

Sebastian the crusty cat

Sebastian is a 2 year old Siamese cat that is usually very alert and into everything. He was referred with a skin problem that had been treated with a variety of remedies for 4 months. Initially, he just had some crusts around a teat. Then his right front foot developed crusts, scabs and sores and he became lame. Next, crusts developed on his nose and more recently his other feet became involved and sores appeared on his belly. His owner described thin walled blisters that appeared in waves, but quickly broke and became crusts. Initial test including biopsies had not been able to pinpoint the problem. By the time he came to PE, he had been on a drip for several days and was feeling miserable. He'd not wanted to go outside for weeks and found walking on his right front foot very painful. He would only allow his foot to be cleaned under sedation.



Sebastian



Severe crusting on nose (photo taken while he was anaesthetised)



Characteristic thick pus in nail bed



Wheeping and mild crusting on sore on body



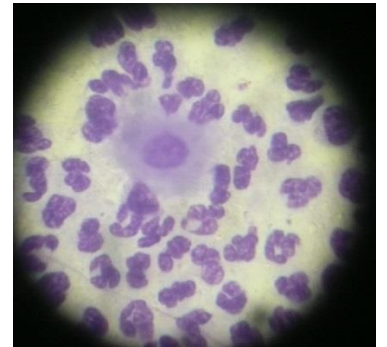
Right foot is swollen and hair has turned white from ongoing inflammation (and thus heat)



Severe crusting of ear

Sebastian was anaesthetised and new biopsies were collected. Finding the right bit to biopsy can be quite tricky. We suspected that he had an immune mediated problem called pemphigus foliaceus where the cat's immune system goes on the fritz and attacks the proteins that hold skin cells together.

To increase our chances of finding proof of his disease we looked at samples from below his ear crusts and in the thick pus in his nail beds. The samples were stained and what you see right is the view under a microscope with 1000x magnification. There are lots of pus cells (neutrophils) arranged around a skin cell. These are very rare in diseases other than pemphigus



Smear of underside of an ear crust reveals an acatholytic acanthocyte – a skin cell surrounded by pus cells. These are characteristic of animals with pemphigus



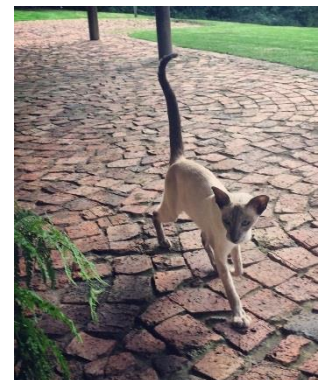
A few weeks into treatment and all the crusts on his face and ears have disappeared



His right front foot is still white but all the swelling and toe jam has resolved.



A few weeks on treatment: the sores on his belly have gone



A day after starting prednisolone treatment, Sebastian was walking on his right fore for the first time in months

Sebastian started treatment with high doses of prednisolone and started feeling better quickly. Within a few weeks all his sores had disappeared. His right foot will probably grow grey hair again in spring when he next moults. This is because coat colour is temperature dependent in Siamese: the coat is dark where the skin is cool and lighter where the skin is warm. Normally, the feet, tail and ears are the areas of skin that get coldest in a cat and so turn dark. When the area is very inflamed (like his food), it also gets very warm – resulting in the coat colour change.

Cats with pemphigus need a long course of cortisone to allow their skin to settle. Some animals can be weaned off treatment altogether, others need low doses life-long to keep them in remission.