

# Animal *Health* Trust News



Issue 64 | Spring 2008

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Cataract surgery is performed on Prince the White Tiger



## Eye of the Tiger

*2008 seems so far to be the year of the exotic... not only have we been paid a visit by Eve the chicken, but members of the AHT team have also been called upon to treat an altogether more unusual creature...*

In February, AHT ophthalmologists Keith Barnett and David Donaldson flew to Tenerife, along with Andrew Greenwood of the International Zoo Veterinary Group, to perform a cataract operation on one of the world's rarest creatures: the white tiger.

Prince, the big cat, lives at Loro Parque, a beautiful, exotic wildlife park in Puerto de la Cruz, with mate Saba, a tiger of regular colouring. The park is also home to four gorillas and the world's largest collection of parrots.

Prince, the 'snow tiger' had been living with cataracts for a while, so the experts were sent out to restore his vision.

"The operation went like a dream," said Dr Barnett. "It has made such a difference to his sight and therefore his quality of life. It was excellent – better than we could have expected!"

Two months later, Loro Parque told us that Prince is doing really well, and clearly enjoying his enhanced sight.



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Top left: The tumour on Eve's leg

Top right and left: Loving parents: Eve with her owners

## Eve is caught 'on the hop' by Animal Health Trust

*Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall may think that we are a nation that pays little attention to the welfare of chickens, but Elaine Denney from Hatfield Norton, in Worcestershire, would beg to differ. Last month, she and her husband Chris travelled across country to the Animal Health Trust with her pet chicken Eve, so that leading oncologists could investigate a tumour on her leg.*

Sadly, this was not Eve's first brush with cancer. In 2005 she had a tumour on the other leg which, unfortunately, resulted in amputation. However, she has been managing perfectly well with one leg ever since and, according to Elaine and Chris, hops around quite happily, lays eggs and hardly seems to notice.

When the latest tumour appeared, Eve was referred to us by her local vet, who diagnosed the tumour as a squamous cell carcinoma, a form of skin cancer most commonly seen in cats. Head of Oncology, Sue Murphy, said "although our clinics generally treat dogs, cats and horses, we are always willing to accept referrals of other species that can benefit from our specialist expertise and facilities".

The tumour, which was around 4cm long and 1cm wide, was largely removed by Eve's local vet. The hen then paid a second visit to the AHT where she received local radiation with Strontium. This method of treatment is generally used on cats, where it has a high success rate of 80% to 100%.

Before the treatment, Sue said, "I am not aware of these methods ever having been used to treat squamous cell carcinomas in chickens, but I think that strontium will offer Eve the very best chance."

And this certainly does seem to be the case. Eve had no problems in recovering from the anaesthetic and was even cheerfully munching on blueberries before she left the Small Animal Centre. So far she has responded well to the Strontium treatment.

## Major Breakthrough in Strangles Battle

We are really excited about the progress of our *Breaking the Strangles Hold* campaign, being run in association with the British Horse Society (BHS).

The Strangles Campaign was launched by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal in February 2007, and aims to raise a target figure of £250,000 by 2009. It has two main aims: to raise awareness in the equine world and to generate funds to support the vital research in the ongoing battle to eradicate the disease.

So far, over £130,000 has been raised, and the money has been instrumental in funding the development of a diagnostic blood test. The new test is ideal for screening horses prior to movement, competition or sales and was launched on 1st March this year.

Peter Webbon, AHT Chief Executive, said: "The development of this diagnostic test is a major milestone. Huge thanks go to all of those who have supported the campaign."

Strangles is the most commonly diagnosed infectious disease in horses around the world. It causes untold suffering and, at its worst, can be fatal.

The next big step for the Trust is to produce a new vaccine, which would be a major breakthrough in protecting horses and ponies around the world.

The campaign still needs public support. You can help us by making a donation, holding a fundraising event, keeping a collection box, selling pin badges or buying a 'Breaking the Strangles Hold' Puffa polo shirt.

**For more information about the Strangles campaign, visit [www.strangles.org](http://www.strangles.org)**



Right: A pony suffering from Strangles







## Burt the Bransby Pony

It's hard to believe that Burt, a very sweet pony who is just 10-hands (40 inches) high, actually represented a huge threat to the health of the horse and ponies around him. In a study being carried out by our research team into Strangles, Burt was identified as a carrier with more chondroids in his guttural pouch than our team had ever seen!

Chondroids are hardened balls of pus which can sit within the guttural pouches (structures within horses' heads) for years. Although the carriers can appear to be perfectly healthy they can, at any time, be responsible for infecting other horses or ponies and starting an outbreak.

