



# Animal Health Trust News

Issue 66 | Spring 2009

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## Make Your Dog A TV Star!

There's probably not a single person among you who hasn't seen an advertisement on television recently for sofa firm **dfs**. Well, guess what? Your dog could be the star of the next one!

The Animal Health Trust has teamed up with furniture giants **dfs** to offer one lucky donor the chance for their pet to appear in an upcoming commercial. The advert will be screened nationwide and shown at peak viewing times - the perfect chance to show off your pooch to the Great British public!

The appeal competition was launched at Crufts and is simple to enter - just visit the website [www.makeyourdogastar.com](http://www.makeyourdogastar.com). There are three easy steps to follow and who knows - your dog could be a star by the end of the year!



## Animal Health Trust

Lanwades Park

Kentford

Newmarket

Suffolk CB8 7UU

Telephone: +44 (0)1638 751 000

Fax: +44 (0)1638 750 410

Email: [info@aht.org.uk](mailto:info@aht.org.uk)

Website: [www.aht.org.uk](http://www.aht.org.uk)

Registered Charity No 209642



**Right:** Bluebird is recovering well and **above:** The scar down her back from the surgery

## Blue Bird Flying High Thanks to Vets' Expertise

Pioneering imaging equipment at the Animal Health Trust has saved a cat who was suspected to have been suffering from a life-threatening form of cancer.

When Blue Bird, a nine-year-old British Blue, started to have trouble walking on her back legs, her owner Damien Sparkes became increasingly worried. Blue Bird's back legs had become weak and she was struggling to walk properly.

The problem didn't improve, so Damien took the cat to see his local vet, who immediately suspected the worst.

"He thought she had a spinal-cord tumour," explained Damien, from Nuneaton, Warwickshire. "When he told me it could be the last time I saw her, I was devastated."

However, x-rays done to confirm his thoughts suggested that Blue Bird may in fact be suffering from a slipped disc in her back. If this was the case, an operation might be possible and Blue Bird had a chance of recovery, but in order to confirm the diagnosis a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan was necessary.

Veterinary institutions which have MRI scanners powerful enough to obtain detailed images of cats' spines are few and far between, so Damien brought Blue Bird on a three-and-a-half hour journey to the Animal Health Trust. The scan on our high-field MRI system revealed that the cat had actually slipped three discs in her back, one of which had compressed her spinal cord to just 25% of its normal diameter – it was no wonder she was struggling to walk!

"Without the facilities and knowledge of the Animal Health Trust, Blue Bird would have surely had to be put down," said Damien.

Specialist neurologist and neurosurgeon Alberta de Stefani, who treated Blue Bird, said, "Such a severe compression, if left for too long, would have definitely caused permanent and devastating damage to the spinal cord. The operation, although risky, was the only chance for Blue Bird to get back to a normal life."

Alberta performed major surgery on the cat at the end of October to remove the area of compression on her spinal cord. The operation went well and was a huge success. Blue Bird will need lots of rest and physiotherapy to get her back to her full fitness, but Damien is so grateful to everyone at the AHT.

"I would like to thank everybody at the Animal Health Trust deeply for their part in saving the life of my cherished cat Blue Bird," he said. "All aspects of her treatment were carried out with absolute professionalism, emotional sensitivity and the vets went beyond the call of duty. I cannot praise enough the service that was provided at such a difficult time."

## ECP Appeal Update

At the beginning of 2008, we launched an appeal to raise the funds for an endoscopic laser in the Small Animal Centre, used to treat dogs suffering from glaucoma. Glaucoma is a very painful condition, which can ultimately cause blindness and is notoriously difficult to treat. Endoscopic Cyclophotocoagulation (ECP) is the only successful long-term treatment available and the Animal Health Trust pioneered its UK use to treat the condition in dogs last year. We have now managed to buy the equipment thanks to some excellent fundraising efforts from AHT supporters.

Pat Booth, secretary of The Spanish Water Dog Club, recently presented AHT Ophthalmologist Claudia Hartley with a cheque for £2,630 (pictured) following two events held to raise money from the appeal - a sponsored dog dive, and shortly afterwards, 'Di's Fun Behavioural and Training Weekend'.

Also supporting the appeal is Sue Gilkes, who organised a sponsored dog walk in September. The walk raised £175 and fourteen people and nineteen dogs took part. They walked through five miles of farmland and countryside around Little Wolford, Shipston-on-Stour, in Warwickshire.

