



PVPC Newsletter

June 2025 Issue

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FOXTAIL SEASON



The sun is shining and the air is warm, 'tis the season to get outside and stretch those legs! 'Tis also foxtail season... And boy is it all fun and games until we run into a foxtail.

Foxtails are a type of grass weed that grow all over El Dorado County and nearby areas. Those of us who have lived locally for many years have become all too familiar with those pesky weeds as they are impossible to get rid of. What makes foxtails so prevalent in veterinary medicine are the barbed tufts that grow at the tip of the grass. They quite literally get stuck on everything including our pets.

The majority of medical conditions we see throughout the summer months here in veterinary medicine are due to foxtail related health issues in both dogs and cats. As mentioned before, the barbed tips are the culprits to the medical problems we see. The

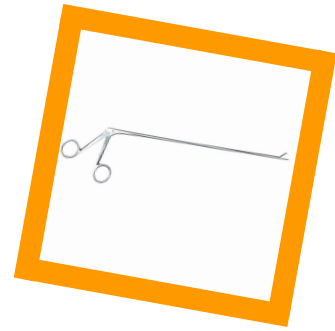
shape of the foxtail tips allow them to easily lodge in small spaces such as noses, eyes, ears, and between the toes while the barbs on the weed prevent them from being able to come back out the same way. The design of the foxtails is also why they are able to embed in the skin and migrate throughout the body while creating an infection that often presents itself as an abscess.

Since foxtails have a knack for lodging themselves into tight spaces, it is not uncommon that pet parents are unable to remove some foxtails from their pets on their own. These weeds can be rather uncomfortable so it's not surprising if your pet won't sit still long enough for you to poke around for them. Even if your pet is the most patient pet in the world, some of the small crevices and those stuck under the skin make foxtails near impossible to remove without medical assistance from a veterinarian. When foxtails lodge in the nose and ears, stuck under the third eyelid, or migrate under the



skin of an animal, special instruments, an extra pair of hands, and even medications are required to remove them.

Believe it or not, removing foxtails from the eyes is typically the least invasive procedure veterinarians perform during foxtail season; however, it's critical they get removed as soon as possible. Severe swelling and a large amount of discharge is usually the biggest indicator that a foxtail is stuck in an animal's eye. Since foxtails can be so painful, a veterinarian usually will start an eye exam by applying a numbing eye drop to the affected eye. Once the numbing drops take effect, veterinarians will often use a tweezer-like instrument to lift the third eyelid while also using a cotton tipped applicator to swab underneath the eyelid so the foxtail has something to attach to. Foxtails can scratch the cornea of the eye and cause mild to severe ulcers depending on how long they are stuck which is why veterinarians will use an eye stain after the foxtail has been removed. If the stain highlights a scratch or ulcer then the veterinarian will prescribe antibiotic eye drops and sometimes pain medication. If left untreated, the foxtails can cause major damage to the eye that often leads to the surgical removal of the eye. Removing foxtails from the ears is a pretty simple procedure just as removing foxtails from the eyes is; however, they can be difficult to remove if the patient is not still enough. The most common symptoms of a foxtail stuck in a pet's ear are rubbing or shaking of the head and scratching of the ears. For a veterinarian to be able to remove a foxtail from an animal's ear, they have to use a tool with a small light and an attached cone that is placed into the ear canal allowing visual access all the way to the eardrum. When a foxtail is noted on an ear exam, the veterinarian then needs to use a long instrument to grab the tail of the foxtail. As stated before, the animal must remain as still as possible to maintain visual access and to prevent the tip of the long instrument from puncturing a hole into the eardrum. In most cases, the manual restraint from a veterinary



staff member is enough to accomplish this, but in other cases the foxtails have caused so much irritation and infection to the ear canal that holding the pet is not enough. In those situations, sedation medication is needed to not only keep the pet still, but to allow some pain relief. If foxtails in the ear canals are left untreated then the irritation and infection of the ear canals will continue causing great discomfort and can even lead to hearing issues in severe cases. Foxtails can even puncture through the eardrums to then migrate elsewhere and cause other infections to brew.

A pet violently sneezing with occasional drips of blood from the nostrils almost always means they have a foxtail lodged up their nose. Like the ears, removing foxtails from the nose is a simple procedure including the same instruments and requires the pet to be very still. The main difference between removing foxtails from the ears and the nose is that no amount of manual restraint from the veterinary staff can keep a pet still enough to remove the weed and always requires full sedation or anesthesia to do so. When left alone, it's possible for some pets to sneeze so hard the weed comes out on its own; however, in most cases the foxtail can travel through the nasal passage into the throat to then get stuck in the tonsils causing further irritation.