Burt lives at Bransby Home of Rest for Horses, where AHT vet Jeremy Kemp Symonds has been helping to manage a Strangles outbreak. Jeremy was absolutely amazed when he found, and removed, 27 chondroids, from the pony's guttural pouch – a large number for any horse, especially a little pony!

Although the procedure took Jeremy over four hours to complete, it was conducted under standing sedation with no ill effects at all – see the morning after photo (above). The good news is that Burt is no longer carrying the disease and is therefore not in danger of spreading it.

Burt was the 26th Strangles carrier to have been identified in Bransby's herd of 300 horses and ponies. The AHT started Strangles screening and testing in Autumn 2006. The site has had Strangles cycling amongst its animals for decades and Jeremy wanted to get the property free of the disease completely, which, considering the size of it, was a huge task.

Bransby is split into four yards, so Jeremy wanted to keep the four areas as separate as possible in terms of staff and movement of horses. The aim was to treat one area at a time until all four were clear. All horses were blood tested and swabbed three times to establish whether they carried Strangles and any animals they were suspicious of were checked out with an endoscope. Any carriers found were treated with antibiotics and their chondroids removed.

The team hopes to have completed the process by the end of April. The home then wants to hold an Open Day for the public in June by which time, they will hopefully be completely free of the disease.



## AHT Scoops Prize at Crufts

It wasn't only the pooches who walked away with rosettes and prizes at Crufts last week. The Animal Health Trust scooped its very own award for having the Best Stand in the medium-sized-stand category.

The open-plan stand was brand new for Crufts 2008. As well as selling merchandise and offering a range of leaflets, there was also the chance to 'Meet the Experts'. Every

day, different members of the AHT team, including vets, nurses and research workers, were on hand to offer advice to the public and answer any questions which cropped up.

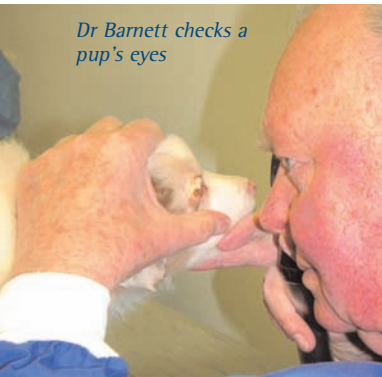
The highlight for many visitors though, was the dog-filled playpen at the front of the stand, which boasted a different breed each day, including two four-month-old Border Collie puppies on Saturday, and Golden Retrievers Gypsy and Bonnie on Friday. As you can see from the photograph, they loved all the attention they got!

We also ran a Prize Draw on the stand, offering one lucky person a year's supply of dog food, courtesy of Pedigree. The prize was won by Nicola Hodges of Telford, Shropshire, whose lucky Staffie, Cookie, will receive 12 months' supply of her favourite fodder.

The dog show was a huge success all round for the AHT. As well as raising public awareness of the charity and its vital work, the merchandise sold provided an income of around £2,000 which will be put towards helping the health and welfare of dogs, cats and horses.



Dr Barnett checks a pup's eyes



## New Accolade for AHT Ophthalmologist

*AHT Consultant Ophthalmologist Dr Keith Barnett has recently been made an Honorary Diplomate of the American College of Ophthalmology, making him the only current member from Britain. This newest accolade goes along with his memberships of both the European and British Colleges of Ophthalmology too. Congratulations Keith!*



## Thank You AHT

*Our Small Animal Centre regularly sees pets who are on their last chance. These letters, sent by the owners of three of our patients, serve to remind us of how important it is to continue developing improved methods to prevent, diagnose and, when necessary, treat illness*

“To all staff at the AHT,

We would like to say a big thank you for saving our Shetland Sheepdog Arabella’s life, and for the love and support you have shown us throughout this ordeal.

Learning that Arabella had oral cancer was very traumatic and something that we hope we never have to face again. Hopefully, our vigilance of the health of both our Sheltie’s meant we caught the lump early. Our local vet removed the mass and sent it off for biopsy. Our worst fears were confirmed when the results showed she had squamous cell carcinoma. She managed to get a very quick referral to the AHT and, after our consultation, it was agreed that having part of her lower jaw removed would offer her the best chance.

Arabella has coped really well and does not seem affected by it at all. She eats well and loves to play with her soft toys.

We appreciate all the help and support given to us by the staff at the Animal Health Trust and thank you all for hopefully saving our little girl’s life.

Best wishes to you all.”