To date over 50 patients have been referred for the surgery, mainly in glaucoma cases but also to treat retinal detachment, and the laser has been used for the procedure over 30 times. We have been very pleased with the results. Most of the dogs operated on have been saved from blindness.

As you can imagine, the ophthalmologists and nurses derive great pleasure and satisfaction from seeing a dog wake up from surgery with its sight restored. However, this is easily surpassed by the joy the owners feel on being reunited with a much-loved pet who can now see again.

Other dogs which, sadly, have been blinded by disease before surgery, are made comfortable and free from pain by the procedure.

We would like to thank everyone who supported the ECP appeal!



## AHT Canine Genetics at Crufts 2009

Our award-winning 'Meet the Experts' stand at Crufts in 2008 helped inspire an innovative Dog Health Stand at this year's event. The AHT, along with the British Veterinary Association, was invited by The Kennel Club to showcase our many areas of expertise as part of the Health Zone, by talking to breeders and owners about our work. The Dog Health Stand gave thousands of visitors the chance to get advice on veterinary matters including health screening and DNA tests. At Crufts, we also announced new Kennel Club Charitable Trust funding for the Canine Genetics Centre. This exciting new partnership will enable our Canine Genetics team to speed up research into inherited diseases, hopefully in time creating further diagnostic tests which, together with breeding advice, will improve the health and welfare of generations of dogs.

The AHT's Canine Genetics Group undertakes research to identify the mutations that are responsible for inherited conditions that affect particular breeds, and develop DNA diagnostic tests. These tests can be used to determine whether an individual dog carries a particular mutation and therefore whether it will a) develop the inherited disease that is associated with that mutation and b) pass the mutation on to any offspring it has. Breeders can - and should - make full use of these DNA tests to make sensible choices about the dogs they mate together to minimise the risk of producing affected puppies.

For more information on the 23 tests currently offered and ongoing research work, visit [www.aht.org.uk](http://www.aht.org.uk).



## Printer Cartridge and Mobile Phone Appeal

Since the commencement of the above recycling schemes we have raised nearly £3,000 - so a huge 'thank you' to all supporters who have taken part. The schemes continue and keep up the good work by sending your empty cartridges and mobile phones to EAH Recycling in the enclosed freepost envelope - every cartridge and mobile phone is much appreciated as the Animal Health Trust receives a generous donation for each one.

**Please Note: We cannot recycle Epson, laser or toner cartridges.**

For extra envelopes please call EAH Recycling on 01473 658161.



## Imaging Appeal Helps Solve Figgy Mystery!

In 2007, we launched a major appeal to fund a major upgrade of the diagnostic imaging equipment used in the Centre for Equine Studies. Thanks to generous donations from charitable foundations and our many supporters, we managed to achieve our target and, by the end of 2008, had bought several pieces of new, state-of-the-art equipment. These digital facilities will enable AHT Equine to build up a comprehensive, computerised archive of images taken of equine patients, which will prove crucial in a wide range of future research.

Diagnosing a lameness problem in a horse can be a tricky job, and for one pony, 12-year-old Figgy Williams, it was necessary to use all modalities of imaging before the team could fully understand what was going on.

Figgy was referred to the AHT for right forelimb lameness. The referring vet had already established that pain was coming from the fetlock region, but couldn't see anything unusual on the x-rays.

When Figgy came in to the AHT, he was seen by equine clinicians Shelley Down and Dr. Rachel Murray, who assessed the pony and agreed that the right front fetlock (the equivalent of the joint between the end of a finger and the long bones in a human hand) was swollen.

Detailed X-rays using of both front feet and fetlocks, new digital radiography equipment, showed a tiny notch in the right fetlock, but X-rays are not able to show deep bone damage or soft tissue damage. To do this, ultrasonography was needed. This £45,000 state-of-the-art equipment was installed in early 2008 and the images the equipment produces are of significantly higher quality than the previous system. On these images it was clear that one of Figgy's ligaments on the right side looked abnormal. They didn't think this should be causing Figgy that amount of lameness and that there must be something somewhere else causing the problem.

