

ON HEAT

The “heat”/ in season

This is the period in which a bitch ovulates, allowing conception. It is associated with a number of changes both physical and behavioural. A bitch will usually first come in season at 6 to 9 months of age, and will continue to cycle approximately every 6 months. The entire time schedule varies between bitches and may be unpredictable or run like clockwork.

A typical cycle is as follows (note that many bitches do not exactly follow the norm)

- Genital spotting from the vulva is common
- Bitch secretes pheromones, making her attractive to dogs. She is not likely to allow dogs to mate at this stage, but will be interested in them. Prior to day 7, mating will not produce a pregnancy, as sperm will not survive until ovulation.
- At approximately 9 days into the “season”, ovulation occurs.
- Discharge will usually (but not always) become clear/straw coloured
- The bitch will usually accept a dog willingly at this stage. If none are present, she may wander in search of a dog.
- This “danger” period lasts for another 7–9 days.
- If mated, fertilisation of the ova takes place in the fallopian tubes.
- The embryo moves down to the uterus, where it embeds for the duration of the pregnancy.

Controlling the natural cycle

The reproductive cycle in the bitch may be controlled by the use of hormones. The most common hormone is Megestrol acetate as found in Ovarid tablets or Covinan injection.

1. Prevention of the cycle – a low dose given continuously to prevent the bitch ever coming into “heat”
2. Suppression – allow the bitch to commence the “heat”, and then suppress the event using a short high dose course (8 days). This is the more common option used.

Note that a) first season bitches need an extended course
and b) some bitches have an almost unstoppable cycle.

For either method, we will need to know the weight of the bitch, whether it is her first season, and if she is in fact in season at the time.

Misalliance – stopping an unwanted pregnancy

Should an unwanted mating occur, you will need to act quickly. The old Standard drug, Stilboestrol dipropionate has been withdrawn from veterinary use. This used to be one injection to be given within 36hrs of mating.

The replacement, Oestradiol benzoate must be administered in three separate injections, Given on days 3, 5 & 7 after mating. 2 important facts should be considered before the use of Oestradiol

1. the injection does not take the bitch off season – she can and will mate again
2. there is a SIGNIFICANT risk associated with the use of the drug – uterine infection (pyometra) may result, possibly needing emergency surgery.

Once into the pregnancy, there is NO satisfactory way of stopping it.