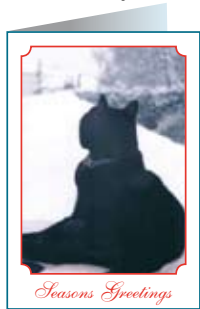


**Welcome to the Winter 2009 edition of our Newsletter.....**

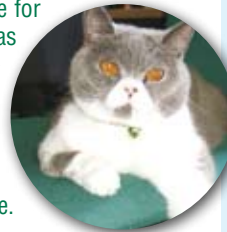
**Jack's Diary** It seems so long since I wrote my last column, I wondered what had happened, Val the Practice Manager asked me to apologise for no Summer or Autumn newsletter, unfortunately this was due to circumstances beyond her control.



Seasons Greetings

Our year started badly with the fire in the cellar which was fortunately contained however there was a lot of smoke damage. What an exciting night that was. As normal Holly and I were having one of our many snoozes and we had found a really cosy spot for the night in the vet's bedroom. The only problem was, we had sneaked in there and no one knew we were there, so of course when the alarm went off panic ensued as we were nowhere to be found. We were totally oblivious to what was going on around us but then we were rescued by a lovely fireman (my new best friend)! We were taken into a human ambulance that had been called out and we were given oxygen, even though we were alright, we felt very important! The other hospitalised pets were already in the ambulance and everyone was safe.

I have very sad news to report. Holly had been very quiet, was off her food and I could tell she was not her usual self. She hadn't been well for a while but seemed to be getting worse. Everyone was very worried about her. She would disappear for a few days at a time and when I went down to the hospital I found she was in the cat ward on a drip. This helped her, she would improve for a few days and she would come back to me, I was so happy to see her but I was worried. I heard the nurses talking and they said it was her kidneys and that she had chronic renal failure and she was getting worse. When Holly was young her tail had to be amputated due to injury and ever since the nurses would have to express her bladder several times a day. As a result, over the years problems with her kidneys developed and now everything that could be done for her had been done. Sadly my poor Holly passed away and life has not been the same since. I am sad and I miss her so much, as does everyone!



I have not been too well myself but I was really surprised when the nurses told me I was to be Star Pet of the Season, it is a real honour for me as it is a very special award. I suppose it has been a tough year but hopefully I am all sorted now and of course you can read all about me on page 4 and don't forget to look out for my story and photographs on the star pet board in the waiting room.

We now have a very smart new cat ward which is a big improvement. Cats are segregated and they find it less stressful to be kept apart from the dogs; which in turn aids their recovery.

I am famous again! Recently we had the film cameras at Dudley Hospital to make a short DVD which will be played on our new website [www.blacksvets.co.uk](http://www.blacksvets.co.uk) so don't forget to give it a try, have a look and see if you can see me. They were here for three hours but blink and you might miss me!

We have two lovely new nurses Charlotte Byewater an auxiliary nurse at Causeway Green surgery and Gemma Sanker a Senior Animal Nurse at Dudley Hospital. Good news and congratulations to Sarah Walker and Laura Tustin who have passed their final year nursing theory exams and to Sara Williams RVN and Gemma Hall RVN have who have been promoted to Head Nurses of Sedgley and Causeway Green surgeries respectively, both positions being awarded on merit.

**Christmas and New Year 2009/10**

**Surgery Hours**

- Christmas Eve** - Normal day surgeries - No evening surgery
- Christmas Day** - By appointment only - At Dudley surgery
- Boxing Day** - By appointment only - At Dudley surgery
- Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> and Monday 28<sup>th</sup>** - Urgent cases 11am - 12.30pm  
- By appointment only - At Dudley Hospital
- New Years Eve** - Normal day surgeries - No evening surgery
- New Years Day** - By appointment only - At Dudley surgery
- 2nd and 3rd January 2010** - Normal weekend surgeries

In an emergency, as always,

a vet can be contacted on 01384 252509

Well I can't believe it but it will soon be Christmas again. I don't know what I am doing this year. I know it will be really lonely without Holly so I think I might ask one of the nurses if they will take me home with them even if it is just for Christmas Day.

On behalf of everyone at Blacks Veterinary Group I would like to wish all our clients and their pets a very happy Christmas and a healthy, prosperous New Year. Until next time, take good care of yourselves.

