foraging, preventing boredom and frustration.

The ideal bunny diet should therefore consist of 80-90% hay, supplemented with a spoonful of pelleted/nugget rabbit food once a day (twice a day if the rabbit weighs >3.5kg) and a cupful portion of fresh vegetables (Figure 3). Think of nuggets and vegetables as a delicious, nutritious snack – both should be quickly devoured by a healthy rabbit, leaving them to graze for the rest of the day on their limitless supply of hay.



Figure 3: Diagram depicting the ideal pet rabbit diet, compared with the diet of a wild rabbit. Courtesy of therabbithouse.com

You should hopefully see your rabbit's appetite for hay improve once switched from muesli, and the amount of pelleted food is reduced to the recommended amount.

High-quality, fragrant hays should be offered: tasty, nutritious hay will be greener in colour than the brown hay that should only be used for bedding.

Another tip is to put the hay in a rack positioned over the litter tray, as rabbits often toilet as they eat. You can also make hay more interesting, by placing it within the inner tube of a toilet roll.

Sprinkling their daily allowance of nuggets or adding dried herbs/flowers, such as Burgess Excel Nature Snacks, into their hay can help increase their interest as well as their enjoyment from foraging!

If your rabbits are still reluctant to eat hay after switching from muesli, or often have uneaten caecotrophs in their enclosure, speak to your Veterinary Surgeon as this may be indicative of an underlying health issue.

[Visit Rabbit Awareness Week for more information and rabbit care tips!](#)



If you would like to receive this newsletter and other information from Willows by email, please subscribe to our mailing list at: www.willows.uk.net/signup

Monti's 'socking' problem!



Monti came in to see Willows vet Georgina Wells on a Saturday afternoon with a worrying story of having eaten a child's sock which had failed to re-materialise. He had been fine for several days but then had started retching as if needing to be sick.

His owner and Georgina were concerned that the sock might be starting to cause problems, the worst of which could include a complete obstruction of his intestines which would require urgent surgery. He was sedated that afternoon for x-rays of his abdomen (tummy) which showed some unusual gas patterning but did not conclusively demonstrate any obstruction.

Given his history with the sock, options at this stage were to perform an exploratory surgery or to provide supportive care and repeat some abdominal imaging later on to see if the results were any more definitive.

Given that Monti seemed to be quite stable and comfortable, a decision was made to hospitalise him on a drip and repeat the x-rays after a few hours. Although he continued to be bright and happy and was eating well, it remained unclear from a series of x-rays whether the sock was still in situ.

He was discharged home after a couple of days as the vomiting seemed to have stopped, but the following day his symptoms relapsed and he was re-admitted.

We decided to perform an ultrasound scan at this stage in the hope that it could provide us with more information prior to making a decision about Monti's treatment. Specialist radiologist Elizabeth Baines performed the scan and was indeed suspicious that she could see evidence of foreign material within his stomach.

The very good news for Monti was that it did not appear to have moved any further on into his intestinal tract and there was therefore a chance of avoiding surgery.

Monti was referred to medicine specialist Kirsty Roe who performed a gastroscopy, which involves inserting a flexible camera into the stomach. To our relief the sock was clearly visible and could be removed using some special endoscopy forceps which are inserted down the tubing of the camera and used to grasp objects for removal. Monti made a rapid recovery from this procedure and was discharged home the following day. Unfortunately the sock was not so lucky...

Foreign bodies in the gastrointestinal tract are one of the most common surgical problems we deal with; some dogs (and the occasional cat!) seem to have a recurrent tendency to eat non-food items.



Fabric foreign bodies present a particular diagnostic challenge on x-ray as they are indistinguishable in appearance from fluid and body tissues so we rely to some extent on secondary signs of obstruction e.g. accumulations of gas or unusual anatomy.

Harder foreign bodies, e.g. stones, bones or toys, are generally much easier to diagnose. Monti was very fortunate that the sock remained in his stomach where it did not cause a full obstruction and could be removed without the need for surgery and the risks that would have involved.

