

Milo's encounter with a Tiger Snake



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VETERINARY SURGERY

Case Study—December 2013

Milo is an inquisitive 19 month old chocolate Burmese, and is always up to mischief. Mostly an indoors cat, he occasionally ventures outside when his family are in the yard.

A few weeks ago he ventured beyond the backyard, and followed his mum through the sand dunes towards the beach at Kawana. It is not abnormal for a Burmese cat to 'go for a walk', as they think they are little dogs. It was in the dunes where his walk ended that day.

On returning from a quick swim, Milos mum found him on the path through the dunes collapsed and struggling to breathe. He had vomited and passed diarrhoea and was frothing at the mouth.

His pupils were dilated and he was only barely conscious. It is lucky for Milo that our surgery is close to where he lives, and he was raced to us.

On arrival at the surgery, Milo was in a bad way and his breathing was getting worse by the minute. There was a small amount of blood tinged saliva in the corner of his mouth, but no visible wounds, and after a quick examination it was decided the only likely cause was a snake bite. Emergency treatment with snake anti-venom via an intravenous drip began immediately. He was also given antihistamines and cortisone to stop reactions to the anti-venom, and an oxygen mask helped him to breathe.

There are so many different types of snakes and we were not sure what type of snake had bitten Milo. There is a snake detection kit available to determine what type of snake had bitten Milo, but it takes about 30-45 minutes to run, and we didn't have time to spare due to his condition. Instead, we treated him with Combined Tiger/Brown Snake anti-venom, as this covers all possibilities (Tiger Snake anti-venom also treats Black Snake bites).

Over the next 30 minutes, whilst receiving the life saving anti-venom, Milo improved dramatically. He stopped salivating, his breathing improved, his heart rate and gum colour came back to normal, his pupils started to respond to light and constrict, and an hour later he was sitting up grooming his coat and trying to lick his drip line out! It was as if nothing had happened.....but his battle wasn't over yet. Snake venom has several toxins...firstly those to paralyse its prey, then those that dissolve the internal organs.

Whilst Milo had survived the initial onslaught of paralysis, we had to closely monitor his internal organs over the ensuing days. Blood tests to check his liver and kidneys were normal but his muscles had been damaged as indicated by high CK (creatinine kinase) on his blood tests. His blood clotting time also began to increase, which means he was at risk of bleeding like a haemophiliac. He was monitored closely overnight, and a second dose of anti-venom given 6 hours after the first dose helped his blood to clot normally.

By Day 2 Milo thought he was 100% and was eating and smooching and wanting to go home. But internally, things were still not right. Whilst his liver and kidney function and blood clotting ability were all good, his urine was port wine colour. A full urinalysis performed in our in-house laboratory revealed this discolouration was not blood cells, but was from myoglobin (muscle pigments) being released into the bloodstream from his damaged muscles. If left untreated, these myoglobin pigments are toxic to the kidneys, and will cause kidney failure.

So, Milo spent the next five days on an intravenous drip in our hospital to support his kidneys, and we monitored his urine daily until there were no more pigments and his urine was crystal clear. He was bright and smoochy and had us wrapped around his little paw by becoming very vocal when he wasn't getting enough attention :) We all fell in love with Milo.

Once his urine was fine, Milo was sent home to rest for a week to allow his body, and particularly his muscles to repair. Those who know Burmese know they do not like to rest, rather they prefer to play and run about the house like Phar Lap. It was a long week for his family whilst he objected to being confined to the master bedroom.

A repeat blood test a week later showed perfect liver and kidney function, and he was given the 'all clear'. Unfortunately pets do not learn from their mistakes, and after using one of his nine lives, Milo is now an inside cat with access to an outdoor cat enclosure.

