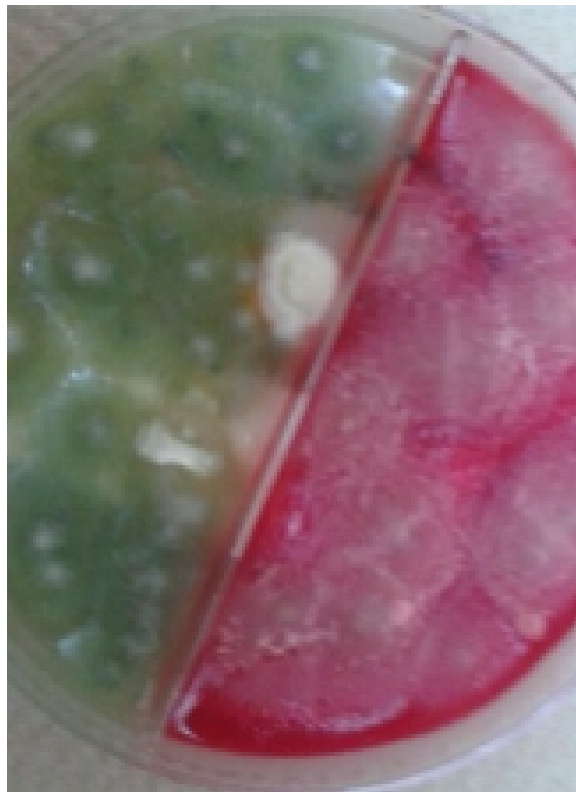


# Shelter Vet Gazette



## Newsletter Highlights

---

LETTER TO  
VETERINARIANS

---

RHDV RETURNS TO  
COMOX VALLEY

---

DERMATOLOGY FOR  
SHELTER ANIMALS

---

ANIMALKIND PET  
SERVICES STANDARDS

---

BC PET REGISTRY

---

SPECIALIZED CARE  
FOSTERING

---



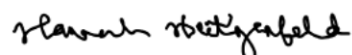
Dear Colleagues,

In July 2022, after many years of practicing in British Columbia and volunteering and working with the BC SPCA in various capacities, I began in the position of Senior Manager, Animal Health for the BC SPCA. This dynamic role involves managing our shelter animal health program, including population level protocols for infectious disease prevention, euthanasia, decision-making, etc.

I have been enjoying the work so far, and I feel privileged to get to know and work with more of my veterinary colleagues through this role. I have already had the chance to meet several of you from around the province through my visiting some of our 34 shelters, and I am so impressed with veterinarians' tireless dedication to helping shelter and community animals in need through this busy time of a veterinary shortage. Thank you very much for all you do for all animals in your communities.

I would like to open a line of communication with you through a veterinary newsletter. I would love to hear from you if you have any questions, concerns, or feedback about our shelter animal health programs. Our website has a section for veterinarians to access updates relating to our animal health policies and procedures which can be found here: <https://spca.bc.ca/programs-services/leaders-in-our-field/professional-resources/>. If you have questions or comments about the BC SPCA Shelter Animal Health Program, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at [hweitzenfeld@spca.bc.ca](mailto:hweitzenfeld@spca.bc.ca).

Thank you again for your passion for animal welfare,



Hannah Weitzenfeld, DVM  
BC SPCA Senior Manager, Animal Health

# RABBIT HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE VIRUS (RHDV) RETURNS TO COMOX VALLEY, BC AFTER 3 YEARS

HANNAH WEITZENFELD, DVM

One afternoon at the end of January, I received an email from one of the diligent staff from our Comox Animal Centre. She was writing to let me know that the shelter was contacted by a concerned community member involved with the Courtney Airpark about ill and deceased feral rabbits at the park.

Given previous incursions of RHDV into British Columbia in 2018, when it was first discovered in BC (Nanaimo), and 2019 (Parksville, Lower Mainland, Capital Regional District), our Animal Centre teams are well-trained in monitoring and prevention of RHDV for animals coming into our shelters. They were aware of the signs of RHDV, including listlessness, incoordination, bleeding from orifices and sudden death. The team knew they needed to contact the shelter Animal Health Team and the Ministry of Forests. With guidance from the ministry, our local staff, gowned up in full personal protective equipment, secured specimens for the Ministry of Forests to submit for testing.

