

Thunder and Fireworks

We love fireworks! The colours, the patterns and the wonderful noises that fill the sky. Still, as much as we enjoy them, our pets hate them often shaking uncontrollably, covering in the corner or hiding as best they can. To pets, thunder and fireworks represent danger and something to fear. Helping our pets survive these sudden noises takes preparation and planning.



Fireworks are quite predictable across WA. There are Australia Day celebrations throughout the state and sometimes also on New Year's Eve. Pets that fear fireworks often also struggle with loud thunderstorms and although warning is not always available, there are always things that can be done to help them get through it.

Consider what fireworks and thunderstorms must look like to a pet. There are sudden, incredibly loud noises like nothing else that they hear and which would normally make animals in the wild run for their life. There are flashes of light that they would never

have experienced before and, more often than not, there's the family making excitable noises, jumping to look out of the window and talking loudly to each other. Add to that, the inability of the pet to know whether this scary situation is ever going to end.

Preparation is essential if dogs, cats, small animals and birds are to get through firework nights or sudden thunderstorms with the least amount of fear and stress possible. There is nothing more heartbreaking than losing a pet that escapes out of fear and unfortunately, these do not always find their way back home.

Helping Dogs Cope

Prior to the night, make a special place for the dog to escape to. Their favourite room in the house would be the best place but really, any room indoors will do the trick. Choose a room that is naturally quiet such as one in the centre of the house or with a minimal number of windows. For dogs that only stay inside, consider bringing them

in for the night or at the very least, preparing a garage for them to escape into out of the noise and light.

Put in lots of blankets for the dog to dig into in the room and include an old, unwashed piece of clothing which will provide comfort if you are away. Close any curtains hanging towels or blankets over the edges to stop as many flashes from the fireworks as possible. Use treats to encourage the dog to go in and out of their special place

2 or 3 times throughout the day prior to the fireworks beginning so that he gets comfortable there and if they are to be left on their own throughout the night, wedge the door so that there is no chance of him accidentally getting trapped inside or out of the room.



Take the dog out to the toilet about an hour from when the fireworks are about to begin and leave food, water and a few special chews for him to reduce his tension though he may not be terribly interested if he is scared.

Moderately loud rhythmic music with a good beat is a good way to mask the firework noises from outside. Put this on prior to the fireworks beginning.

Feed the dog late in the afternoon but make it a large, carbohydrate rich meal by adding pasta or overcooked rice as this will make him feel calm and sleepy later in the evening. A long walk in the afternoon will also help.

For pets that are known to blindly panic during fireworks, a visit to the Vet may be worthwhile. They may prescribe medication that will help to reduce their fear.

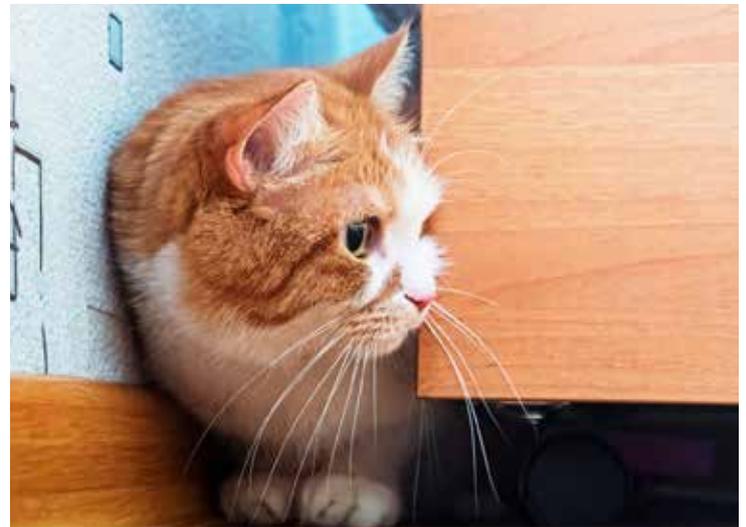
There are always many stories of dogs becoming so scared during storms or fireworks that they panic and escape the property. When in such a state, they may even jump fences that they have never been able to before. Take the time to walk around the property to ensure that all gates and fences are properly secured with no chance of being blown open or even over. Ensure that the dog is wearing his identity collar and that his micro chipping details are up to date.



Calming Cats

Cats and fireworks just don't mix. More often than not they do a good job of living up to the term 'scaredy cat'. Some may sit on the windowsill wondering what is going on but it is far more likely that most will end up hiding under the bed or at the back of an open wardrobe hoping that it will all go away.

Just like dogs, cats need somewhere to escape to. They will often find their own hidey hole, somewhere dark and buried behind curtains or soft fabric. Allow them access to rooms that they feel the most comfortable in and make sure that there is absolutely no opportunity for them to escape outside through a cat flap or other open door.



Even if the house is to be empty during fireworks or a thunderstorm, leave the lights on to reduce the impact of the flashes and have rhythmic music playing to mask the noise.

Make sure that outdoor cats are brought inside prior to a storm or fireworks. If they are not used to being inside, keep them relegated to just a few rooms and make sure that they have access to kitty litter, food and water.

Many of the tricks used for dogs can also be used for cats and remember that they will stay calmer if the household is also calm and should not be pacified throughout the noise and flashes. They may appreciate a bit of a game as a distraction but in the end, they will probably just want to hide until it all passes.



Small Animals and Birds

Both birds and small animals will appreciate being moved to a protected area during a storm or before fireworks if their enclosures allow. Birds that hang under verandahs and patios are a real concern as they blow around quite a lot and if they fall, the base is likely to drop off and the bird escape. Place cages in a protected area and cover cages with a large blanket to help keep any flashes out and take out some of the toys or perches that they may get caught up in if they panic and run or flap around inside the cage.



It is a sad fact that pet birds have been known to escape their cages during wild winds and storms and are unfortunately carried many kilometres away from their home. Take the time to make sure that bird cages and aviaries are secure before the storm hits.

Birds in large aviaries are particularly at risk during storms. Their enclosures are often under large shady trees which may drop their limbs or the aviary itself may not last through the storm. Before any storms are likely to hit, take a critical look at the aviary to ensure that all framework is strong and the wire secure. Check the door to make sure that it will stay firmly closed, even in strong winds, and make sure the roof is firmly attached. It may also be necessary to tie the aviary down to make sure that it doesn't tip over.

Hutches and enclosures used for small animals may need to be covered with tarps if they can't be moved.



During the Storm

It is tempting to soothe a pet to relieve its fears but this really is the worst thing to do. It gives them the impression that there really is something to be scared of and may even make it panic more during other times that the family isn't around.

During the noisy period, ignore the pet when it is looking frightened and only show it attention once it relaxes by playing a game or rewarding with a treat. Playing games throughout the storm and calm conversation will also help. If you and the family are calm and everything seems normal, the pet will feel less stressed and concerned as well.



Desensitising Pets

For pets that really struggle with fireworks, desensitising may help. After all, just like us, fear often comes from the unknown.

Videos or recordings of firework are available that should be played several times each day whilst the pet is doing things it likes - games, cuddle time, treats and meals. Slowly raise the volume of the recording over a few days until it gets quite loud without the pet showing any stress.

