**Behaviour, diet and worming**

With Valentine’s day coming up, perhaps you are thinking about that special ‘our tune’ or planning some musical accompaniment to a romantic evening. So what about shared musical tastes and pets? Some owners notice their pets react in particular ways to different pieces of music they play – sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. Apparently cats, on the whole, do not like human music and much prefer compositions that have been created especially for them with sounds more akin to chirping birds and crickets and at a tempo and pitch similar to forms of cat communication. But it’s often difficult to know exactly what a cat is thinking! However, recent research done by the University of Glasgow has found that dogs do show a marked preference for reggae and pop music and that heart rates fell and behaviour was calmer when listening to music. But some of you probably already knew that and didn’t need a study to tell you! Other recent research into dog behaviour has shown strong links between diet and behaviour – this has led to a greater understanding of how our pets are affected by what they eat. The research indicates that certain diets improve levels of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine. Not surprisingly, it would seem that foods which do not have added colourants, chemical additives or artificial nutrients in them are significantly better for the animal’s emotional health as well as physical well-being. So a good quality diet may have more positive effects for a stressful or anxious pet and use of a good supplement or nutraceutical may also be recommended.

Thinking of the general well-being of our pets, a brief reminder about the importance of worming. Nearly all domestic pets, and especially rabbits, cats and dogs are born with worms in their digestive tracts and roundworm (toxocara) has many negative effects on an animal’s health. Plus, an un-wormed animal can pose a significant hazard to human health - in this respect, picking up after your dog is especially important. In addition to possible contamination from bacteria in the faeces, an untreated dog may be a carrier for worm eggs. The eggs of the most common worm, toxocara canis, or roundworm, are easily picked up from infected soil, and get into human digestive systems via unwashed hands. The eggs then hatch into larvae which migrate around the body. In humans, they usually migrate to the liver, but also to the eye, potentially causing significant damage. Respiratory/ asthmatic conditions have also been connected with roundworm infection. In pets, the larvae returns to the intestine, reaches adulthood and lays eggs, starting the cycle again. Pet owners can play a massive role in reducing the general burden of roundworm infection. Simply by cleaning up our dog’s poop, and by worming dogs and cats regularly, we can interrupt the worm’s lifecycle and prevent reproduction. For more advice about worming and further information, ask your vet!