

## **Helpful Hints**

The Skin and Ear Health Survey certainly confirmed most people's suspicions that these conditions are a real problem in our breed. The survey results have highlighted the fact that this problem is particularly prevalent in English Setters kept as family pets. Some reasons for this are suggested by the statisticians in their report. Most of the owners of these affected animals are desperate to find remedies to ease the suffering of their pets and many outlined their experiences in the Other Comments section of the questionnaire. This section of the report is a compilation of the comments most frequently mentioned. These were submitted by ESA members and others who returned the questionnaires and should not necessarily be taken as representing the views or being recommendations from the ESA.

### **Diet**

Many owners of setters affected by itchy skin also reported that their dogs suffered from colitis. The following foods often made both of these conditions worse:-

Red Meat - feed Tripe, Chicken or Fish instead

Flaked Maize - as found in many Complete Foods

Not all Complete Foods contain red meat and/or maize - read the label carefully. Some setters reacted to both maize and wheat. In these cases, owners provided the carbohydrate necessary by feeding cooked potatoes, rice or pasta. There are also special gluten-free diets available from one or two manufacturers. Fats added to the diet, i.e. margarine, cheese or vegetable oils (Rapeseed/Sunflower) were also claimed to alleviate symptoms.

Some owners believed that the protein level of the food affected skin conditions - a protein level of 24% or higher causing problems. Most types of Complete Food include a range of protein levels - choose an 18-20% level instead of the higher one. If feeding meat and biscuit, then feed 1/3rd meat and 2/3rd biscuit.

Many owners add supplements to the dog's food on a regular basis and claim that these help control skin trouble. The most commonly reported were ANIMALSTRATH, HOKAMIX 30, DENES Seaweed tablets, Vegetable tablets or Greenleaf tablets and Evening Primrose Oil (EPO). Nearly all the users of EPO advised a dose of at least 500mg daily for a period of 3 months before any beneficial effects could be seen.

### **General Management**

Advise new owners to inspect ears daily and clean thoroughly at the first sight of any brown wax. If this regime is started BEFORE an ear infection begins, a serious condition may be avoided.

Ear cleaning preparations mentioned frequently by owners were LEO, AUROCLENS, DERMISOL, HIBISCRUB, EPI-OTIC, OTODEX, LOGIC and EAR-EEZE. Some owners prefer to use home-made solutions of calamine lotion (1 part) / surgical spirit (2 parts) or Benzyl Benzoate available from the chemist.

Keep the coat clean and free from parasites. Nuvan Top flea spray was the most widely mentioned with many people regularly using medicated shampoos such as QUELLADA, GENISOL or ETPIDERM. However, some owners found these too harsh for their setters and had better results with regular bathing in a mild baby shampoo.

A remarkable number of survey forms suggested that wet, muddy conditions aggravate the skin - particularly on the feet, legs and belly. Washing these areas in clean warm water after returning from walks in bad weather and then towelling down thoroughly was highly recommended. This alone reduced feet and belly nibbling in a great number of cases. Also, owners of kennelled dogs found that using shredded paper for bedding after walks dried the dogs quickly and minimised this problem. Shredded paper also has the advantage of being free from harvest mites, etc.

Be careful with disinfectants, carpet cleaning powders, etc. Many owners reported that carpet powders, in particular, made their dogs scratch. The condition was also aggravated by room temperatures being maintained at too high a level.

## **Ear Treatments**

The most commonly reported ear drops prescribed by vets and used with some success include: CANAURAL, PANALOG, VETALOG, OTERNA, SUROLAN, SYNULOX, GENTICIN, GENTISONE and PIMAVECORT.

Many people reported that, whilst initial treatment might not be satisfactory, if ears were thoroughly washed out under general anaesthetic and then treated, the results were far more favourable. Occasionally, even this did not work and surgery - aural resection was necessary. In almost all cases reported, this operation was a success.

The most widely used treatment not prescribed by a vet is a powder called THORNIT. This was reported as one of the most effective treatments for all types of ear problems and many owners put a "pinch" of this powder in each ear (after cleaning) on a regular basis as a preventative measure. It was described by many owners as brilliant! Other ear remedies available from pet shops or chemists include SHERLEYS canker powder, SAVLON cream and aromotherapy Lavender Oil.

## **Skin Treatments**

Many of the owners reported that PREDNISOLONE tablets were routinely supplied by vets in almost all cases of skin irritation. These tablets reduced the itchiness but did nothing to remove the cause of the problem. Many owners were distressed to find that the symptoms returned soon after a course of these tablets was completed. Unfortunately, in almost all cases, this can happen and many setters have to have this medication for the rest of their lives. As advised by the vet, use as low a dose as possible to keep the skin condition at bay and be aware that these tablets can have unpleasant side effects. Other remedies can be tried at the same time, and even if a total cure is unlikely it is sometimes possible to give extra relief and at least keep the Prednisolone dosage to the minimum.

Treatments made available by the vets have included: PANALOG ointment, VETSOVATE cream, SUDOCREAM, FUCIDIN (for fungal infections), prolonged courses of antibiotic (particularly CEPOREX). Over-the-counter remedies used include:- VETZYME Eczema powder, Zinc and Castor oil cream, EXMARID lotion, TCP solution, Athletes foot powders (MYCEL or DAKTARIN) Benzyl Benzoate lotion, Drapoline Nappirash cream, Sulphur or Tar shampoos. Many owners place a lump of Rock Sulphur in the dogs water bowl to help "cool the blood" and use Flowers of Sulphur on itchy feet. Bob Grass' Skin Cure and White Blood tablets have also been used with some success.

Several owners reported using homeopathic remedies. The success rate for these seemed to be variable. Remedies suggested include: HEPAR SULPHURIS, ARSENICUM, ALBUM, RHUS TOXICODENDRON, LYCOPODIUM, KALIA ARSENICUM, GRAPHITES, NEW ERA HOMEOPATHIC HAY FEVER TABLETS.

## **Summary**

All of these remedies have been used successfully by at least some of the English Setter owners who returned questionnaires and so, hopefully, these shared tips will be of use to those of you unfortunate enough to own a dog with a skin or ear problem.