**Breeding dogs - an overview for the first time breeder**

**How often does a bitch come into heat?** Usually every 6 months from 6-8 months of age.

**What are the signs of heat?** Swelling of the vulva, followed by vaginal bleeding.

**What should I do to ensure a successful mating?** Take the bitch to the male; timing is crucial, the bitch is most fertile around the 10th -14th day of heat; however this can be as early as day 3 or as late a day 18.

**Are there tests to determine when to mate my bitch?** A microscopic examination of vaginal cells can be made, or more accurately, testing progesterone levels in the blood.

**How long will my bitch be pregnant?** Pregnancy lasts around 63 days; most dogs whelp between days 63 and 65 post mating. Mating dates *must* be recorded for accuracy.

**Feeding:** Your bitch must be in peak condition, neither too fat or too thin; after the 6th week food intake should be gradually increased and high energy, low bulk foods given; during the last 3 weeks food intake will increase by up to 1 ½ times normal level, and at height of lactation (about 3 weeks after whelping) can be as high as 2 ½ - 3 ½ times normal.

**What should I do to prepare for whelping?**  During the last week or so, the bitch will look for somewhere secure for delivery, so prepare an area that is warm, draught-free and secure, eg- a quiet room in the house. Select a whelping box and place in this area and line with generous amounts of newspaper; bedding and blankets can be added for extra warmth.

**Signs of impending whelping:**  Nervousness, panting and off food during the last 24 hours, vomiting; rectal temperature may drop below 37.8C. Delivery times will vary; large breeds may take longer. Brachycephalic breeds (eg bulldogs) or small dogs with only 1 or 2 pups are more likely to have complications. If there is more than 2 hours between pups, and the bitch does not start to strain, veterinary advice should be sought immediately.

**Normal birth positions:** Puppies can be born head first, or in the ‘breech’ position. Each puppy is enclosed in a sac with a placenta, which is passed with each pup. It is normal for the bitch to eat the placenta. It is normal for one or two pups to be stillborn, especially in a large litter.

**What are the signs of my bitch having trouble delivering her pups?** Twenty minutes of intense labour with no puppy delivered; if the bitch has sudden depression or lethargy; fresh blood for more than 10 minutes; green discharge with no puppy having been born, or a puppy stuck halfway. *CONTACT YOUR VET IMMEDIATELY FOR ADVICE.*

**What is milk fever?** A serious condition due to a depletion of calcium in the blood; usually occurs when pups are around 3-5 weeks; signs are muscle spasms, spastic movement, heavy panting. *THIS CAN BE FATAL AND IS AN EMERGENCY*

**After the pups are born:** Check every few hours and make sure all pups are feeding well and are contented; noisy pups may be cold and/or hungry and may need help. They should sleep for 90% of their first 2 weeks and gain weight daily; eyes will be open between 7-14 days. At 2 weeks they should be trying to stand; at 3 weeks climbing out of the box, and by 4 weeks they should all walk, run and play; they can have solids from 3 ½ - 4 ½ weeks.