*Lots of love Jack xxx*

**We would like to introduce you to our new vet .....**



Blacks Veterinary Group are very happy to announce the appointment of a new vet, who joined the veterinary team in April.

Cathal Rafferty BVM MRCVS, qualified at University College Dublin and was previously employed as a veterinary surgeon at a small animal practice in County Kildare where he gained valuable experience, increasing his knowledge and surgical skills.

Many of you will have already met Cathal and found him to be just as friendly and charming as his photograph portrays and even after such a short time he has made a big impact on the practice. He is very popular with all the female staff but alas he is spoken for and his partner Josie, who is an optician has now joined him in England. We wish them both good luck and happiness as they embark on their new life together here in the West Midlands.

Cathal has already received letters and cards of thanks and to quote a few lines from correspondence recently received is testament to his expertise and warm friendly nature.

*"I am delighted to tell you that we could not have received a warmer welcome from the reception team and Mr Rafferty gave us the kind of care and attention we had hoped for".*

*"Again by design, we have since seen Mr Rafferty at two of your other surgeries at Dudley and Causeway Green Road, Oldbury, where we received the same friendly, warm welcome at reception and high standards of care and attention from Mr Rafferty"*

*"We have felt so comfortable seeing Mr Rafferty on all visits to date; will you please pass on our thanks for being so helpful and welcoming".*

We know Cathal will endeavour to ensure your visit to our surgery exceeds your expectations, as is the case with the whole practice team.



## This is a Veterinary Hospital Do you realise what that means?



A **Veterinary Hospital** is a practice that meets the most **exacting standards** applied in this country.

The standards are many and varied to include the premises, the equipment, the vets, nurses and the level of care provided. These standards are set and enforced by the **Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons**, our governing body. **Registered Veterinary Hospitals** are *independently* inspected to ensure compliance and are not to be confused with an animal hospital, which is not RCVS inspected. There is a big difference and we have worked very hard to ensure we comply with the exacting standards required for the benefit of all our clients.

Many aspects of pet care that you might expect to take for granted can only be guaranteed to happen in a **Veterinary Hospital**.

- **Veterinary Hospitals** are the only practices where you can be certain your pet will never be left alone.
- A **Veterinary Hospital** will have a vet or nurse on the premises *24 hours a day* – every day of the year

- **Veterinary Hospitals** *must* have a dedicated, aseptic operating theatre in which to perform your pet's operations
- **Veterinary Hospitals** have an *obligation* to make sure their vets and other staff are well-qualified and up to date
- **Veterinary Hospital** status ensures X ray, ECG, laboratory facilities and an up to date *library* will be present on site
- **Veterinary Hospitals** are *guaranteed* to have a dedicated ward with sufficient, comfortable kennels as well as intensive care and isolation facilities
- **Veterinary Hospitals** are *required* to ensure that if your pet is anaesthetised, there will be a vet or nurse monitoring the anaesthetic from start to finish

Full membership of the **British Veterinary Hospitals Association** is restricted to *Registered Veterinary Hospitals*. **You know you can feel confident of the veterinary care you receive from Blacks Veterinary Group.**



## Congratulations..... Ruth Wickens gets Certified!!



We are delighted to announce that Ruth Wickens, our very popular vet in Lye has been awarded her Certificate in Small Animal Medicine.

This is the highest award that a vet can achieve while in practice. It allows her to receive referrals of difficult medical cases

from other practices and she is now a resource of knowledge and expertise that we can all use here in Blacks Veterinary Group.

All vets are trained to a very high level in Veterinary College and then continue learning by attending regular courses (CPD) to keep them up to date. A certificate takes things to a higher level and is equivalent to a Consultant grade in the medical world.

In addition to her role in Lye, Ruth will now be providing her expertise throughout the Group so that everyone's pet can benefit from the most advanced developments in medicine if the need arises.

There have been great advances in the treatment of conditions like diabetes and Cushings disease and also now, many cancers can be controlled to allow cats and dogs to have an extra few years of quality life without the side effects that there used to be.

