

THE IMPORTANCE OF PETS



Issue

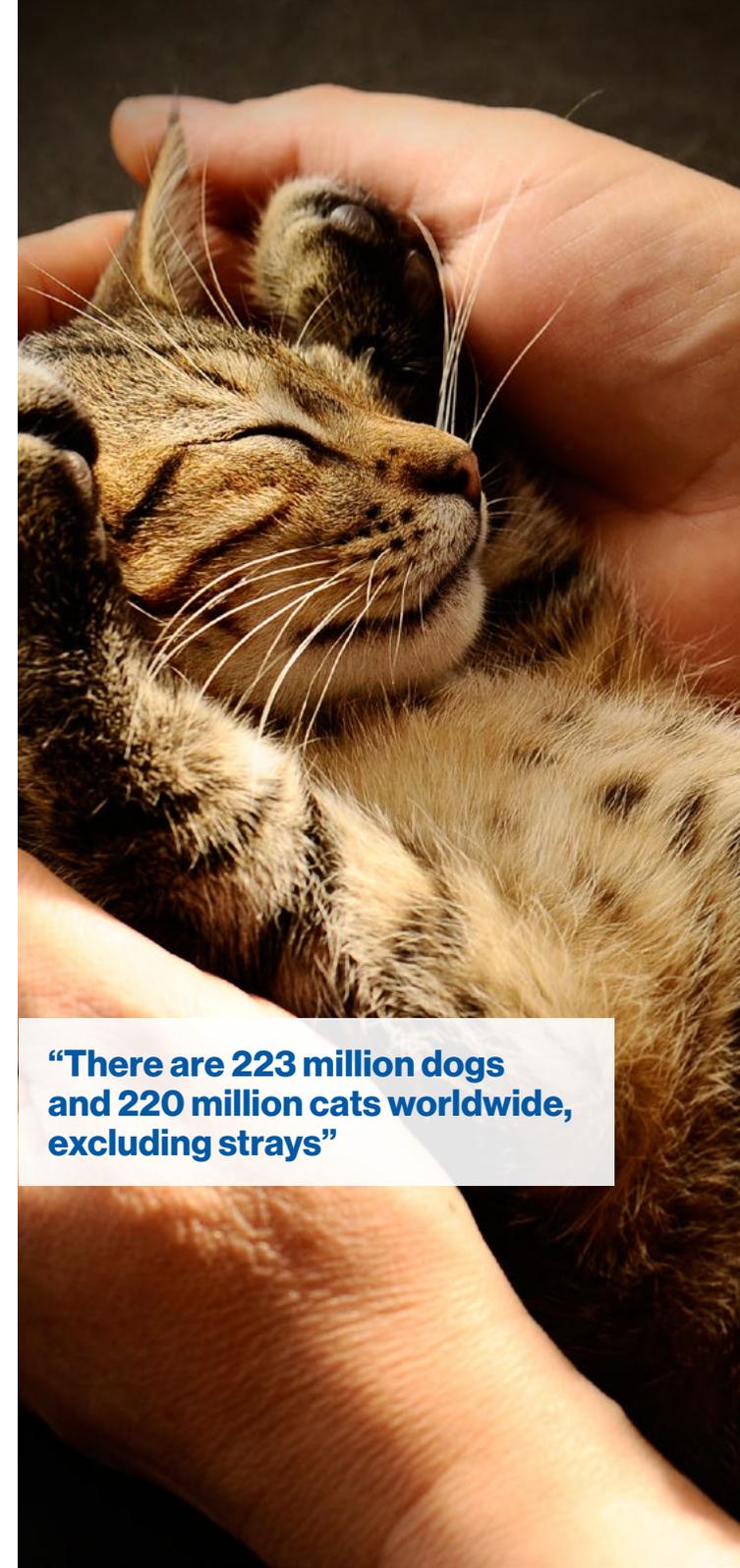
Pets are part of our everyday lives and part of our families. They provide us with companionship but also with emotional support, reduce our stress levels, sense of loneliness and help us to increase our social activities and add to a child's self-esteem and positive emotional development. In return, as responsible pet owners we need to ensure that our animals are kept healthy, fit, get nutritious food, love and affection and proper housing and care.

Pets help out in many societal ways as well, especially dogs. Their sense of smell and the fact they can be easily trained have led to dogs being used to help people in an extraordinarily diverse range of activities: therapy dogs are taken to nursing homes, hospitals, care centres for the disabled to engage with patients to help their quality of life by making them more sociable and encourage interaction and activities. Rescue dogs have been trained to take on a number of tasks in searching for survivors after natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, fires, avalanches, etc. They assist firemen and policemen in tracking people and they rescue thousands of people across the world every year. Medical alert and detection dogs help in detecting cancer, but also have been trained to help people with severe forms of Diabetes, Narcolepsy, Addison's Disease, and Epilepsy to ensure they get medical attention when necessary. These dogs save people's lives on a daily basis. And then there are the assistance dogs we see regularly when we are out and about: they are trained to help physically impaired people (the disabled, blind and deaf people) in their everyday needs and perform a number of tasks to facilitate people's lives from opening and closing doors to helping people undress, to emptying washing machines.

More and more people have pets who share our homes and daily lives. Like us, our pets live longer as well. We need new and improved ways to care for them as our pets are living longer than in the past.

