

## **'ear about the awn?**

Now we are well into summer, and hopefully the sun is shining and even the evenings are warm, the flowers start to die off and seeds start to be produced. Some plants are very 'clever', or at least they have evolved in such a way, that makes it easy for their seeds to be distributed once they leave the plant. Some such as dandelions are very light and will blow easily in the wind. Some seeds have wings that again will propel along. Others are covered in bright coloured flesh so that birds or animals may eat them and distribute the seeds through their faeces. Some fruiting bodies may explode and scatter their seeds far and wide, while others again are sticky and will adhere to animals or birds as they brush past and then fall off later.

Some grasses have hairs or bristles on their seeds which will adhere to animals' coats. They will self propel the seed into the ground to allow it to start growing in a normal situation but when on an animal can cause all sorts of problems. One of the most common of these is when they adhere to an animal's ears. Dogs with long pendulous ears with long hair, such as spaniels, are very prone to this problem. The awn attaches to the hair on the inside of the ear then as the animal moves the awns works its way down into the ear canal. This is very irritating to the dog and can cause immense pain as the seed presses against, or even perforates, the eardrum. The dog will constantly shake its head and may cry out in pain.

Usually it would require an anaesthetic or heavy sedation for the seed to be removed.



While ears are a common site for grass awns to invade they are by no means alone. They can also get between the toes especially in long haired dogs. They can then actually work their

way through the skin and then up the leg causing swelling and discomfort as they go. Surgery may then be required to locate them which can be difficult at times as they do not show up on x rays. Other areas where they can cause problems are up the nose, in the mouth, in the eyes, around the anus; well anywhere is possible!

It is important to protect your pet at this time of year from these dangerous seeds. If it is long haired clip it, especially around the feet and ears. Clipping it as short as possible will minimise the risk. Also ensure it is checked over when returning from a walk to make sure it has no awns on its skin. Avoiding areas of long grass may be required.

The major signs of grass seed penetration are shaking of the head, swelling of paws or legs, discharge from nose or eyes, or swelling or discharge from anywhere the seed may have

penetrated. So if your pet is showing any of these signs it is important you get it checked by your Veterinary Surgeon as soon as possible. Delay will only make things worse!

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