Gastric dilation volvulus (GDV), more commonly known as GDV, bloat, or “twisted stomach” is one of the most dramatic and life threatening of all the emergencies in farm dogs. This is unquestioningly an emergency and survival depends on how quickly the animal is treated. Signs of gastric bloat and possible torsion (twisted stomach) include some, or all, of the following:

• Distended abdomen, especially just behind the rib cage (some large chested dogs can hide a lot of gas so this may or may not be evident).
• Drooling.
• Anxiety, restlessness, pacing, some dogs bark or howl in their kennels.
• Attempted vomiting, without bringing up much more than frothy saliva.
• Depression and signs of shock.

Normally, the stomach sits high in the abdomen under the ribs. It contains a bit of gas, mucus and undigested food. Its job is to receive food from the esophagus, grind the food up with rhythmic contractions and deliver it, a small amount at a time, to the start of the small intestine. In a bloated stomach, a large amount of gas is produced, stretching the stomach wall, causing severe pain. A bloated stomach cannot contract normally, is unable to move food to the small intestine nor vomit, and more gas is produced from the fermenting food inside. The stomach may remain just dilated, or for reasons unknown, may twist on itself, not only shutting off the exit routes for the food, but may shut off its own blood supply as well. The spleen, which sits near the stomach, may also be involved. Death can result in only hours if emergency treatment does not occur. Many dogs just “found dead” in their kennels may be a victim of this condition.

Factors increasing the risk of gastric dilation/torsion (making it more likely):

• 20% of dogs with GDV are Huntaways, the bigger the dog, the more chance of a GDV.
• Older dogs (over 10 years) are more likely to have GDV.
• More cases are seen in summer than winter.
• There is a hereditary component. If a dog has family members that have had GDV, their risk increases.
• Large meals followed by exercise.
• Fast eaters.
• Animals fed from an elevated position.

What to do if you suspect your dog has bloat
Get emergency veterinary treatment as soon as possible. All dogs with bloated +/- twisted stomachs need urgent medical and usually surgical attention.

DO NOT try to relieve the gas from the stomach or give the dog anything to eat or drink.

Treatment involves stabilising the dog (treat for shock) and relieving the pressure on the stomach. Surgery is usually necessary to reduce the twist and assess the viability of the stomach wall. Sometimes part of the stomach and also the spleen may need to be removed if the blood supply has been cut off for too long. After repair is complete, the stomach is sutured to the body wall to prevent it twisting again. The survival rate of the surgery is approximately 70-75% but varies with the degree of damage to the blood supply to the stomach and spleen.

Prevention
The following factors could help prevent the occurrence of bloat or GDV:
• Feed smaller meals twice a day, rather than one large meal.
• Feed not from an elevated position but on the floor/ground.
• Do not exercise directly after a meal.
• Do not allow dogs to scavenge. We often see this problem in working dogs that have eaten carcasses/dead lambs while on the job.
• Gastropexy - this surgery is done in at risk dogs. (Large dogs with a history of relatives that have bloated.) This involves a procedure where the stomach wall is sutured to the body wall. This does not prevent bloating, but does prevent the stomach from twisting on itself.

Be aware of the signs of GDV and act quickly if you believe your dog is bloating. Time to treatment is critical to survival.

Lori Linney
Vetlife Alexandra
Handling pups

For the purposes of this article the pup is referred to as ‘he’ but is also applicable for ‘she’ pups!

It is a pleasure meeting farmers with confident, friendly and calm working dogs – some of the dog’s attributes are genetically inherited and some are shaped by rearing and handling. You, or somebody else, may need to administer medication or a worm tablet, take a rectal temperature, inspect ears or paws for grass seed, weigh a dog on scales or even just hold a dog by the collar to restrain it. A little preparation spent on your pup while he is a youngster makes life so much easier later on for all involved in the care of your dogs.

In a Massey study of 479 working dogs in the mid to lower North Island in 2008-2009, behavioural problems were the most frequently observed issues in working farm dogs and dogs that had died or been destroyed. Generally we find working dogs coming into the clinic to be well behaved but lack of handling and socialisation can make performing the above tasks difficult or sometimes even dangerous (and is not exclusively attributed to working dogs). Let me also stress that rearing a well handled and socialised dog has absolutely no negative impact on his working ability so here is a bit of background in pup behaviour.

From four to twelve weeks of age a pup establishes social relationships with other dogs and people. Pups up to four to five weeks old readily approach strangers but after this age they tend to avoid them. Studies have shown that this avoidance phenomenon reaches a peak at around eight weeks. It seems to be nature’s way of protecting young animals from predators by an “anxiety period” of avoidance behaviour. What a pup has not experienced before 12 weeks of age will be avoided, and possibly feared, by the pup later on.

There are no excuses for dogs who struggle at any stage hold him firmly until he relaxes, and start again – it is important that you persevere because he will soon learn that a struggle and a wriggle is all he needs to do to get out of anything. Repeat this a few times a week until the pup is calm while you do it – five minutes at a time is plenty.