*Karen and Graham Archer*

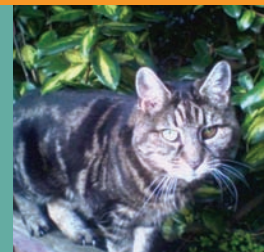
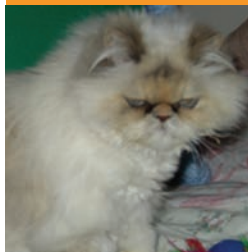
## In Memory of Bella

“We would like to express our most sincere and grateful thanks to the Oncology Team, nurses and reception staff at the Animal Health Trust for all the help and support they gave to our special cat Bella, and to us.

“Bella was part of our family life and has given us immense pleasure over the years, not only as a very loving companion, but also as a Show Champion in 2001, under the name Popylea Moon Tiger. She will be missed so very much by her family.

“We have a lot of faith in the Animal Health Trust and the work they do. Back in 2001, another cat of ours called Duke suffered inner ear cancer. Surgery was performed and was a total success. Duke is still with us to this day, and is fit and well. Thank you all from the bottom of our hearts for saving Duke and giving Bella that extra bit of time with us.”

*Angela and Brian Smith*



## In Memory of Boo

“To everyone at the Animal Health Trust

My cat Boo Boo was in with you three years ago, being treated for an overactive thyroid, and she was really well looked after. Boo Boo passed away in May last year, just six weeks short of her 19th birthday.

I’d had her since she was 12 weeks old so it was sad to say goodbye and I miss her every day. But the AHT gave her two and a half extra years to enjoy and, although she was old, she wasn’t really ill until the last few weeks when her little kidneys finally gave out. She was put to sleep late one night and died in my arms.

I now have two new cats, Dillon and Daisy, who are Battersea cats. Although I miss Boo, I couldn’t let the basket get cold and had to give a home to two little unwanted souls!”

*Karen Chilvers*

## A Lasting Tribute

*The new-look Animal Health Trust website now has a section dedicated to pet bereavement and memorials. There is the chance to read about how to cope with the loss of a beloved pet, and the opportunity to fill out a form to submit your very own dedication to your pet, which will appear on our website for 12 months. These memorials can be a great help and comfort when dealing with the death of a pet, and allow you to share memories with others.*

*You can also download our leaflet on how to cope with pet bereavement ([www.aht.org.uk](http://www.aht.org.uk) <<http://www.aht.org.uk/>>).*





# AHT Race Night

*It's time to get your betting hats on as Rowley Mile Racecourse in Newmarket is holding a special race night next month with the Animal Health Trust as the benefiting charity.*



*The famous Rowley Mile Racecourse*

This race night is going to be held on Thursday 15th May, with the first race starting at 5.50pm. The last race of the evening will be at 8.30pm.

You can take the family and, hopefully, enjoy some springtime sunshine. There will also be entertainment and competitions on the night, as well as the races, and don't worry if you're not a seasoned race-goer - this is one for the novices too!

This special race night is set to be fun for all the family and, what's more, AHT supporters buy one ticket and get one free. Under 16s go free which makes it a cheap and very enjoyable family outing. To obtain tickets, telephone 01638 675 500 and quote AHT08 to get your 2-for-1 deal.

## Gala Day Plans in Full Swing!



After the great success of the AHT's Gala Open Day last year, this year's date is definitely one for your diary! 21st September will see our gates open to the public for a day of fun in the sun with something for everyone! There will be displays from Tricky Tykes Terrier Racing Team, Southern Golden Retriever Display Team and the Rockwood Dog Display Team, as well as a charity dog walk and many stands.

Topping the bill once again will be the dog show, including a class for Animal Health Trust ex-patients. The day is great fun for all the family, especially the dogs, so make sure you visit us in September!



## The Story Of Forrest Dump

As Told By Karen Felton, Head Of Nursing



I first spotted Forrest sitting miserably under a tree in the forest, almost as if he was waiting for someone. My friend and I began to feed him, as he was very thin and always hungry. At each opportunity I tried to coax him into a cat carrier. Despite nearly 20 years as a veterinary nurse, Forrest's evasive tactics eluded my honed skills.

Each evening when I fed him I could see he was becoming infested with engorged ticks all over his body. He also had a huge brewing abscess on the side of his face. Despite his nervousness, once he came out of the trees he would purr and knead the ground and was obviously delighted to see people. By the last week of August the abscess was fully formed and his eye was closed. A friend borrowed a cat trap cage from the Cats Protection League, and we finally managed to catch him.

Back at the AHT I made Forrest a nice comfy bed in one of our big cat pods, gave him some food and applied antiparasitic and worming treatment. The next day we lanced the abscess and removed all his ticks and dying lice. To my amazement we scanned for a microchip and found one, making us hopeful that he could soon be returned to a loving owner. Sadly, when I contacted pet log, they told me he was chipped at a boarding kennel in Suffolk in 1995 but was never registered to anyone.

