

# Cavy Capers

November/December 2009

## HOT WEATHER

= SPECIAL MANAGEMENT for covies

**Now** that the weather is hotting up it is time to make sure our covies are protected from this major killer. I recently took my fans apart and cleaned/vacuumed them to



make sure they're in good working order. Some of them were in use, as I have some fans going 24/7. I use rice hulls for bedding and the dust is something I am constantly battling. Every few months I try to vacuum the fans and this time I also checked that the filter in the air conditioning unit was clean and it was ready for the season.

### DANGERS

We all know about the dangers of heat stroke with covies – or do we? Did you know that when they are outside, even for a few hours, (or minutes; if they have no shade), they can suffer from heat stroke? Did you know that if you find a cavy slobbering or streaming from the nose/eyes, that is a sign of heat stress? If you find covies in this condition, get them cooled quickly.

Some types of cavy 'hideouts' can make the problem worse.

The plastic guinea pig 'igloos', not made of breathable material, have very poor ventilation and have only one opening. They can become death caves. Covies don't always know to move out from under these into a cooler area, because they feel safe while hidden. There is a real chance that this feeling of safety can lead to their death – from heat! Their body heat (especially if more than one animal is crowded into that small 'safe' place) can build up to dangerous levels. Wooden or card board boxes with several exits and high roofs are a safer 'sanctuary' option in hot weather.

Heat stroke can strike extremely quickly and is an incredibly fast killer.

Guinea pigs are in danger of heat stroke when the ambient temperature stays higher than 18 to 24 degrees C. If you have you ever seen your cavy sprawled out with both back legs sticking out, this is a sign that they are too hot.

### KEEP THEM COOL

In previous issues we have discussed ways to keep them cool. And you can download a Heat Stress First Aid poster from the Club website. [www.nswcavy-](http://www.nswcavy-club.org)

[club.org](http://www.nswcavy-club.org).

### A FEW QUICK TIPS

**Air** conditioning or open windows and fans are a must.

**Frozen** water bottles can be a life saver. Have several in the freezer and put at least two at a time in the cage, wrapped in a light towel to absorb the moisture as they melt. The pigs can then sit as close or as far from these as they like to help keep themselves cool. Some sows will sit right on top of them.

**Make** sure their water is fresh daily to encourage them to drink sufficiently. Covies don't like stale water. In warm/hot weather don't add any nutrients to their water, as this can quickly go off in the heat. You may want to try insulating the bottles to keep them cool longer.

**Ceramic** floor/wall tiles are fantastic to put down in the cage. Do you like the feel of the cool bathroom tiles on your bare feet in summer? The pigs will lay on them for the same reason.

**Keep** the cage out of direct sunlight! It sounds obvious but it's one of the easiest ways of keeping the heat down. Shade cloth formed into a tent over the top and

sides of the outdoor cage adds an extra 'thermal layer' to keep them cooler.

**Fans** are necessary to keep the air moving, but make sure the covies aren't in a draft or in direct line with the fan. Guinea pigs are very susceptible to upper respiratory infections, mainly caused by drafts. Having a fan above the tops of the cages is a good strategy. You can also put a frozen water bottle in front of the fan to encourage the circulation of cooler air.

I also use minimum/maximum type thermometers, available for around \$25 from nurseries or feed stores, to keep track of the temperature in my shed, but any kind of thermometer is a good idea to help you monitor the maximum temperature your shed reaches.

**Covies'** have a much lower tolerance to temperature range than people, so don't forget that the top temperature, AS WELL AS the range of temperature variation needs to be monitored. ☺



### Heat/Heat stroke articles

"Animal heat stress can be heart breaking" – Andrea Slaugh [reprint] Nov./Dec. 2002 p. 9+14

"Covies in the summer heat" – Mette Ruelokke Apr. 2000

"Don't let hot weather be a killer" Nov./Dec. 2004 p. 1+4

"Heat stroke" – Dr. Sandy Hume Nov./Dec. 2001 p.8

"Hot weather management" Oct. 2007 p. 1+9+11

"Hot weather management" – Barbara Grieve Nov./Dec. 2007 p. 1+7

"Hot weather tips" Jan./Feb. 2003 p.21

"Hot weather tips" – Jo Livingston Nov./Dec. 2003 p. 19

"Hot weather and pregnancy toxemia" – Jo Livingston Oct. 2006 p. 20-21

Follow up letter – Elizabeth Hodsdon Jan./Feb. 2004 p. 5

"Keeping your pigs alive & well in hot weather" – Peter Wright Jan./Feb. 2006 p. 1 +4-5 ☺

Thanks to Nikki White, Reguli Stud  
From the Capital Country Cavy Club website, *Cavy Capers* Index.

<http://home.netspeed.com.au/reguli/cavy-capersindex.htm>