

Exotic Animal Medicine Conference

Check out this summary of the topics covered at this year's exotic animal medicine conference.

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Photo Courtesy Jerry Murray, DVM
Prairie dogs are a popular pet in Belgium.

Once a year there is an exotic animal medicine conference, and I just returned from this year's conference. These conferences are a great chance to relax and learn. Plus, they are usually in visitor-friendly cities. This year's conference was in beautiful San Diego, and the weather was absolutely amazing!

The presentations covered many different small mammals, so I will give you a brief summary of this year's topics.

The conference started with an excellent presentation on the use of Revolution (selamectin) on rabbits for flea control. This research was done at Kansas State University; and surprisingly Revolution does not last as long on bunnies as it does on dogs and cats. The new recommendation is to use it once a week for flea control. There were two more rabbit presentations. One covered chest surgery, and the other covered facial surgeries.

There were three guinea pig presentations. The first covered the normal values of guinea pig urine. This set the stage for the second talk on limiting calcium in the diet of guinea pigs. Guinea pigs are prone to calcium carbonate crystals and bladder stones, so some owners try to limit the amount of calcium in their guinea pig's diet. Unfortunately this produces another more serious problem. When there is not enough calcium in the diet, most mammals start absorbing calcium from their own bones. This is exactly what happened to the three guinea pigs in the second presentation. It was so severe that all three were euthanized within a year, because the treatment could not reverse the fibrous boney changes.

There was a presentation on a chinchilla with a fatal yeast infection, and a pathology review of brain tumors in hedgehogs. Hedgehogs are also prone to a neurologic disease that causes a "wobblers" syndrome, and now brain tumors have to be considered when seeing hedgehogs with neurologic signs.

One of the more interesting presentations was from a Belgian veterinarian who spoke about prairie dogs. Who knew prairie dogs are popular pets over in Belgium? Her presentation covered six prairie dog pups with anorexia, hair loss, facial edema, diarrhea and weight loss. These prairie dogs had three different intestinal parasites (tapeworms, coccidia and Giardia) that caused the problem. Treatment was successful in five of the pups.

In addition, six ferret presentations were given on the opening day and two more talks later in the conference. One covered a brand new respiratory disease in ferrets from a mycoplasma infection. This is very similar to the mycoplasma infections and pneumonia of rats. My talk was on the prostatic problems that male ferrets with adrenal gland disease can develop. Needless to say, it was a great conference, and I look forward to next year's conference in Seattle.

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