After the submission was sent, the Animal Centre team maintained communication about the issue with the local community members involved. During this time, there were further reports of ill and dying rabbits, and reduced populations in the area. Once the necropsy and testing were processed, the bad news was confirmed: RHDV is back in the Comox Valley. The sequencing to determine if this is a strain that may affect both domestic and wild rabbits is still pending.

After we were informed of this result, the Comox Animal Centre team continued to communicate and collaborate on the matter with local stakeholders. We also updated our provincial website with the news, and informed veterinarians through online interest groups. Given the spread of the virus across the continent over the last several years, RHDV may become endemic, highlighting the importance of keeping pet rabbits current on vaccination. The good news: the Filavac RHDV vaccine is now readily available through Associated Veterinary Purchasing in 10-packs of single-dose vials as well as multi-dose vials.

Despite our efforts to make the rabbits in our shelters as healthy and adoptable as possible, rabbits are the species with the consistently longest stays in our shelters – an average of 42 days in 2022, with some staying in care for close to a year. Most rabbits surrendered to us come in due to moving/eviction, with the guardian unable to find housing that allows for rabbits. This is also the top reason for rabbits being returned. In both 2021 and 2022, 61% of rabbits coming into care had at least one medical concern. In addition, accessing spay and neuter services for this species can be challenging in some areas. Despite this, in 2022, we were able to assure live outcomes for 91% of rabbits entering our care, and no healthy rabbits were euthanized. In addition to being spayed or neutered, all rabbits in BC SPCA shelters are vaccinated for RHDV upon intake and every 6 months. Our rabbits also go through a 14-day RHDV quarantine period to make sure they are healthy. If you know someone who is considering adopting a pet rabbit (or two), please let them know them about our rabbits at the BC SPCA. This will help reduce rabbits' length of stay in the shelter, allowing us to help more of the many pet rabbits in need, and assuring their forever guardians can find them.



## Dermatology in Shelter Animals

HANNAH WEITZENFELD, DVM

Like owned animals, shelter animals in British Columbia sometimes have chronic skin conditions. As a result of the complexity of managing some of these conditions even in the hands of diligent owners, these conditions may be the reason for animals coming into care; in other cases, conditions may be incidental or may become newly apparent during their shelter stay. Chronic dermatological conditions can often be even more challenging to manage in the shelter than a home setting. For example, allergic conditions require attention to symptoms by various staff, collaborating with veterinarians on care plans, finding foster homes for animals that are expected to have a prolonged stay due to a medical condition, managing foster compliance, assuring animals consume required medications, preventing animals from consuming alternate diets or treats, monitoring progress and managing follow-up care, while also deciding when during the course of treatment it would be appropriate to move the animal along the pathway to adoption. Animals with these conditions also require specific guardians that can commit to the ongoing care required.

At the BC SPCA, we are able to treat most animals with dermatologic conditions, though there is a small proportion that do not respond well to appropriate therapy and are likely to experience ongoing suffering, and for these animals we provide humane euthanasia. As our Community Animal Centres do not have veterinarians working in them, we are grateful to be able to partner with community veterinarians to provide incremental care, where achieving a diagnosis, educating shelter staff on care needs and prognosis, and regular follow-up are important for successful outcomes.