For the latest news on our new hyperthyroidism treatment unit for cats – see [Dave's story](#)
<https://www.willows.uk.net/dave-story>

Dedicated to Oliver...

...from his loving owners

Ollie came into our life in October 1997 and from that point onwards he changed our lives forever...

It became apparent from day one that he was the boss and we, as most cat people can relate to, were his servants. Three weeks after Ollie arrived we collected a new friend for him, a 12 week old Blue British Shorthair we named Oscar. Ollie was not amused, his existence was now compromised by another feline sharing the same house and he immediately stamped his mark.

That said Ollie did learn to grow with Oscar and eventually he accepted that they had to compromise and co-exist, eventually sharing the same beds and litter trays without problems - however Oscar always knew he was still king cat.

To people young and old he was kind and affectionate and would happily sit on your lap for hours if he felt comfortable. On holidays we would take him to the cattery in Wales where he was bred but quickly found out that the car journeys were stressing him out and soon found one nearer to home.

Holidays were always a traumatic time for Jo and I as we missed him so much it took a few days for us to settle into the holiday until on our return we welcomed him with open arms. Ollie on the other hand always looked indifferent as if to say 'you left me alone in this place for two weeks and now you expect me to be grateful'.

Well for the first few nights back home he would sit at the bottom of the stairs caterwauling basically getting his own back and telling us 'well you've got to go to work tomorrow but I can laze around all day and catch up on my sleep'.

Following the death of Oscar well before his time at 11 years old we started taking him to Jo's sisters when we went away and he was more than happy to stay there as he was obviously spoilt rotten and loved every minute of it. We did think he was missing Oscar so we were offered another cat from Oscars breeder who she was retiring at 8 years old.

He is a reddish and white British Shorthair we named Willow and is in fact Oscars nephew in the cat world. Much to our disappointment Ollie again was not impressed and whilst he tolerated him, Willow adored Ollie and only wanted to play with him.

Ollie was a cheeky cat especially at meal times he would pester you until he got his way. He wasn't a greedy cat but he had a sweet tooth and his favourite meal was 'Tuna Tuesday' as we nicknamed it.

Every Tuesday he had a small tin of tuna in spring water followed by a large helping of yogurt. Ollie was weaned on yoghurt and his favourite was Goats Yogurt which he had a table spoonful of every night, whether this helped his longevity we will never know but he would never settle for the evening until he had his quota.

He had been a patient at the Willows from November 1997, at which time they were located in Tanworth Lane, Shirley and following this when the facility relocated to its current site at Highlands Road. He was a patient for over 20 years and all the reception staff especially those from Tanworth Lane knew him well.

The Willows staff have always been so attentive and friendly and Ollie has seen numerous vets in his time including Karen Walsh, Laura Shaw, Sally Hutton and in more recent times Sam Carrington-Brown all of whom have been wonderful and kind to Ollie's needs.

Many visitors to the Willows are from far afield this being a main country wide referral centre, but it has always been a primary care veterinary practice of which we are proud to be amongst its long attending 'fluffy owners'.

Our special memories of Ollie were his loving affectionate nature, I would pick him up and hold him for ages when he would rub his chin against yours and purr incessantly. He would curl up alongside you in bed on cold winter nights and sit on his scratch pole watching the outside world go by. He had the most wonderful thick tail and sat like a model with his paws slightly turned out.

He loved to jump in boxes or bags and think you could no longer see him and he would sit on the work surface and lap his arthritis medicine without a worry. We always knew the sad day would come when we had to say goodbye and in his last hours, vet Georgina Wells was on hand to ease his passing. Whilst this situation is hard to accept Georgina made us feel comfortable with our decision to say goodbye. We will never forget Ollie he was part of our family for a third of our lives and we will never see another cat of his like again. Although he had a long life at 20 years 6 months and 5 days we really do miss his presence. Ollie we hope is now in cat heaven curled up with his old friend Oscar.



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