

# The Curious Case of Dylan...

How many dogs and cats would eat plants like Tutu or Rhododendrons or Macrocarpa?

**Dylan, a normally bright friendly and active young Gold Retriever had collapsed.** His very concerned owner carried him into our clinic. His muscles were rigid and he seemed to be reacting excessively to every stimulus.

**Dylan looked startled and scared.** He was salivating, and had a puffy swollen face and he had vomited once at home. He was not eating.

**During his physical examination his heart rate was very slow.** These symptoms alerted us to the possibility of some type of poisoning or perhaps an allergic reaction. The owners advised that Dylan sometimes grazed on unusual plants in the paddock where he lives. Favourites included bidybirds and woolly nightshade!

Bidybirds are not toxic, but there is a very pretty page in my album of plant collections, on the common weed woolly nightshade, which is also known as flannel weed and tobacco weed. The soft furry sage green leaves of this plant smell like kerosene and cause an irritating allergic rash when they are touched and so they do not sound like an appealing food choice for a dog in a paddock—calf cleanings normally win hands down.

**Armed with the history and examination findings,** we took a blood sample to check out Dylan's internal organs, set him up with intravenous fluids and some medication to counteract allergic reactions and relax his muscles.

**Then we got on the phone to the Poisons Centre** in Otago to find out more about what to expect and how best to treat this suspected woolly nightshade poisoning.

**Dylan's symptoms** closely matched the text book description for acute poisoning. There is no antidote and no real way to get the toxins out of the system. Symptoms often don't appear for 2-3 days after eating the plant. It causes severe irritation to the gut resulting in nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea which can be difficult to control.



**The slow heart rate can result in** circulatory collapse and death so we monitored Dylan's heart rate every 30 minutes.

**It can also cause red blood cells to rupture** which can also result in death. Luckily blood results later that day confirmed this was not happening to Dylan.

Towards the end of the day his heart rate started to improve. He ravenously devoured a bowl of biscuits. We continued fluid therapy overnight and the next morning the Dylan we know and love was back.

We sent Dylan home with some special food and treatment for the diarrhoea the Poisons Centre had warned us about.

Dylan's owner is on a mission to rid his paddocks of woolly nightshade seedlings and I'm having another read of my poison plants album!