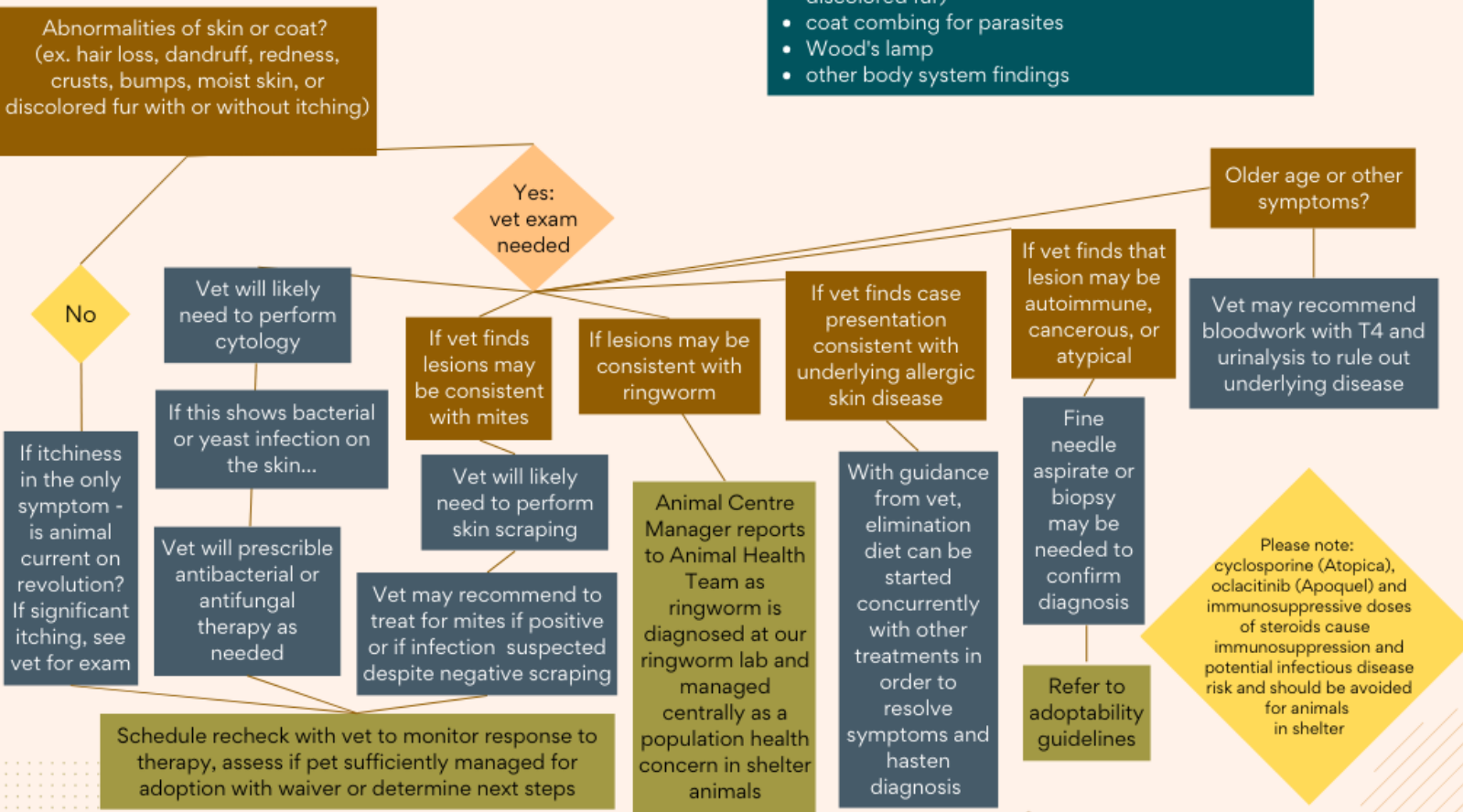
Incremental veterinary care relies on the clinical judgment of the veterinarian, active follow-up of case progression, and, when appropriate, in-home care that can be provided by the client. In addition, there is a focus on prevention, and early diagnosis and intervention.

The Shelter Dermatology Algorithm demonstrates our guidance of Community Animal Centre teams in understanding pathways and steps required for a veterinarian to reach a diagnosis and treatment plan to help BC SPCA animals with dermatologic conditions. This was created so that animals can progress along their pathway home as quickly as possible. Even though shelters are resource-limited environments, we encourage practitioners to perform any necessary diagnostics without delay as we have found that this approach leads to faster care outcomes.

