

## Issues to Avoid

### Cherry Eye [Harderian Gland] Survey

*"Cherry" Eye (Prolapsed gland of the third eyelid. Prolapsed nictitans gland.)*

- **What is it?**

Dogs have a third eyelid, in the third eyelid there is a gland located on the lower outer portion facing the cornea which is a tear producing gland. Under normal circumstances this is not visible as it is held in place by a small ligament. For some reason the gland prolapsed out of its normal position, and can be seen as a cherry red swelling above the lower eyelid. Once the gland prolapses it is exposed to the air and irritants, it may become infected, begins to swell, go red and later becomes hard.



In the survey the majority of the prolapses were unilateral and usually occurred under 18 weeks of age.

- **Causes**

The exact cause is not known but is suspected to be a weakness of the ligament. This may be hereditary. Once the prolapse has occurred it obstructs the flow of tears, the gland begins to swell and secondary infection can ensue. It can occur at any age but mainly in young dogs.

- **Importance**

Tear production in the dog is mainly supplied by the lachrymal glands, which are located at the upper outer portion of the orbit. Up to 30% of the tear production in dogs may come from the nictitans glands. The amount of tears produced by each gland is variable. (In the Burmese cat the nictitans gland may be the only gland that produces tears)

- **Treatment**

- 1. Excision of the gland.**

This can be done under local anaesthetic or general anaesthesia. The bulldogs are pretty stoical and can easily be held for excision under local anaesthetic. This was the most popular method in our survey. The average cost varied between £8 and £30. General anaesthesia with all its attendant risks costs usually between £80 and £150.

Usually you are given an antibiotic ointment to apply for a few days after the procedure is done. It is easier to do after the "cherry" eye has been present for a few days and the gland has become hard. The potential main complication is 'dry' eye (keratoconjunctivitis sicca). This requires lifelong treatment. This occurs because the remaining tear glands do not produce an adequate amount of tears to lubricate the cornea. It can occur naturally due to disease affecting the lachrymal glands. (Further research is needed to find out in the bulldog whether excision of the gland does lead to more dry eyes than would occur naturally.)

## **2. Replacement of the gland.**

In this the gland is replaced in a mucous pocket and sutured down. (Should be carried out by a specialist in veterinary ophthalmology. )This necessitates a general anaesthetic . This procedure has a failure rate of about 5%. The operation should be carried out as early as possible after the gland prolapses to try and avoid damage to the gland.

