

Animal parasites – review and planning

The complexity of parasite control in pets today cannot be underestimated, warns **Gareth Harries** BVMS CertSAS MRCVS, from XLVets practice Wright & Morten



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When I qualified from vet school a little over 15 years ago, the only product worth using for flea control was a spray, which was pretty challenging with an angry cat. The use of flea powders was still very common, as was flea shampoo. None of them were terribly effective unless used as a physical weapon. With such a limited number of products on the market, advising owners which one to use was very simple.

As our living standards have improved in the last 20 years, so have those for our pets – and fleas can be a huge challenge in some households when they take

hold. As the flea challenge has grown, the discovery of other parasitic threats to our pets has complicated the picture. The array of products available for owners has also grown.

Spot-on products have revolutionised and massively simplified the treatment of fleas, ticks, mites and many types of worm.

No single product on the market will tackle every parasite, so the challenge becomes one of establishing which product and which routine of application is appropriate for each animal in its environmental and family circumstances.

There is certainly still a role for flea-only treatments as this remains the greatest issue for many owners who do want a simple solution to their problem. Knowledge of a household's make-up will assist in identifying what may not be suitable.

Many vets will have knowledge of treating cats exposed to permethrin-based products, and the use of the canine variety on cats can indeed have a very sad outcome.

The recent products that have been added to the pharmacy, and supermarket shelves, were once prescription-only products and we know that they have had many years of successful use. They can be considered safe, effective and suited to many situations where fleas are making life sharing an environment with a dog or a cat rather uncomfortable.

HOME ENVIRONMENT

It might not be the only issue that you should address to solve your customer's problem. The environment of the house will have many eggs which may potentially lie dormant for years, waiting for the right moment when local environmental conditions are optimal before hatching. Advising the customer to address this issue might save them a return trip to complain that your treatment didn't work. It did work, but unfortunately there was a whole regiment of young fleas just waiting in the carpets!

An awful lot of pets develop allergies to the flea saliva and develop what we call flea



Fleas can be a huge challenge in some households when they take hold

allergic dermatitis. Reacting to one bit might result in widespread loss of hair, severe irritation and bacterial skin infections. Pets with this type of issue need treatment and a plan for prevention, so do your best to encourage owners to think about a regime for flea prevention.

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BUT IT DOESN'T END THERE...

The cat has fleas so it grooms frantically, trying to rid itself of the irritation so that sleep can return. While grooming, it catches a flea which it swallows, so releasing the tapeworm egg within it! How clever nature truly is.

So treating our patient for fleas isn't just about the fleas,

but dealing with the potential for another challenge to the pet's health: tapeworm. Owners will be amazed by the idea that a parasite will hitchhike in another parasite but such is the complexity of nature.

Worming has also become rather complex, with many experts, and many companies having their own take on what is the ideal. In actual fact the ideal regime will vary from one pet to another, one family to another and one specific challenge to another. The good old days were so much simpler!

So as an SQP, being able to explain the challenge that a customer's pet faces, and the effects upon their household and family, may not be as simple as selling a pack of spot-on, but it will go a long way towards addressing the customer's and the pet's actual problem.

The knowledge of products throughout the range rather than just those in your own arsenal will provide you with a massive advantage over outlets with much narrower availability.