- History to share with vet
- age (or age of onset if known)
  - other symptoms
  - how long has it been an issue?
  - previous response to treatment (if history available)
- Intake physical exam
- note abnormalities on skin and coat and locations (ex. hair loss, dandruff, redness, crusts, pustules, discolored fur)
  - coat combing for parasites
  - Wood's lamp
  - other body system findings

## BC SPCA Shelter Dermatology ALGORITHM FOR ANIMAL CENTRES

Start



# Shelter Derm Case Scenario: Bailey

## Subjective

Bailey, a 2-year-old yellow Labrador retriever, entered our care as the previous owner was unable to provide veterinary care. Bailey was experiencing pruritus, ear infections, flatulence, soft stool, and occasional vomiting that had been going on for several months. Though the owner kept Bailey current on flea prevention, had switched brands of food after the problem started and bathed her weekly, financial constraints prevented provision of further care. Bailey was not observed to have evidence of external parasites, and received routine intake treatments including a topical parasiticide and an appointment was made with a local veterinarian. Because our shelter team understood that Bailey may be with us for some time while her skin issues are diagnosed and treated, she was placed into a temporary foster home.

## Objective

Otoscopic exam revealed thick brown discharge and erythema of both ears. She was also found to have saliva-stained ventral paws and perianal area. Bailey's coat quality was dull and slightly scaly. There was no evidence of hair loss, crusting, or pustules on her skin. Bailey had a body condition score of 5/9. Physical exam findings were otherwise unremarkable.

## Assessment

The veterinarian discussed the findings of otitis externa and mild pododermatitis and perianal dermatitis with the manager of the Community Animal Centre. Given the lesion distribution informed her that an underlying condition may be a factor. Cytology of the affected areas was recommended to determine if secondary infection was present in those areas. Bloodwork to rule out underlying internal disease was also discussed and was deferred given Bailey's young age and otherwise healthy condition. Cytology revealed too numerous to count yeast in Bailey's ears and scant yeast on Bailey's feet and perianal areas.

Given Bailey's history, signalment, symptoms, physical exams and lesion localization, a working diagnosis of canine allergic food reaction with secondary *Malassezia* otitis and dermatitis. Prognosis was thought to be good with treatment.

## Plan

Bailey's ears were cleaned, and she was prescribed a standard combination otic preparation, anti-fungal shampoo, and a strict elimination diet. An anti-itch medication was prescribed short-term to control clinical signs, with a re-evaluation scheduled in 2 weeks to ascertain resolution of otitis and dermatitis.

A friendly yet bouncy girl with a voracious appetite, Bailey was relatively easy to treat, as long her foster paid close attention to her to prevent her sniffing out any unexpected snacks on her walks.

Upon re-evaluation, clinical signs and secondary infections were nearly resolved. Bailey was still on anti-pruritic medication at that time and was tolerating the food well. Her pruritus was under control as well. In discussing with the veterinarian, it was decided that Bailey could be placed for adoption with disclosure of her condition of canine allergic food reaction. Managing adopter expectations, finding the right match and discussing when a follow-up appointment is needed are key to finding dogs like Bailey a forever home. It was recommended that the adopter, who've had experience caring for a dog with a chronic condition in the past, recheck with their veterinarian two weeks following the second visit to reassess and discuss additional steps and a longer-term plan.

## DOG TRAINING: PROVIDING EVIDENCE-BASED RESOURCES

MARCELA VARGAS AND HANNAH WEITZENFELD, DVM



Whether with a new puppy or a dog with a behavioural issue, clients will often come to their veterinarian or veterinary team for a trainer recommendation. As professionals who value science-based treatments and advice, veterinarians have an opportunity to educate pet guardians to make an informed decision. There is consensus between CVMA and the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior positions stating the harms of aversive training methods, and supporting reward based-training for learning success and for strengthening of the human-animal bond.

AnimalKind is the BC SPCA's accreditation program for companies that provide higher welfare animal-related services. The AnimalKind Dog Training Standards were created in consultation with veterinarians, trainers, animal welfare scientists and a board certified veterinary behaviourist. AnimalKind audits dog training companies to ensure they use evidence-based training methods and are committed to animal welfare. The standards, as well as the up-to-date list of accredited trainers, can be accessed at [animalkind.ca](http://animalkind.ca). For those pet guardians unable to access training services in person, the website includes a listing of trainers that are able to accommodate clients remotely.

