

DONOR TALES



Help Pets in Need with the Gift of Life

For many pet owners a pet is not 'just a dog' or 'just a cat.' He or she is an important and loved member of the family and when they die, a significant even traumatic sense of loss is experienced by the other family members.



Louis—the first feline donor

It's hard at such times to think about how this loss might help other animals, but in some cases the knowledge that a beloved pet's departure has actually been able to help other pets find a new lease of life can make the grief more bearable.

This was the case for Linda Babb from Nailsworth in Gloucestershire who tragically, lost her cat Louis prematurely through a suspected heart attack.

Louis was an eight year-old British Red Shorthaired who appeared to be in robust health apart from a slight heart murmur.

Unable to locate Louis one morning, Linda Babb went searching for her elusive feline and was devastated to find him dead by her front gate. She rushed him to her veterinary practice, Clockhouse Veterinary Hospital in Stroud where vets were unable to diagnose a direct cause of death.

Whilst waiting in the practice reception area, Linda noticed a poster asking for pet donors to come forward to aid a ground breaking operation which processes and banks bone and soft tissue to provide grafts for badly injured pets.

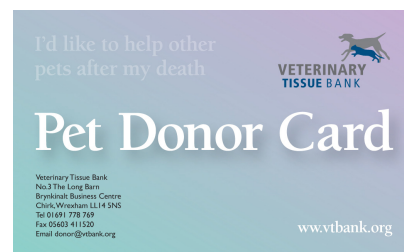
Linda commented: "Louis was a lovely boy, but he had already gone. So it was actually a relatively easy decision to allow him to help other pets in need.

"I later received a lovely thank you letter from the Veterinary Tissue Bank advising me that Louis had actually helped 32 injured cats gain a new lease of life. That was great news and affirmed my decision."

Aimee Lardner is a veterinary nurse at Clockhouse Veterinary Practice who provides pet owners with informal bereavement counselling at times of loss. She commented: "Losing a pet is very

traumatic and I try to help owners to find coping mechanisms at these emotional times. Donating their deceased pet can provide them with some solace enabling them to find some comfort from the fact that their beloved pet will be helping others after he or she has departed." Clockhouse Veterinary Practice has placed posters and leaflets in the surgery. They also include a mention of the donor scheme on the base of its Consent forms which owners sign prior to pets being put to sleep.

"This acts as reminder to us to mention the donor scheme and we actually find that most owners respond positively to the concept."



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Veterinary Tissue Bank is hoping to encourage more pet owners to register their pets as donors. Dr Peter Myint said, "Pet owners can carry a pet donor card or there is the option to sign their pet on to our donor register at any time by emailing donor@vtbank.org

"We hope owners will find comfort at their time of bereavement from the knowledge that they are able to help another in need through their gift of tissue donation."

The tissue bank is short of cat donors and is hoping that owners will respond positively by registering their pet cats as donors. This will enable specialist veterinary practices around the UK to access processed tissues, bone, tendon and ligament, which are often needed in orthopaedic surgery to repair injuries such as fractures and ligament ruptures.

For more information on becoming a donor contact VTB on 01691 778769 or by visiting the website at www.petdonor.org

UK FIRST FOR PET MENISCAL TRANSPLANT

An eight year-old Labrador bitch called Tia has been given a new lease of life thanks to pioneering surgery on her knee.



Tia is the first pet in the UK to benefit from a meniscal transplant – a procedure that replaces the wedge-shaped cartilage of the knee joint using donor tissue.

She suffered a severe injury to her knee joint, following a car accident last year and her vet, orthopaedic expert, Patrick

Ridge from Devon based Ridge Referrals, felt Tia was an ideal candidate for knee cartilage replacement surgery.

The Veterinary Tissue Bank, Europe's first tissue bank for veterinary surgeons, is a ground breaking new operation which processes and banks bone and soft tissue for specialist practices to provide grafts for badly injured pets, was con-

tacted to size-match and process a suitable cartilage ring for her

Healthy tissue was then transplanted into Tia's knee joint, making her the first dog in the UK to receive meniscal transplant.

Tia's owner, Paul Selway from Newton Abbott, Devon, said: "It's great to have Tia back to her old self again. I'd like to thank the owner of the donor dog for having the consideration to think of how another pet might benefit from their loss."

"Before the formation of the Veterinary Tissue Bank, there was no European facility for tissue transplantation in dogs and cats meaning that only autograft procedures which involved tissue removal from the host pet could be used.

Now, specialist veterinary practices around the UK are already able to access processed tissues, bone, tendon and ligament, which are often needed in orthopaedic surgery to repair injuries such as fractures and ligament ruptures.

