

Commercial Dog Food vs Bones: Myth or Science?

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Man has always been a myth maker. Man has always attempted to understand his world by making up stories or hypotheses or theories or myths.

Modern man is no different. We want to understand our world, and to do that we devise myths about our world. If we are scientists, we name those myths. We call them scientific theories. We then devise tests to disprove these myths. If our tests, which are actually predictions based on those myths, cannot disprove the myths, those myths remain as the current science of the day. They are never ultimate truths, simply ideas not yet disproved.

Nowhere is this more true than in the case of processed dog foods.

Small Animal Nutrition Myths

What I am working towards are two modern hypotheses or theories or myths involving the nutrition of small animals.

Myth Number One

This myth states - if I understand it correctly - that "by feeding a scientifically balanced commercial pet food to a pet, it is being fed in the very best way possible". On the assumption that optimum nutrition produces optimum health, we should be able to test that theory. A logical way to do that would be by comparing the results of feeding pets on processed foods with the results of feeding pets their natural diet.

This brings us to the second myth.

Myth Number Two

The second myth states - as I understand it, that "by feeding a pet on its primitive diet, the one it grew accustomed to over a long period of evolution, optimum health, i.e. optimum growth, freedom from disease, optimal reproductive capacity and maximum longevity with health should be produced".

I should mention that it is myth number two that modern scientific zoos throughout the world use. They have found myth number two works admirably as a predictive base to devise feeding programs, particularly when they are keen to promote optimum health and reproductive capacity in their animals.

It should be clearly understood that myth number one has never been tested properly. Not by the makers of commercial pet foods, nor by the established veterinary teaching and research bodies. To a small degree it has been tested by zoos and found wanting.

However, amongst vets and teachers of vets, in research laboratories established by pet food companies, this myth was proposed and accepted years ago in a totally uncritical manner, without having undergone any comparative testing.

Some tests have been performed on various examples of the commercially produced products, mostly by analysis, and occasionally by comparing one with another, but again, that has always been on the basis that any other method of feeding, any method outside the myth, was inferior, and therefore not relevant.

What is required today in 1993 is that we so-called scientists check out which of those two myths are least able to be disproved on the basis of that one logical prediction. That prediction regarding optimal health.

In fact, much of that work has been done.

Myth number one has been tested continuously for decades by the people who own pets, and by a limited number of veterinarians in practice. The end result of that long testing program is that today, myth number one, in a very scientific sense and manner, is being challenged.

There is more however. In 1988 a group of Australian veterinary surgeons, many of whom were confirmed believers in the first myth, were a little unsettled by a post graduate course involving small animal nutrition.

Two leading veterinary surgeons from the States were invited to lecture to Australian veterinary surgeons by the Post Graduate Committee in Veterinary Science. Their topic was dog, cat and horse nutrition. The conference was surprisingly well attended.

That course destroyed many long held and highly cherished beliefs: beliefs involving commercial pet food as the ultimate in pet nutrition. Unfortunately, the information derived from that course has never become common knowledge among veterinarians in Australia.

No proceedings were published. A textbook from the States was the proceedings, and much of the material presented at the conference was relatively new information, as yet unpublished. The information does however exist on tapes held by the Post Graduate Committee.

The results of that research I have documented in a book which will be published towards the end of this year.

This is a book for ordinary people who own dogs. Hopefully a very practical book which marries practical dog feeding, using cheap and available fresh whole raw foods, with the latest research involving the nutritional needs of dogs.

The diets advocated in this book all revolve around a central theme of raw, meaty bones. They have all been tested on my own dogs and my clients' dogs for years. They have all been compared with the commercial products, and been found to outperform them in a manner way beyond our expectations.

This book will include:

- discussion of the problems inherent in modern commercial dog foods, and home cooked diets.
- foods which are available to feed dogs.
- practical dog feeding.

The book's release should precede or coincide with a conference to be held at Parklea by the Bichon Frise club of N.S.W. in November of this year.

Conclusion or Epitaph or Something ...

Tom Lonsdale has started the ball rolling. He has been a lone voice, crying in the wilderness. Now is the time for the profession to get behind this man and share his vision. Have a good look at what Tom is seeing.

At the moment he is seeing a profession that is blinkered, may be blinded and possibly hoodwinked into promoting products that are not worthy of our professional approval.

He is seeing that we are doing our clients a disservice every time we advise them to feed their pets commercial pet food.

He is seeing the importance of feeding an animal on a diet which matches the one it evolved upon. In the case of cats and dogs, that means a diet based on raw, meaty bones.

He is looking into the future and seeing a veterinary profession with a clear vision and a clear conscience, advising their clients as only true professionals can, with honesty and understanding.

That understanding includes the very simple, healthy and cost effective way to feed cats and dogs ... without using commercial pet foods.

The first step we need to take to become part of that vision is to ask why it is that a myth that has never been properly validated should have become the cornerstone of much of our advice to the pet owning public? A myth which is already disproved ...

For further information, please feel free to make contact.

Editor's Note: Dr Billingham included in this article an outline of the program for the Bichon Frise Conference. Due to limitations of space this has not been included here, however full copies if this are available from the Post Graduate Committee on Tel: 02 264 2122, Fax: 02 261 4620.

Clindamycin Use in the Ferret

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Clindamycin hydrochloride (Antirobe Aquadrops Antibiotic Liquid, Upjohn) has been presented for use on dogs for canine dental infections, wounds and abscesses and osteomyelitis for treatments up to 28 days.

A recent case study shows the use of Clindamycin for a feline otitis media (C&T No: 3392).

I should like to record the use of Clindamycin in the treatment of a severe abscess wound in a jill ferret (WT. 600 grams).

The ferret was sent down from Port Hedland after being bitten a week previously possibly by a dog.

The jill had a deep festering wound to the left stifle area and was severely lame. There was a good pocket of pus.

The abscess was treated under a general anaesthetic and some attempt was made to close what was a gaping wound.

The jill was given a twice daily dose of 0.25ml of Clindamycin and was hospitalised.

The ferret was seen to be using the leg to scratch itself after seven days and she was kept on Aquadrops for a further seven days. The jill took twenty days for the wound to heal completely over. There is some scarring but the jill is good for breeding next season. A radiograph showed there was no bone involvement at the stifle and no side effects of the use of Clindamycin in this ferret were observed.

Reference:

1. Veterinary Care of Birds, Rodents, Rabbits, Ferrets and Guinea Pigs by David Pass, Ray Butler, John Lewington and Jan Thomas. Murdoch University Foundation for Continuing Veterinary Education Publication No 2/93 May 5th 1993.