Very quickly Forrest Dump, as we named him, began to exhibit quite a character and became fondly regarded by all staff. He displayed the most gargantuan appetite and quickly put on weight. He was very nervous and fearful of anything new but was becoming more confident as he was handled by the staff every day. I had grown really fond of this little cat but initially held back from offering him a home as I had a firmly established cat that would not take kindly to an interloper. However it was clear this cat wouldn't be easy to home to anyone who wasn't prepared to make allowances for his moments of terrified nervousness. I began to have ideas about Forrest living in our boiler house and how that could be a life long solution to his home requirements. So on 17th December 2006 Forrest finally left the AHT to come home with me.

In 2007 the friend who'd helped to catch him gave me a fabulous outdoor cat run complete with house so Forrest could be safe and secure outside in the better weather. His confidence increased every day and now he is truly the most gentle, grateful, purring, lovely cat I have ever met. We spend quality time with him every day and his loving nature has repaid us many times over.

Overall Forrest's story began as a sad one but during his period at the AHT (his rehab period as I call it), and at his loving home, he now trusts people and enjoys life once more.



## DNA Tests Launched for Two New Breeds



Left: Australian Shepherds can now be tested for cataracts



Right: A working Italian Spinone



Ophthalmologists perform intricate surgery

The future is looking brighter for two popular breeds of dog, the Italian Spinone and the Australian Shepherd Dog, following the AHT's launch of two new DNA screening tests at Crufts this year.

Italian Spinones suffer from a condition called Cerebellar Ataxia, a disorder affecting the nervous system, which causes unsteadiness and lack of coordination. It is caused by shrinkage of the cerebellum, the part of the brain controlling balance. Cerebellar Ataxia is a progressive degenerative disorder that usually results in euthanasia before an affected dog's first birthday. These kinds of disorder have no cure, and gradually get worse over time. The AHT has been carrying out considerable research into this condition and has now developed a linkage-based DNA screening test, which analyses markers that are known to be located close to the mutation.

A test to screen for Hereditary Cataracts in the Australian Shepherd has also been developed. Cataracts are a common problem for many dog breeds and can ultimately cause blindness if left untreated.

In 2006, the mutation in Australian Shepherds was identified by AHT researchers in a small number of dogs affected by Hereditary Cataracts. The team have since analysed DNA from over 300 dogs, collected from 12 different countries, and their results show conclusively that this particular mutation is a risk factor for the development of the condition, and that dogs which carry the mutation are 12 times more likely to develop cataracts in both eyes than those that don't. The mutation is dominant, which means that dogs need only inherit a single copy of it, from either parent, to be at risk.

However now, thanks to pioneering research by the Genetics Team at the AHT, the new DNA screening test has been made available and will help to dramatically decrease the incidence of cataracts within the breed.

## ECP Appeal Update

In our last newsletter, we launched an appeal to raise funds for an endoscopic laser to treat canine glaucoma.

Thank you to everyone who has so far made a donation towards this great cause. However, we still have a way to go! We need to raise £50,000 to pay for this amazing piece of equipment, which can also help with Retinal Atrophy. So far, we've gratefully received £32,000.

The endoscopic laser, formally known as endoscopic cyclophotocoagulation (ECP) is used to treat glaucoma in people. Raising the funds for this technology will make us the only veterinary institution in Europe to use it to treat animals.

Glaucoma is a notoriously difficult condition to treat, which is why ECP can make such a great difference to the lives of so many of our canine friends. It offers the only long-term solution to the disease, which causes pain and discomfort and can ultimately result in blindness. ECP tackles the cause of the problem, by burning away the fluid-producing areas behind the eye with a tiny endoscopic laser.

We still need to raise another £18,000 in this appeal. Please help us if you can by sending a donation using the enclosed form.

## Marathon Success for AHT

We'd like to say a big congratulations to all those who ran for us in the Flora London Marathon. All four finished with very good times...

- Andy Wolfe: 3.25.15
- John Suik: 4.25.00
- Pam Deal: 5.07.07
- Amanda Sims: 5.45.29

Between them they've raised a total of around £17,000 for the AHT.



## Caring for Companion Animals, Caring for the Environment...

Do your bit for the environment and support the Trust at the same time. Get your AHT jute bag now to save on plastic bags!

The bags are perfect for taking shopping with you, and have long handles so they fit on your shoulder. The slogan reads, Animal Health Trust. Caring for companion animals, caring for the environment.

They cost just £2.50, so visit our online shop today at [www.aht.org.uk](http://www.aht.org.uk) and bag yourself a bargain!