It can be difficult on a farm to introduce the pup to different people but use any opportunity – encourage your family and other people to pat and handle him. While he is eating stroke him and touch his food bowl so he learns that you are not a threat to his food source. Put a lead on him and teach him “wait” – wait while you unlatch the gate, wait calmly while you unclip his chain, wait while humans go through gates and doorways first, wait while you put his food down and wait until you say he can jump on the back of the truck or bike.

Be consistent, firm, even-tempered and persistent – never be violent or unfair. When teaching your pup any new task, if you set everything up for your pup to succeed and then be praised for doing things correctly he will learn so much faster than by growling and correcting him for doing it wrong. This is not to say he will not make mistakes that require discipline!

It is very important that a working dog pup is socialised with children to avoid biting accidents later in his life. If you have children, grandchildren or neighbours with children who are used to dogs encourage interaction between them and the pup but always under supervision (and I usually say that for the pup’s benefit not the children’s benefit).

There is plenty more on the subject of handling pups but I consider these exercises to be the basic requirements for any mentally healthy dog. Michael Oliver of Cambridge and Lloyd Smith of Palmerston have both written excellent booklets on training dogs with sections on rearing pups – Lloyd has also produced an excellent DVD.

Remember to repeat these exercises periodically throughout the year i.e. touch, examine and stroke your dogs – it does not make them soft or less hard-working – honestly!

Helen Williamson
Vetlife

Eukanuba winner at Canterbury Show

Mike Brown of Geraldine was the lucky winner of the “Place an order and get it for free” competition at the Eukanuba tent at the Canterbury Show in November. Mike is the president of the Canterbury Centre for the NZ Sheep Dog Trial Association and is a fantastic advocate of Eukanuba Premium Performance for his working dogs so we were thrilled to hear that he was the winner. Mike ordered three bags and won six bags (he probably wishes he had ordered 12 bags to win 24 bags!). Congratulations!
A couple of stories told to me by farmers have prompted this particular article.

In the first story the farmer had parked his farm truck with his team of dogs caged on the deck and bees swarmed from nearby hives and attacked the dogs inflicting multiple stings. The farmer managed to get another vehicle to enable him to get close enough to unlatch the cage door and release the dogs. He took the dogs to the clinic for treatment but unfortunately two of the dogs did not survive. This was a devastating loss for him.

The other story was a dog triallist visiting a friend with his dog and he shut it in a spare, un-used kennel and run where bees had taken up residence and it also suffered multiple stings and died.

What to do if your working dog is stung

Bee or wasp stings on the face, neck or in the mouth of your dogs can be dangerous purely because of their location, causing swelling which impacts on the dog’s ability to breathe. Observe carefully.

A single sting on the body of a dog is usually only temporarily painful and irritating. If the stinger is still present try removing it by scraping it with your fingernail or something rigid like a credit card – tweezers may force more venom into the dog. An icepack or ice wrapped in a towel and applied to the site can help reduce swelling and pain.

If your dog is experiencing a severe reaction (anaphylactic) to a sting you need to take it to a vet immediately – this is not one of those occasions where you can wait and see what happens. The symptoms can include:

• General weakness.
• Drooling.
• Difficulty breathing.
• Collapse.
• Large amount of swelling extending away from the sting site.

Multiple stings are a medical emergency requiring immediate veterinary attention and treatment.

Thankfully dogs can be treated very effectively if they are able to be brought to the clinic early enough.

Helen Williamson
Vetlife

Flea season

With this newsletter being the summer issue, we had better discuss fleas and the available treatments for your working dogs. Flea populations increase rapidly in warm, humid weather and even if you or your children are not being bitten by fleas, it is probable that your dogs are. Working dogs often do not display signs of flea infestations because they are busy working or, if they do, it is not noticed by their owners – I would suggest that grooming their dogs is not high on a farmer’s priority list!

It can take up to three months to break the lifecycle of fleas. There are several products available - see table.

There are other products such as Advocate and Revolution which also treat dogs for worms, mange and ear mites but because everyone with dogs living in a rural area would be on a worming programme it is advisable to speak with your Vetlife clinic before using these products.

Also, some other topical tube applications and flea collars are not suitable for sick, debilitated or underweight animals and therefore we would not recommend their use in certain circumstances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of treatment</th>
<th>Suitable for</th>
<th>Protection from</th>
<th>Protection for</th>
<th>Pack size</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frontline Plus</td>
<td>Topical tube application on the back of the neck. Dogs over the age of 8 weeks. Safe for pregnant and lactating bitches.</td>
<td>Fleas, lice and ticks.</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>3 pack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontline Spray</td>
<td>Spray bottle. Puppies from 2 days of age. Safe for pregnant and lactating bitches.</td>
<td>Fleas, lice and ticks.</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>100 mL or 250 mL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>Topical tube application. Dogs over the age of 8 weeks. Safe for pregnant and lactating bitches.</td>
<td>Fleas and lice.</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>4 pack and 6 pack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seresto</td>
<td>Collar. Dogs over the age of 7 weeks.</td>
<td>Fleas and lice.</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>1 collar per pack</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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