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CAT LOSES ONE OF HIS NINE LIVES IN RTA

Merlin – a male two year old Bengal cat – severely injured in a horrific road accident outside his home in Liverpool has been given a new lease of life thanks to pioneering surgery on his leg.

The hit and run accident happened in the early hours of the morning when Merlin chased across the road in hot pursuit of a fox cub chasing a squirrel both wild animals were killed in the incident which left Merlin with a completely shattered front and back leg.

His owner, Julie Sothern rushed him to her local veterinary surgery, Crawford and Crawford in Mossley Hill, Liverpool who advised her that the injuries were so severe that Merlin's only chance of keeping the front leg would be referral to an orthopaedic specialist.

As a result, Merlin was referred to the orthopaedic service at the University of Liverpool Small Animal Teaching Hospital for assessment and treatment by Professor of Surgery, John Innes.

John Innes commented: "Poor Merlin's injuries were both severe and extensive.

X-rays showed a fracture of the left femur and a severe right ulna fracture ex-



tending in to the elbow joint, in addition to a left hip dislocation.

"I was able to repair the left elbow fracture with a bone plate and screws together with feline demineralised bone matrix graft supplied by Veterinary Tissue Bank. This is a processed form of bone from a donor cat which provides proteins called growth factors to stimulate the fracture to heal."

The Veterinary Tissue Bank, Europe's first tissue bank for veterinary surgeons, is a ground breaking centre which processes and banks bone and soft tissue for veterinary practices to provide grafts for badly injured pets like Merlin.

Merlin was then confined to quarters and was put on cage rest for several weeks. He is now making an excellent recovery



and has just had the pins taken out from his hip.

Julie Sothern, said: "It's been a long road to recovery but he's worth all the heart-ache. Merlin is such a lovely, soft chap we just had to do everything we could to give him the best chance of recovery. Our vet has been incredibly supportive and Professor Innes has literally saved Merlin's life. Without this latest treatment he would have lost his front right leg."

FAMILY DOGS BECOME DONORS

When Sarah Jane Shaylor saw an article about the life-saving work of Veterinary Tissue Bank in a national newspaper, she immediately signed up all three of her rescue dogs as donors.

Following a career in human orthopaedics and married to an arthroplasty surgeon, Sarah Jane immediately recognised the important role donors play in



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She commented: "I have seen first-hand the benefits of using bone grafts in humans and can well appreciate how the same techniques will provide incredible advancements in veterinary orthopaedics."

"We love our three dogs dearly, but also feel that when they die it is important to go on to help someone else – whether that is another human, in our case, or another animal in their case."

The Shaylor's three rescue dogs include Kitch a 14 year-old collie-cross Belgian shepherd who suffers from canine dementia, Claude a 10 year-old lurcher and Nookie a seven year-old lurcher who is epileptic.

Now, all three dogs carry donor cards and their veterinary practice, EC Straiton & Partners, has included their new donor status on their files.

Sarah Jane concluded: "I think the donor scheme is a marvellous idea. Our veterinary practice is hoping to encourage more clients to sign-up and I hope that many pets will benefit from the scheme."

UK FIRST FOR STEM CELL THERAPY

Following the success of its pet donor scheme, Veterinary Tissue Bank - is now launching the UK's first stem cell therapy service for pets.

John Innes, Professor of Small Animal Surgery at the University of Liverpool Veterinary School, is spearheading the initiative which aims to help dogs and cats with joint injuries or fractures that are difficult to heal by stimulating the healing process.

This ground breaking process of stem cell therapy involves extracting fat from the host pet's abdomen in a small surgical procedure, the fat is then specially transported to Veterinary Tissue Bank where the stem cells are extracted, cultured and multiplied.

They are then provided to veterinary surgeons to inject into the injured area. John Innes explains: "This is a pioneering treatment which we believe can accelerate the healing process considerably, especially with severe injuries that are otherwise hard or slow to heal."

"By culturing the cells, we can inject 60-70 million cells as opposed to just 5 mil-

lion which is the number achieved by extracting the cells from fat and injecting them back in. So, in theory, we have much greater chances of success."

The cells used are autogenous (from the patient) and should not be confused with the more controversial embryonic stem cells.



John is careful to point out that this treatment is not yet a replacement for routine surgical procedures, but may improve a pet's prognosis in some cases where more acceptable treatments are not appropriate: "Stem cell therapy is showing promise for fractures that fail to heal with traditional treatments, and also for some joint problems such as ligament or tendon injury and meniscal tears where stem cells are also promising better healing"