We are all very proud of Ruth and her Certificate; we know how much work and dedication she has put in to achieve it. This expertise in Medicine complements our other Certificate holders knowledge; Brian Hogan's Certificate in Small Animal Surgery, Girish Thakral's Certificate in Cardiology and Ian Orr's Certificate in General Practice.

Gaining Certificates is part of Blacks Veterinary Group's commitment and ethos "Where Pets Come First" ensuring our clients have access to the best possible veterinary treatment available.



## Introducing our new MRI Scanning Service



We are proud to announce that MRI scanning is now available at our Dudley Hospital. MRI is one of the most advanced diagnostic tools in Veterinary Medicine and is currently only available in two centres in the Midlands. Blacks Veterinary Group is the only centre in the Midlands which provides MRI with Hospital Facilities.

MRI uses powerful magnets to gain fantastic images of body parts that cannot be achieved by conventional methods. It can be extremely useful for patients with symptoms such as nose-bleeds, fits, balance problems and in some lameness cases to name a few.

Having this facility available at our Dudley Hospital means worried owners no longer need to travel long distances with an ill pet to benefit from this service.

With the back-up of four Certificate Holders and our Hospital Facilities, this means that in many cases MRI can be combined with a follow-up procedure for example spinal surgery.

Clients who have already benefited from our MRI facility have been extremely pleased with the service provided. Several delighted owners, who would have otherwise found it difficult for them or their pets to travel a long distance, have been reassured and happy to know, they could get the best possible service available to help their beloved pets, locally.

## Love is in the air.....Congratulations



Auxiliary nurse Julia Holley and her fiancé Andy Wilcox celebrated a romantic Valentine's Day wedding at Dumbleton Hall Nr Evesham and.....  
On 2 May receptionist Jo Beckley married fiancé Paul Handley at St Mary's Church Kingswinford (right).



*Star Pet  
Of the Season –  
Jumping Jack Black  
Each season surgeries  
will select a Star Pet  
so don't forget to check  
the gold star boards  
in your waiting  
room*

## Star Pet of the Season Jumping Jack Black (Our Surgery Cat)

We know we usually choose a client's pet for our star pet but on this occasion we have taken the unprecedented step of selecting Jack, our practice cat, who has been through a lot this year and we feel when you read his story, you will agree he truly deserves this accolade.

Sadly in May Jack lost his companion and best friend Holly. Although Jack had always been used to being on his own, when Holly came to live with him at the Dudley hospital, they got on very well together despite the odd tussle and Jack has certainly missed having her around.

At the end of August during one of his cuddling sessions with Head of Reception Tracy Wood, she noticed a pea sized lump on the left-hand side of his neck. Immediately she got one of the vets to check him over and it was decided to put him on a course of antibiotics and anti-inflammatory pain killers for seven days to rule out infection and check if the lump had reduced in size.

Seven days later Clinical Director Brian Hogan examined Jack and found the size of the lump had increased and decided it should be removed. Jack was not happy at being starved the night before his operation and treated everyone with indifference at not getting his own way! His pre-anaesthetic bloods showed raised liver parameters and Jack received intravenous fluids prior to his operation. The lump was removed and sent to an external laboratory for histology. As you can imagine Jack received very special VIP treatment from all the veterinary and nursing team and loved being spoilt by everyone!



The diagnostic results came back showing a mastcell tumour. Histology showed complete removal of the malignant mass however, there is a chance of recurrence but fortunately this is low in cats. Needless to say, Jack is examined weekly, although I would hasten to add, I am sure this is daily, the number of times he is picked up and cuddled!

Just after his operation the nurses noticed Jack's breathing rate had increased and so arranged for him to be examined by our heart specialist Girish Thakral. Jack had chest X rays and an ultrasound scan of his heart which together with other investigations proved he had an enlarged heart with a back flow of blood (known as mitral regurgitation). In some cases heart conditions can be caused by hyperthyroidism and as he was eating lots and not gaining weight we checked him out with a blood sample, fortunately enabling us to rule this out. Since Jack started his heart medication, the battle of the bulge is back!!

He takes his heart medication three times daily and thankfully is very good with his tablets. He is much more active and playful and loves to help by supervising the blood machine as you can see in the photo. Senior Felix is on his menu but after struggling with a weight problem for so long, prefers obesity food and instead has tuna and chicken as a treat, a much better option as far as Jack is concerned!!

