

Common symptoms to look for in pets during foxtail season



Image provided

The Outfox Field Guard (designed by a Bay Area local) is a basket of mesh that encircles the dog's head, allowing him to see effectively, but with small enough mesh that it's very difficult for a foxtail to penetrate through.

By Mona S. Miller, DVM

For those of us in the veterinary field, we anticipate the start of "foxtail season" with some degree of dread, since these little plant awns can burrow into any part of an animal's body. Foxtails are the plant dispersal unit for a wild annual grass that is prevalent throughout California. Foxtail "season" starts in early spring, when the awns are initially green, but quickly turn to tawny tan/brown, and lasts through into fall. It is impossible to miss this grass plant if you go into any un-landscaped area.

The name refers to the bushy spike arrangement at the top of the grass that resembles the tail of a fox – it is a cluster of spikelets attached to a main stem. Each cluster comes off the plant easily, and tiny barbs clasp onto material (socks, fur, etc.). Then, the sharp point at the base of the cluster allows it to move forward into the material. This is

the plant's adaptation for dispersing its seeds throughout an area. For most wild animals that live in the same native environments that foxtails are found, their fur is short enough that the foxtail does not migrate into the skin. Instead, it is transported and dropped off, allowing for successful seed dispersal. However, for our domestic pets we often find that the foxtail point will migrate into tissue and thereby cause problems.

I have seen foxtails in every part of an animal's body. Symptoms are related to the body part affected. Some areas are easier than others to find and remove the foxtails – such as in-between toes, the undersides of paws, ear canals and conjunctival lining of the eyes. Even in these areas, though, there may be significant pain associated with the foxtail, and its resultant inflammation and infection. Some dogs may need sedation or even anesthesia to remove it, especially if it has burrowed deep into tissue. Dogs who lick their paws, shake their heads

and ears, and have swollen painful eyes should be checked for a foxtail.

Other areas are more hidden – full anesthesia would be required in the majority of cases to visualize and remove foxtails in the throat and nose. The classic case of a dog inhaling a foxtail into his nose would be one running around in open space, and starting to sneeze violently. The sneezing may subside as the foxtail settles over the next few hours to days, but this is something to check with your veterinarian. Coughing and gagging are common symptoms when a foxtail (or blades of grass) gets stuck in the tonsil area.

Most dogs will demonstrate symptoms of foxtail abscess, but I recently anesthetized a small dog for a routine dental cleaning and evaluation, and found a medium-sized foxtail partly embedded under the tongue. This little dog had shown no symptoms of pain at all to her owners!

Foxtails in cats are much less common, possibly because cats are meticulous cleaners, but I have seen foxtails in cats' eyes and ear canals.

When a foxtail gets embedded into tissue, it is only a matter of time before it will start to penetrate inside. Foxtails can form abscesses in the fat tissue under the skin, and also inside the lungs and abdomen. The deeper the foxtail migrates into the body, and the more it creates tissue inflammation around it, the harder it is to find. It is common to need two to four recheck probes in some cases, or even deep surgery to remove the affected tissue to find the foxtail hidden inside. Obviously, it is best to address a foxtail problem before it has advanced inside the body and requires

subsequent surgical diagnosis and removal.

Prevention is difficult if your dog is an active, outdoors hiker, since the most effective prevention is avoiding any areas where foxtails might be found. Alternatives include keeping your pet shaved during the summer, especially around the paws and face. There is a product called Outfox Field Guard (designed by a Bay Area local) which is a basket of mesh that encircles the dog's head, allowing him to see effectively, but with small enough mesh that it's very difficult for a foxtail to penetrate through. This is an effective strategy to prevent foxtails in the nose, mouth, eyes and ears.



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her son, two cats and yellow Labrador. She attended UC Berkeley as an undergraduate, and received her DVM from UC Davis. She has been happy to call Lafayette home since 2001. She can be reached via email at MonaSDVM@aol.com. She welcomes questions from readers that may get incorporated into a column.

Additional information can be found at <https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/news/foxtails-cause-serious-health-risks-animals> <https://pets.webmd.com/dogs/foxtail-grass-and-your-dog#1> <https://outfoxfordogs.com>

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CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS VOTE 3-2 TO PREPARE MASSIVE GROWTH SCENARIOS FOR APARTMENT/CONDO DEVELOPMENTS THROUGHOUT LAFAYETTE



HOW COULD THIS IMPACT YOU?

The proposed growth scenarios are in preparation for the State's next Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) Process (2023 – 2030). **Effectively the scenarios open up most of the city to Apartment/Condo development, even in neighborhoods currently zoned for houses - look at the impact in Santa Monica <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEFEVXggCw>**

But the city has enough capacity within its existing zoning to meet Lafayette's RHNA requirement of 2114 units plus a "buffer" (units above and beyond the State's RHNA requirement). Below are some key reasons why current zoning is sufficient:

1. **City staff is recommending a 60%+ buffer** (1269 additional apartment/condo units) in its distributed scenario on top of the 2,114 RHNA units. However, the State recommends only a 15%-30% buffer. A buffer of 15% equals 317 units, which would eliminate 952 units from the Staff's numbers (down from 3,383 to 2,431).
2. **The 15% buffer would be sufficient for several reasons:**
 - During the last RHNA cycle, developers proposed projects on properties that were not on the list of the City's RHNA identified sites, thus freeing up unused sites for consideration in the upcoming cycle.
 - The state's population is declining because of lower birth rates, higher cost of living, companies leaving the State, fewer jobs and people working remotely - this creates a justification for fewer RHNA units.
 - In 2014 Lafayette's RHNA allocation was only 400 units, yet today - even with lower California census data - Lafayette has been targeted for 2114 units.
 - Due to pending legislation and lawsuits, Lafayette voters could regain control over the number of mandated new units.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN?

Using current zoning limits, The General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC), a pro bono group of residents, should first analyze the general downtown area around Mt. Diablo Blvd., given the large number of projects (16+) already in the pipeline there. This analysis would identify which additional opportunity sites, if any, would need to be included in the site inventory in order to meet the RHNA target plus a 15% buffer. If - following that analysis - the conclusion is that some sites need to be upzoned, the relevant data will be readily available.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Email/write to GPAC, generalplan@lovelafayette.org
2. Organize your neighborhood – contact Save Lafayette in this regard at savelafayette94549@gmail.com
3. Support Save Lafayette (which has a very successful track record on controversial city matters).
Send your tax-deductible donation payable to Save Lafayette, PO Box 1183, 3641 Mt Diablo Blvd., Lafayette CA 94549.

Many thanks for your continued interest and help,

Michael Griffiths
President, www.SaveLafayette.org