Scintigraphy, or 'bone scanning', was needed next, which is a method that involves injecting a radioactive label which is used to highlight areas of bone damage. New scintigraphy equipment was also purchased and installed in 2008 thanks to the Imaging Appeal. This more advanced technology enables faster image acquisition and produces much higher image resolution. Furthermore, the new software will enable clinicians to overlay scintigraphy with different imaging modalities, such as MRI, X-ray and ultrasound. In Figgy's case, the scintigraphy showed bone damage to the right fetlock, but still more investigation was necessary to work out just what was going on.

The next step was MRI. The AHT is the only place in the UK to use both standing and high-field MRI scanners for veterinary clinical purposes, so Figgy was definitely in the right hands! The scan showed the AHT team exactly what was wrong with him: active damage and bruising to the bones and cartilage of the fetlock, and damage to the collateral (supporting) ligament.

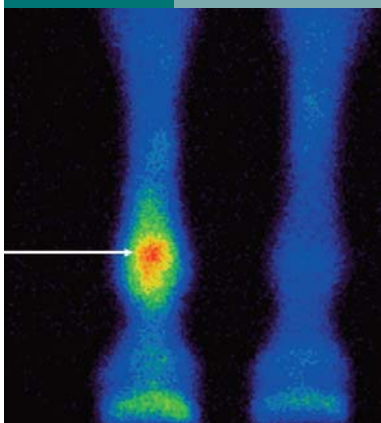
The MRI was able to show the AHT team exactly where, how much and what damage was done. This all meant they could make sure Figgy's injury would be treated in the most effective way. He had to have at least four months box rest and was given medication to normalise the bone cell environment. The AHT team also used radial pressure wave therapy (shockwave) to treat the damage.

Figgy's period of rest is nearly up. He will soon be returning to the AHT for reassessment. His owner, Caroline Williams, says he's looking incredibly well and is so pleased with everything the Animal Health Trust did for them.

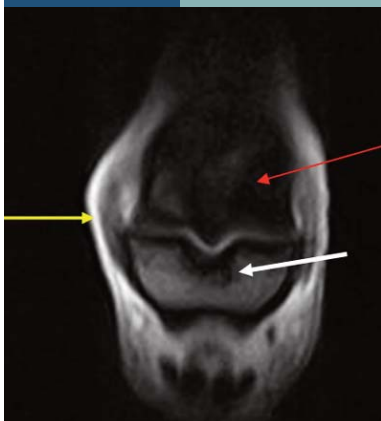
"I can't speak more highly of Shelley Down and Rachel Murray and everything they did for Figgy," she said. "It was absolutely brilliant."



**Above:** X-Ray of the right front fetlock.



**Above:** Bone scanning (scintigraphy)



**Above:** Figgy's MRI scan



## Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed... Something for the Animal Health Trust

A dog lover has given the Animal Health Trust a cheque for £1500, after asking for donations rather than wedding presents...

When Lesley Beevers' West Highland Terrier was kidnapped, she was beside herself with worry. So when a call came through, telling her a dog matching his description had been found, she rushed down there immediately, only to find the canine spotted was not her dog, but another homeless Westie. Lesley and her husband felt so sorry for this little dog, they adopted him and decided, should they ever find Jack the two could be brothers. Sadly, six-month-old Jack was never returned to the couple, and newly christened Casper became a firm member of the family.

At around two years old, Casper's skin became sore and he started itching all over. Lesley took him to their local vet, but they were unable to get to the root of his problem, so referred him to the Dermatology Unit at the Animal Health Trust.

"We came in to see Natalie Perrins, who was so kind and helpful," explained Lesley. "She talked through every possibility with us so we knew exactly what was going on."

Casper had a series of blood tests, which were then sent away, to see if they showed the root of Casper's problem. The results show he had an allergy to house dust mites and a special vaccine was made to try and desensitize him.

However, Casper still had little itchy patches, so it was back to the AHT where further blood samples were taken. Sure enough, the results came back and reported that Casper in fact had an allergy to Cyprus trees, which the Beevers' have all over their garden! A new vaccine was made to contain this pollen in addition to the house dust mites and it has been successful in controlling Casper's allergy.

Lesley was so pleased with everything the AHT had done for her and Casper, she decided she wanted to give something back and could think of no better time to do this than at her wedding. She and her then-fiancé decided they had everything they needed, so the couple asked their wedding guests to give donations to the AHT instead of buying them wedding presents.

