Parasites in rabbits
**Fleas**
There are a number of parasites which can affect pet rabbits. External parasites which live on the outside of the rabbit are most frequently encountered.

**Fleas**
Rabbits have their own species of flea called *Spilopsyllus cuniculi*. This is seen occasionally in pet rabbits. The main concern with this parasite is that it can spread myxomatosis between rabbits (See Vaccinations in rabbits information sheet). Rabbits can also pick up cat and dog fleas *Ctenocephalides felis* and *canis*. If fleas are seen on your rabbit it is important to treat both your rabbit and its environment. Please contact the surgery so we can discuss safe and effective treatment options. It is important never to use flea products which are not specifically licensed for rabbits, as certain products which are safe in cats and dogs can harm rabbits.

**Mites**
The most common mite in rabbits is *Cheyletiella parasitivorax* or 'walking dandruff'. This is usually seen as an area of white scurfy skin, usually on the back or between the shoulder blades. This condition can be treated by your veterinary surgeon, but it is also extremely important for your rabbit to have a thorough examination should mites be discovered as they may be an early sign of other disease. Mites can occur when a rabbit is in poor condition due to any systemic disease and also if it has dental disease. (See Dental disease in rabbits information sheet).

Another common mite infection is ear mites, ‘*Psoroptes cuniculi*’. Ear mites cause crusting, itching and ulceration in the ear canals of rabbits. Veterinary treatments are available and it is important not to attempt to try to clean the crusts from the ears before treatment of the mites is commenced, as this can be extremely painful.

**Lice**
*Haemodipsus ventricosus* is the rabbit biting louse. It can be seen with the naked eye. It is often an indication of poor husbandry, especially in breeding colonies. It is also seen when a rabbit is ill or run down for other reasons, e.g. with dental problems. Veterinary treatments are available for this condition.

**Fungal Infections**
‘Ringworm’ occurs in rabbits but it is not common. It is not a worm at all but a fungal infection usually caused by *Trichophyton mentagrophytes* or *Microsporum canis*. The lesions are crusty and inflamed and cause hair-loss. They may or may not be itchy. Ringworm usually occurs in young rabbits and, again, may be a sign of underlying poor health or poor husbandry. This is a zoonotic disease which means it can be caught by humans. (See Zoonoses in rabbits information sheet). Veterinary treatments are available but it can be difficult to rid the environment of the infective spores.

**Internal parasites**
Regular worming of rabbits (as is essential for cats and dogs) is not necessary. Worm infestations of either round or tapeworms are possible but rare in pet rabbits. Rabbits are intermediate hosts to *Taenia serialis* and *Taenia pisiformis* (tapeworms of the dog and fox) so if you own a dog as well as a rabbit it is advisable to keep the dog wormed. Rabbit tapeworms cannot be passed to humans unless rabbit meat is eaten and not properly cooked, so this is not a health concern for the average pet rabbit owner!