

FLY STRIKE IN RABBITS

Myiasis or 'fly strike' is a life-threatening condition caused by the feeding larvae of the blowfly fly, *Lucilia sericata*. These flies are attracted to any outdoor pet animal with the skin in poor condition and odiferous, often a result of recurrent urine and faecal contamination which may be associated with underlying disease and/or husbandry factors

Lucilia sericata are common in both rural and urban areas. They are approx. 8mm in size, shiny metallic green in colour and are colloquially known as 'greenbottles'. The abundance of these flies increases from May but flies may still be active in October: susceptible pets kept outdoors are most at risk during these months.



Lucilia sericata can deposit up to 250 eggs in a single batch every three to four days. Eggs are creamy white, approx. 1mm in size. The image below shows a cluster of eggs laid on an elderly guinea pig which had sores in the perianal region.

Eggs hatch in 8-12 hours. The first stage larvae use their mouth hooks to abrade the skin and feed on serous exudate. Without intervention, larvae grow very quickly reaching 1.0 – 1.2cm in size in only 2.5 days; maggots cause serious skin damage the extent and severity of which is related to the number larvae present. Rabbits with large numbers of second and third stage maggots may have been struck more than once over a number of days and such cases carry a poor prognosis.



Approximations of growth rates of maggots at body temperature

STAGE	Maximum size	Estimated time to reach this stage
First stage	2mm	12 hours
Second stage	5mm	24 hours
Third stage	1.2cm	36-48 hours

Occasionally maggot-infested sick animals are brought into veterinary practices by animal welfare officials which necessitate euthanasia. In cases where animal neglect is suspected, identification of the life cycle stages of *Lucilia* and possibly other types of 'secondary' blowfly is important in determining the length of time that the animal had been suffering from myiasis.



Blowfly strike is a well known condition in scouring lambs. Such is the rapidity of disease progression, farmers will inspect susceptible individuals in flocks on a daily basis, an approach which should be adopted for outdoor pet rabbits during at risk months



Blowflies are also attracted to dead or dying animals; the image below shows *Lucilia* on a moribund hedgehog.