And what a huge success this idea was! Lesley presented the cheque for £1,500 to Natalie at the Trust at the beginning of October. The money was put towards an appeal for new digital radiography equipment for the Trust's Centre of Small Animals.

"The Trust was so wonderful and took such good care of Casper we wanted to say thank you," said Lesley. "We're so grateful for everything they have done for him."

## Skydiving for Strangles

The British Horse Society (BHS) are looking for hundreds of adventurous volunteers to make a fundraising parachute jump to help raise vital funds for the BHS/Animal Health Trust Strangles campaign.

What's more if you raise more than £395 in sponsorship you will get to jump for free! There are three types of jump available, both solo and tandem, so there is something suitable for all.

No experience is necessary as all training is provided. You can do any of these jumps from any one of over twenty British Parachute Association approved airfields across the UK.

Amanda Watson, BHS South Development Officer who initiated the campaign said: "Strangles is a horrific disease that requires 'Extreme' action. I am thrilled to be able to offer people the experience of a lifetime and combine this with raising vital funds for the Animal Health Trust research into an effective Strangles vaccine and diagnostic tool."

If you would like to help protect horses and the associated industries against this terrible disease, join the BHS/AHT Strangles Appeal and experience the jump of a lifetime.

For a free information pack with everything you need to take part please contact: Amanda Watson, British Horse Society South Development Officer, by calling 01202 558515, or emailing [a.watson@bhs.org.uk](mailto:a.watson@bhs.org.uk).





## Fundraising News



### Pooches Pull in the Pounds

Everyone works that little bit harder over the Christmas period to earn some extra cash, and these East Anglian Working Newfoundlands (EAWN) were no exception!

Over the Christmas period, the group of dogs raised money for the Animal Health Trust by helping out those buying their Christmas trees at Elveden Estate, near Thetford. When the tree had been selected, the dogs then dragged it back to the buyer's car on festively decorated trailers! They then ask for donations, which has raised us close to £1,000.

The EAWN committee members hold this event every year, splitting all donations between three benefitting charities. This year, they chose the AHT as one charity after club member Brenda Peck's seven-year-old Newfoundland, Bosun, had to be referred due to acute leukemia. Sadly, Bosun couldn't be treated, but in gratitude for the way the Trust looked after him, they wanted to donate funds from the annual Christmas event.

The tree pulling took place over three weekends in December, and EAWN have recently presented the AHT with a cheque for a wonderful £951!

### All That Glitters Raises Money!

The champagne was flowing as the money rolled in and guests danced the night away at the AHT's 20th Anniversary UK Equestrian Awards.

The event was held at London's Royal Lancaster Hotel in Hyde Park, and was held in the presence of our President, HRH The Princess Royal.

As it was the event's 20th anniversary, there was a slight change in the format. Winners were chosen from those who had made significant contributions to equestrianism over the past two decades, rather than just the past year.

Winners on the night included British Show Jumping Association chairman and president Douglas Bunn and Essex-based vet Andrew Dobson. The Pony Club won the award for Voluntary Service and eventing record-holder Lucinda Green was proud to pick up the Martin Collins special award for her lifetime contribution to equestrianism.

After the presentation of the awards the band struck up and guests, nominees and winners danced into the early hours. A wonderful night was had by all and it is expected the event will bring in thousands of pounds for the Animal Health Trust.

### AHT Racing to Fundraising Success

The Flora London Marathon takes place on April 26th and will this year also be welcoming six AHT supporters into its midst, including two members of staff!

Maire O'Brien, Senior Secretary and Administrator and Oliver Forman, Genetics Research Assistant, have all bravely volunteered to run the 26-mile race to raise funds for the AHT. Neither of them has entered before but they are both looking forward to it!

Also running for the Trust are four of our supporters; Laura Hudson, Graham McGrotty, Jolene Hammonds and Robert Webbon.

Laura's late father was a veterinary surgeon in nearby village Barrow, and after his death, some of his staff came to work here. Laura has had one of her dogs treated at the AHT and now lives with her partner, twins and dog Hooch.

Completing a marathon is something runner Jolene Hammonds has always wanted to do. "I wanted to run for the AHT as I love animals and supporting a charity that researches ways to improve their health will make me very proud. From a selfish point of view, I enjoy running and would love the sense of achievement in completing a marathon, so it's great opportunity to combine the two!"

If you would like to help raise vital funds for the AHT, visit our website where you will find details of how to sponsor our runners.