As you can imagine we were all very worried as Jack is very special to each and every one of us and is a very important part of Blacks Veterinary Group.

## Employee of the Summer 2009 Season – Eileen Hickman



We have two Employee of the Season awards to announce in this edition of the newsletter, the first one is Eileen Hickman and the enthusiastic voting received for her nomination left us in no doubts as to why she had been selected as the outright winner for the Summer Season.

Eileen is housekeeper at the Dudley Hospital and we just don't know what we would do without this 'wonder woman'! She not only looks after the hospital to the highest standard but also looks after us, the whole team. She is without doubt, the kindest, most caring person you could wish to meet.

As housekeeper her duties are many; she is extremely hard working, gets through everything she is expected to do and much, much more and never complains about anything. She has a great sense of humour and is a ray of sunshine about the place, never moans and is always cheerful, despite any personal problems she may have.

Eileen is totally committed to the practice and cannot do enough to please everyone. She is dedicated, trustworthy and always very respectful to everyone and never takes anything or anyone for granted.

Following the fire in early February, Eileen's support was amazing. She never complained, just got on with the job in hand and made sure everything was 'spick and span' and ready to go. For about three months we had no on site washing facilities and on top of everything else she was expected to do, she always maintained a daily supply of freshly laundered pet bedding, vets uniforms, scrubs, operating gowns and towels etc. She was truly amazing and we know this involved many extra hours work laundering at home, transporting back and forth and daily visits to the launderette.

Eileen loves animals and is always kind and caring to owners and their pets when she meets them in the waiting room, always displaying genuine interest.

Comments from the nurses and vets who are all involved with night duties at various times, "they just love having her around". After cleaning the surgery, rather than go home she becomes a 'perfect' nursing assistant, helping look after the animals she cares so passionately about, chatting to them and making sure they are comfortable. On a busy night with lots of inpatients and emergencies to attend, the On Call Vet and Overnight Nurse value her help and appreciate tea and toast when the going gets tough!

All in all Eileen is a gem and we all feel very lucky to have such a lovely lady, who cares for everyone; always goes the extra mile to help whether work related or personal and I know there are many people in the practice who owe this special lady a huge debt of gratitude. Eileen this is our humble way of saying 'thank you' so much for everything you do for us and for just being you!

## Jack says – Don't ignore that lump!



One of the "golden rules" of veterinary practice is that early detection of problems will generally give us a much better

chance of sorting things out and the regular health examinations we give your pet are a key part of this approach. In addition, frequent grooming allows you to keep a watchful eye out for any lumps.

If your pet develops a lump there may be several possible underlying causes. These include allergic reactions (such as bee stings), abscesses, hernias and tumours.

If you do find a lump it is therefore very important we examine it as soon as possible – in order that we may establish the underlying cause and start any required treatment without delay. If you are concerned about a lump on your pet – or any other health problem, don't delay – please contact us today for an appointment!

**It's New, It's Free**  
**Keep up to date with important news from your Vets**  
**with our new email service or by checking out our**  
**new website at [www.blacksvets.co.uk](http://www.blacksvets.co.uk)**

From time to time, we at **Blacks Veterinary Group** become aware of important new pet health care issues which we believe would be of interest to you, our valued clients. These range from locations of local outbreaks of parvovirus to new services offered within the practice such as our Cardiology, Medical and Surgical Referral Centre complete with MRI Scanner.

If you would like to be a recipient of this new free service simply ask reception to include you in our email database. **No email addresses will ever be passed on to a third party.**

Information you can expect to receive in this way will include:

- Our quarterly news letter
- Information on emerging diseases
- Seasonally relevant parasite control
- Occasional features on interesting conditions
- Promotions to help cut the cost of your pet's health care

**Also, please do check out our new website for lots more information on your practice**

## Is the 'Credit Crunch' affecting you?

**If so..... check this out..... it could be the best long term investment you ever make**

The economic crisis will inevitably hit all of us and here at Blacks Veterinary Group we want to give you some helpful advice we think just may help you to cope with the uncertain times that lie ahead.