When foxtails embed under the skin, it's most common for them to get stuck in between a pet's toes. Usually when this happens a "bubble" will form between the toes and often the pet will excessively lick at the site of irritation. These types of embedded foxtails tend to be less severe so a veterinarian will



often start by shaving the area if a lot of hair is present and clean it with antibacterial cleaners. Since these little abscesses can be painful, a veterinarian will often use lidocaine as a local anesthetic to numb the area before using a surgical instrument to probe the hole that foxtail has created. In the most rewarding cases, the foxtails will sit right at the abscess site and the problem has been solved. In other situations, a foxtail is not found because it has either already migrated its way out of the pet's foot or it has migrated elsewhere within the pet's body. Either way, a veterinarian will prescribe antibiotics and pain medications to assist the healing process as well as recommend the patient to wear a plastic cone to keep their mouth off of the healing site. In the cases where a weed is not found the veterinarians recommend to owners to monitor the areas and if the abscess persists the pet will need a follow-up with probable sedation or anesthesia to allow for a full surgical exploration. In pets with longer hair coats, it's not uncommon that abscesses like those in between the toes are found all over the body from foxtails embedding themselves. In some cases, these abscesses can be as minor as those in between the toes and a veterinarian may choose to attempt probing the site with local anesthetic; however, in most cases these tracts created from foxtails tend to go much deeper and can be incredibly painful to poke around in. It's usually safest and most comfortable for the patient if they are placed under full sedation or anesthesia to surgically explore the foxtail tract. Similarly

to foxtail abscess on the feet, the veterinarian will prescribe antibiotics, pain medications, and a plastic cone to allow the site to fully heal from the infection.

Oftentimes these foxtails can be so pesky that one pet will visit their veterinarian's office multiple times throughout the summer months. Having repeat offenders in the house can be so tiresome and costly for some pet owners. There are some steps that pet owners can take to prevent their pets from acquiring health issues due to foxtails including regular maintenance of the yard the animals have exposure to by pulling weeds or weed eating, confinement to the indoors or areas away from the weeds, and regular in-home or professional grooming to pick out the foxtails from the hair coats. Even with the most diligent pet owners and the cleanest pets, foxtail related health conditions may still come up during the summer months. That is totally okay! That's what those of us in veterinary medicine are here to help with!

Summer Visitor



Say hello to Miss Mikayla! Some of you may recognize her as one of our past friendly faces of PVPC before she departed in 2023 to Chico to continue her education. Mikayla first came to us as a high school student intern through an ROP Animal Health class. Once her internship was completed she then became a staple here at PVPC continuing to work as a certified assistant during her

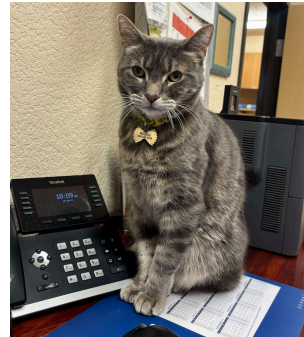
remaining years at Union Mine High School into her beginning years of college at Folsom Lake College. In 2023, Mikayla made her first big move to Chico where she has been studying for her bachelors in Animal Science. Once her undergraduate is completed, she hopes to continue her education on to vet school. While in Chico, Mikayla broadened her vet med experience by working at a VCA facility. There she was able to acquire valued knowledge and experience as well as a new love for emergency medicine, opening up her interest to expand her knowledge even further in that area of practice.

Mikayla grew up right here in El Dorado County and her love for this area definitely shows as she greatly enjoys spending her free time hiking in the mountains or paddle boarding on a beautiful lake with her dog, Tino. She also has a long history of playing volleyball and still finds enjoyment partaking in the sport.

As much fun as Mikayla has had embarking on her adventures in Chico, she couldn't be more excited to spend the summer right here in her hometown with her family and friends, and with us here at PVPC. Welcome back Mikayla!



Noodle's Notes



Happy summer to all!
We talked about this a lot last year and I think it can't hurt to bring it up again. The month of June in veterinary medicine is 'Microchip Your Pet Month' and 'National Pet Preparedness Month.' Having a microchip implanted in your pet is important at all times, but even more so during the summer months AKA fire season. Microchips are the main way that displaced pets are reconnected with their owners during a natural disaster such as a fire. So, what better way to get started on preparing your pet for this fire season than to get them microchipped? Lucky for you, PVPC is knocking \$10 off the regular microchip cost during the month of June to help bring awareness on the importance of having all pets microchipped. So go ahead and give my people a call to get your appointment for a microchip implantation scheduled today. 😊

