We seem to be enjoying an early spring at the moment, which means we and our pets are spending more time outdoors. Here are some tips for pet owners to help keep their pets safe and healthy in the great outdoors.

**Rabbits and Guinea Pigs**

- Don’t be tempted to bring them out of their sheltered winter accommodation too soon, although the days are mild, the nights can get cold and even frosty. Settle for a day run in the garden if the weather is nice until the night-time temperatures rise.

- If your rabbit or guinea pig has access to grass, make sure you only allow him small amounts to start with as eating a lot of grass after eating hay all winter it can upset his digestive system and lead to diarrhoea. A balance of hay and grass is best.

**Cats**

- Some cats become more active this time of year and spend more time outdoors, so make sure your cat is microchipped and your contact details on the microchip database are kept up to date.

- This is ‘kitten season’ when all rescues see an increase in unwanted litters or pregnant queens, so make sure your cat is neutered whichever gender it is.

- Birds are nesting now and fledglings are easy prey for cats, so a safety collar with a bell on it will help alert birds to your cat’s presence.

- Other wildlife, such as foxes, will be protecting their young from predators so if you know your cat likes a scrap, check them regularly for any bite injuries.

- Do not use slug pellets to protect your plants, as these are tasty but toxic to cats and can have fatal results.

**Dogs**

- We all start to take longer walks with our dogs now and take them on days out. Build up their exercise gradually as like us they may be lacking fitness after the winter and could injure themselves if they do too much too soon.

- Make sure your dog is microchipped and your contact details on the microchip database are kept up to date. Also your dog should wear a collar and tag bearing the owners details whenever he is out in public.
- The sun can be quite intense even in the Spring so do not leave dogs in cars on hot days.

- Your dog may spend longer in the garden now, so check your fencing and gates are secure both to prevent your dog escaping and to prevent your dog being stolen. Keep an eye on your dog in the garden as dog thefts from gardens are on the increase.

- **NEVER** tie your dog up outside a shop – every day we see stories of dogs being stolen in this way.

- Always keep your dog on the lead in fields where there is livestock. Chances are they will have young this time of year, especially lambs. Also be aware that birds like pheasants and swans nest on the ground so don’t let your dog disturb the nests.

- If you are gardening or doing DIY, keep any tools safe from dogs, especially puppies.

- Do not use slug pellets to protect your plants, as these are tasty but toxic to dogs and can have fatal results.

- Be lungworm aware. Lungworm can be contracted either by dogs eating slugs and snails (yes, some do), or from drinking water from a bowl where a slug or snail has been, or picking up a toy that a slug or snail has crawled into. So don’t leave toys in the garden overnight – keep them in a snail proof box, and regularly clean out any water bowls in the garden.