We realise that pet ownership can be expensive but our pets are our family and we all want what is best for them. It is very difficult when faced with unexpected bills and trying to juggle all the balls in the air and of course everyone has their own set of priorities.

We want to encourage you to think ahead so that maybe your pet will be one less concern.

Last year we introduced our **Healthy Pet Scheme** because we wanted to give something back to our loyal clients who have supported us over the years. This is not a profit making scheme for us more a way of helping you spread the cost of preventative health care over the year. It means you do not have to compromise your pet's health by neglecting important vaccines, flea and worming treatments; it gives you the option to spread the cost over the year. You will also get lots of advice from our nurse clinics and of course receive a whopping 20% off certain products and services if you are insured and 10% if uninsured.

**Pet insurance** is so important. For a few pounds a month your pet could have the safety net that will enable you to ensure your pet receives the best treatment available without wondering how you can possibly afford to pay the bill. Pet insurance is responsible pet ownership and we encourage everyone to prepare for the unexpected. Remember no-one wants to make an emotive and heartbreaking decision based upon cost. It is the hardest thing in the world to do and is distressing for the whole family.

Next time you are in the surgery have a chat with any member of our friendly team of nurses or receptionists, who will be happy to discuss either insurance or the healthy pet scheme with you. Remember you have nothing to lose and everything to gain!

## Employee of the Autumn 2009 Season – Susan Bryan



We are delighted to announce our Employee of the Autumn 2009 Season is Sue Bryan Client Care Manager at our Lye surgery. Sue was a very popular choice with everyone and happily received her award, flowers and vouchers at a family garden party recently organised by the partners for all staff and their families.

Sue has been with the practice for two and a half years joining as a part-time receptionist whilst also helping at a local school. Last November she left her school job to take on more responsibility within the practice and earlier in the year was promoted to Client Care Manager.

Sue has all the attributes required for client care and Blacks Veterinary Group is very fortunate to have someone who cares so passionately for our clients and their pets. Her warmth, enthusiasm, caring, professional approach to her job is a credit and anyone who comes into contact with her can't help but warm to this very special lady. She knows all her clients and makes them feel welcome with a ready smile and helpful approach. In return clients treat her as a friend and feel comfortable in her presence. They know clients are her priority and pets look forward to coming to the surgery knowing there will be a cuddle or a treat waiting for them after seeing the vet.

Sue realises the importance of pet insurance and in conjunction with our Healthy Pet Scheme, confidently discusses the merits with clients. Her knowledge and genuine enthusiasm is inspirational which is due to her belief in the products she wants her clients to benefit from. (For more information please see our article on this page). She has embraced this challenge and is now responsible for training and administering the scheme throughout the Group. Anything anyone wants to know about the Healthy Pet Scheme, Sue is always ready with an encouraging word and lots of advice.

Within her team at Lye, Sue is respected by all and despite being married and having a grown up family she loves being out with the 'girls' having a good time and enjoying the friendship of her colleagues, who are also her friends.

Congratulations Sue, your award is so well deserved and we take this opportunity on behalf of everyone, to show our appreciation and thanks for all your efforts.

### It's a girl.....



On the 8 February 2009 Head of Nursing Kate Slack and her husband Ste happily announced the safe arrival of their beautiful baby daughter Daisy, a sister for four year old Jake. After a very difficult delivery Kate is adamant, that's it; their perfect family is complete, no more babies! They are happy to enjoy Jake and Daisy and realise how lucky they are to have two beautiful, healthy children. Kate returned to work in September and everyone is delighted she is back, now all that remains is the juggling act of maintaining a healthy work life balance, which is not easy with children but fortunately they have excellent family support which is a great help.



### A Baby Girl born on Mothering Sunday

After eight desperate years of IVF treatment, the impossible has happened and Auxiliary Nurse Anna Higgins and her fiancé Anthony proudly announced the birth of their baby daughter Antonia on Mothering Sunday 22 March. Anna had a very difficult pregnancy and was in and out of hospital throughout. There were many highs and lows but eventually the baby they had dreamed of was born and she will no doubt be very spoilt by a doting family including very excited grandparents. It is hard to imagine what Anna and Anthony have gone through in their quest to become parents but we are all so pleased for them and wish them happiness as the joys of parenthood unfold.