



media release

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PLANTS CONSIDERED UNLIKELY CAUSE OF MYSTERY DOG ILLNESS

**British field botanist assists Animal Health Trust investigation into
Seasonal Canine Illness**

Scientists investigating Seasonal Canine Illness believe plants are not causing the mystery illness dogs are suffering after walking in woodlands.

Shortly after the first cases of 2011 were reported the Animal Health Trust (AHT), who is investigating the illness, visited one of its study sites with British field botanist, Dr Mark Spencer of the Natural History Museum, in order to rule out possible causes.

During a visit to the Sandringham Estate, where a number of cases of SCI have occurred in September 2011, Dr. Spencer stated that there was no obvious evidence of any plants which would cause the clinical signs of SCI in dogs through contact alone.

The botanist was confident that there was nothing unusual in the woodlands and that all plants would probably have been growing there for more than 50 years.

The expert opinion also enabled suggested theories of possible causes to be considered much less likely by the investigation. These theories include toxic effects from:

- blue-green algae
- non-native plants
- bracken and/or fern spores and
- fungi.

Dr Richard Newton, of the AHT, said: “As with any investigation, this is a process of elimination. Whilst we’re not ruling plants and these other toxic causes out completely, we are now focussing our efforts on looking at other natural sources, such as animal related factors.”

The AHT is now enlisting the help of other specialist scientists to help track down the cause of SCI.

Dr Newton, added: “We have had more cases of SCI reported to us in September 2011 than we had in September 2010. We believe this is because people are more aware of the illness and our investigation. We have also added an additional study site to our investigation following a number of reports, from vets and dog owners, of SCI cases.”

In the last week, Rendlesham Forest, near Woodbridge in Suffolk, has been added to the AHT’s investigation sites, with a dedicated questionnaire now available for dog walkers that visit this location.

The other sites for which study questionnaires are available are the Sandringham Estate and Thetford Forest in Norfolk, and Clumber Park and Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. The AHT wishes to reinforce that it doesn’t believe dogs are at anymore risk walking in these areas than in any other woodland area. It stresses that dog owners should remain vigilant and access veterinary treatment if their dog vomits, has diarrhoea or is excessively tired within 24 hours of walking in woodland.

Dog owners who have walked at any of the four study sites since 1 August 2011 are encouraged to complete the relevant SCI questionnaire from the AHT's website at www.aht.org.uk

The AHT wishes to hear from dog owners whose dogs have not been taken ill after walking in these areas, along with those whose dogs have been. The information provided is helping the veterinary charity to put together the pieces of this puzzle.

For more information on Seasonal Canine Illness, please watch the AHT's information video on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGiXBrp7-n4>

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For further information, please contact:

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Additional notes:

- The Animal Health Trust (AHT) is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit the website at www.aht.org.uk
- In September 2010, the AHT was asked by the Sandringham Estate to investigate the illness on its site. Since the investigation began, more cases have been identified across Norfolk and Nottinghamshire and the AHT has been working with the National Trust and the Forestry Commission on this investigation. The Camping and Caravanning Club and the Environment Agency have also assisted the investigation.
- The AHT advises any dog owner who is concerned about their dog's health, or if their dog is experiencing vomiting, diarrhoea and lethargy to contact their vet immediately
- The AHT has produced an informative video about SCI which can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGiXBrp7-n4&NR=1> Please link to this video from any online media outlets so that dog owners can find out more.