Our contribution

One of our main responsibilities towards our pets is ensuring their health and welfare. When a pet is sick, it needs medical attention, and even on a yearly basis a pet should have a check-up by a veterinarian. Like us, our pets can get sick and need medicines too. Preventing and curing disease not only keeps them healthy, but it keeps us healthy too. The animal health sector is at the forefront of pet healthcare and is continuously developing new products to ensure our pets lead comfortable and healthy lives. This includes vaccination, deworming, flea and tick treatments, dental care and skincare. When a family decides to welcome a cat or dog into their home, it is important to have them checked over by a vet and ensure they are vaccinated against serious diseases such as Rabies, Hepatitis, Parvovirus or Leptospirosis in dogs or Chlamydiosis, Cat Flu, and Feline Leukaemia in cats. Anti-parasitics are vital if you want to share your home with a cat or a dog – ensuring they are free of fleas, worms, ticks will not only ensure your pet is healthy, it will mean you are kept healthy too and your house is kept free of these parasites.



“There are 223 million dogs and 220 million cats worldwide, excluding strays”

CASE STUDY:

See how Jason helps protect his horse against parasites



In Australia, Jason and his family own a horse called “Lightning”, and he takes the responsibility of caring for the horse very seriously. Occasionally, while giving him a good brush down following a ride, he will find a small unwelcome traveller that has also managed to hitch a ride on his horse – a tick! With an active lifestyle that involves trotting through fields and alongside bushes, it is not uncommon for this to occur, so Jason knows what to do. While the tick can be manually removed, Jason’s vet made him aware that ticks can transfer serious diseases and recommends to protect the horse against ticks with for example a repellent spray.

Parasites are a common concern for animals and the people who take care of them. While many are harmless, some can present serious threats to animals and people. The parasite can cause disease itself (e.g. worms causing scouring and malnutrition; blood parasites causing anaemia) or parasite-borne diseases such as Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Meningoencephalitis can be transmitted between animals and people (these diseases are called [zoonoses](#)).

In general, there are two types of parasites: endoparasites and ectoparasites. Endoparasites live inside the host (i.e. inside the animal that carries – or ‘hosts’ – it), affecting the gastrointestinal tract, liver, or other internal organs. The most common endoparasites of companion animals are worms. Ectoparasites live on the host, affecting skin, fur, or ears. The most obvious ectoparasites are fleas and ticks.

Fleas

One of the most notorious ectoparasites – and the bane of dog and cat owners around the world – is the flea. Fleas live off blood from their hosts and the intake of a female flea can be equivalent to more than 15 times its body weight. When

receiving regular meals this way, fleas can survive on a host for up to 140 days. Several thousands of eggs are laid by female fleas and dropped wherever the host animal goes. The warm temperature and humidity in homes provide a favourable microclimate for multiple flea life cycles. Flea infestation can disrupt the general well-being of all animals, causing itchiness, redness, hair loss, and in certain cases severe skin infections. Once fleas have settled down in your home, it too will need to be included in the flea eradication programme. Fleas may also transmit tapeworms to your pet and if pet owners are not careful they may unfortunately be infected from their pet with the same tapeworm.

Ticks

Larger and easier to detect than fleas, but by no means less bothersome, are ticks. Most ticks seek hosts by crawling up the stems of grass or perch on the edges of leaves on the ground in a typical posture with the front legs extended (a behaviour called questing). Others are so-called nest parasites, questing in sheltered environments. As soon as a suitable host brushes against their extended front legs, the questing tick climbs onto its body, holds on tight, bores into the skin and begins to draw tissue fluids such as blood. A tick bite not only causes a localised infection, it can also serve as the portal through which serious diseases are transmitted. These can have a severe impact on the animal’s well being. Ticks can transmit disease agents such as viruses, bacteria, and [protozoa](#) to not only animals but also to people.

Worms

Far harder to detect, and in many ways more dangerous are endoparasites, the most common of which are worms. Worm infestations rank among the most critical of parasitic infection in cats, dogs, and horses but also in livestock if not treated.

Worms can be very difficult to detect. The indications of disease depend on the defences of the affected animal and the extent of the infestation. They range from signs of general ill-health such as a dull coat and occasional vomiting to a weakened immune system due to massive loss of blood resulting in anaemia, intestinal obstruction, reduction of weight gain (livestock) and even death. Some of these worms can even be transmitted to people from pets if the infection is not checked.

Because the consequences of worm infestation can be so serious, it is easy to understand why veterinarians recommend that cats, dogs, and horses be dewormed regularly

Advances in treatment

Broad-spectrum [anthelmintics](#) have been developed that are effective against parasitic worm infections in people and animals. Routinely applied, these products expel worms by either stunning or killing them. In the case of a high risk of tapeworms, extra special treatment may occasionally be necessary as these parasites grow much more quickly. Regular check-ups and preventative action and [guidelines](#) for owners are vital to avoid these kinds of infections and infestations.

In a world without animal health products, our pets and livestock animals would be at the total mercy of these invasive pests, causing irritation, pain and death. Due to the huge amounts of potential parasites that animals might be carrying, there is a risk that people may become infected or infested from affected animals and this could be severe. Thankfully, we live in a world where these pests can be detected and controlled, making for altogether more pleasant interactions between animals and peoples – like Jason and his horse.