Complimentary Client Education Materials on Dog Training: How it Works:

Your veterinary team may find it beneficial to have dog training information at hand to share with clients. You can use the cards to add them to puppy packs and welcome packages, display them at your locations, and hand them out to clients. Your clients will learn how to choose a dog trainer, what to avoid and where to find more information about humane, effective dog training. Most importantly, you can feel confident you are providing high-value information that will help clients protect their dogs' welfare. If you are interested to order a free package of rack cards to be mailed to you at no cost, please email [rackcards@animalkind.ca](mailto:rackcards@animalkind.ca).

## What's the BC Pet Registry?

PRISCILLA CHEUNG



Did you know that 80% of cats and 30% of dogs entering our shelters as stray animals cannot be reunited with their guardians, often due to lack of identification? Permanent identification can be a life-altering or even a life-saving asset for free-roaming cats or other animals found at large. BC Pet Registry reunites lost pets with their families. All BC SPCA cats, dogs and rabbits are registered with the BC Pet Registry at the time of adoption. Pet guardians can register other pets at the BC Pet Registry Website through their microchip, tattoo or license number.

We have been seeing more and more microchip numbers that come from overseas. While most other registries don't take microchips or charge extra for microchips that don't come from their own company, we are able to register all types of microchips at no extra cost. For the BC Pet Registry, the transfer of pet ownership process is free of charge with an active registration.

All BC Pet Registry microchips are ISO-certified, and are being sold in BC as well as other provinces. Did you know that veterinarians can order BC Pet Registry microchips through AVP?

BC Pet Registry is the only local, non-profit registry that is determined to achieve social change. Your support will help make a difference in enhancing the lives of animals in the community you live in. BC Pet Registry offers a grant program to help communities through our outreach programs. If you are interested in making a difference in your community, please contact us at [info@bcpetregistry.ca](mailto:info@bcpetregistry.ca).

# SPECIALIZED CARE FOSTERS NEEDED

LYN VARGAS, RVT



At the BC SPCA, an increasing proportion of animals entering our care are coming to us from environments with larger numbers of animals, also known as large-scale animal intakes. Since 2019, the number of animals entering care from large-scale intakes has increased by 68%. Often, animals in these environments are not spayed or neutered, and may be of a variety of ages, including litters of kittens or puppies. Animals from these intakes have a higher likelihood of contagious disease, including intestinal parasites, viruses, or other conditions. Many of these conditions do not affect humans, but may affect other animals in the home, or durable pathogens may affect future foster animals. The type of location needed for a specialized care foster animal (or young foster animal family) is a fully cleanable space separate from the rest of your home, such as a bathroom.

To prevent spread of contagious disease, we ask these foster caregivers to use personal protective equipment (PPE) at the beginning of the fostering period while we await the results of screening tests we perform for animals from these intakes. If results are positive, these animals will need to be given medications, and for personal protective equipment use to continue.

We keep animals under 8 weeks old out of the shelter and in foster care to prevent them from potentially encountering infectious disease in the shelter, given they are immunologically naïve and highly vulnerable at this age. Often animals most in need of foster care are underage kittens and puppies, usually but not always with their mother.

Fosters can decide the type of animals that would suit their lifestyle, and are provided with all necessary supplies and food, all veterinary care is covered during the fostering period, and our Community Animal Centre teams are here to support you every step of the way.

All of our fosters receive training in animal care and monitoring, behaviour and animal training, and use of personal protective equipment, along with informational resources to use as needed, including our foster manual.

As members of the veterinary team, the knowledge, and resources you possess uniquely position you to be excellent specialized care fosters. Having access to fosters like you allows us to help more animals, the ones that need us the most. We are always in need of more specialized care fosters. Could that be you?

If you think you or someone you know may be able to accommodate an animal needing specialized care please find more information and apply here: <https://spca.bc.ca/ways-to-help/volunteer/foster/> PPE in combination with thorough cleaning ensures a safe housing space for more animals to come. We are so very thankful for our PPE superheroes!

## We want to hear from you!

We hope you've enjoyed this newsletter. We would like to continue sharing shelter animal health content that is useful and important to BC veterinary professionals. Please take the time to fill out the the survey linked to this QR code as we value your opinion and would appreciate your input.

Shelter Vet Gazette Survey

