

The Baby in the Bucket

The litter was born on Thursday evening late. First-time mother Kat free-whelped two full-term boys that weighed, respectively, 165 and 190 grams (6.35 oz – 6.79 oz). Kat was excellent, nursing, cleaning and being attentive but not obsessive. The pups each gained in the first 24 hours and were restful and quiet.

Day 2 – By midday Saturday, the largest boy, who had weighed 190 grams at birth, started screaming and gasping. Luckily, I had oxygen on hand. Without it, I doubt this puppy would have survived the next three days. He refused to nurse, so I started tube feeding him on Saturday afternoon. For the next 72 hours, and after every feeding, he gasped for breath. After each feeding, I put him on oxygen for 10-15 seconds, which seemed to get him past the worst stage, but left him with labored breathing.

I assembled a hammock (see BP 2004 issue 4, page 21) and placed him in it, but there was no improvement. Sunday his condition was no better. He was gaining weight, but at a much slower rate than his brother. I started giving him Milicon Drops for gas, but that didn't seem to help either.

Day 4 – On Monday, I noticed a significant change in the shape of his body. In my hand, he felt like a 1960's Sci-Fi flying saucer. I couldn't believe that a 4-day-old puppy could be so flat *! I called the vet, who prescribed antibiotics and yogurt. Still, my puppy cried and labored to breathe.

Day 5 – Early Tuesday morning, I noticed that when I held the puppy upright, his fear and breathing problems seemed to diminish slightly. By now, he was requiring 15 seconds of oxygen after every feeding. In the afternoon, a couple of radiographs showed nothing abnormal, but the vet was concerned about the abnormal flatness of his rib cage.

At that point, I began to suspect that I was dealing with a very early complete swimmer (I have since changed terminology). When I got home, I sat down in the rocking chair next to the whelping box, and held the puppy upright in my arms. I was practically in tears. I could not imagine how this puppy would survive, and I couldn't bear to think that he wouldn't. Could I possibly stay awake for two days and hold him upright? As I rocked, my eyes fell on Kat's water bucket, the little 1-quart stainless steel water bucket with the hook on the flat side, a bucket presently hanging on the side of the whelping box. BINGO!! --- I realized the solution had been in front of me the whole time.

I put the puppy in the hammock just long enough to get a size 200 summer-weight crate pad and pin it up to fit smoothly in the bucket, leaving just enough room to allow a snug fit for him. I gently placed him in his new shiny bucket-bed with his hind legs and tail tucked up toward his tummy and then positioned the bucket partially on the hot pad to keep him toasty warm. Like magic, there was

total quiet..... The puppy fell into a deep restful sleep and I read a book for several hours waiting and watching.

I continued to tube feed him until he no longer gasped after feeding. Once I felt he didn't require oxygen and his flying saucer shape was slowly going away, I put him back with his mom just long enough to nurse, and, oh my gosh, did he ever nurse. He made the rounds at the banquet table. After that 5-course meal he went back into the bucket and slept as before.

I kept him in the bucket for about 2 ½ days except for nursing. He regained his shape quickly and by day 10 he was in his bucket for approximately 6 hours daily: 2 in the morning, 2 in the afternoon and 2 in the evening.

Days 7 – 10. The next three days, the puppy gained at a faster rate than his brother. If he continues at this rate, he will catch up to his brother by the time he's 4 weeks old. He will have made up for those horrible 4 days.

One word of warning to anyone trying this method, remember that the puppy cannot get away from the heat source, so don't roast your puppy. Heat transfers very easily through metal. Check his temperature often—puppy temperature should be about 94° at week one progressing to approximately 99° by week three. If you have a bigger puppy, you're going to need a bigger bucket.

This is a simple solution to a problem that is always fatal if not addressed quickly. The most important thing to remember is to ACT immediately if you suspect your puppy is going flat.

THOUGHTS in October 2017

This mama would leave her baby in the bucket while hanging inside the 3X3, most probably would not. If the bucket was to be hung on the outside of the pen I do believe that my moms would be content if they could sniff their baby on the head, and be allowed to clean them for those brief times that they nursed.

At less than a week of age I don't believe the use of a trough to walk through or a convoluted bed topper would work at all. The puppy MUST get off of its chest.

Teresa and I had a puppy that had gone flat and only survived because he was a back sleeper. I believe we were very fortunate to have saved him; because he was several weeks old it did take longer to get his ribcage reshaped, but we did get it back to normal. If I recall correctly I also placed a very light hand pressure on the sides of his ribs whenever I held him to help regain that correct shape.

Be **VIGILANT & ACT** without hesitation and you should be able to save these FLAT puppies.

*notice I said FLAT. I believe that swimmers and flat puppy syndrome are caused by two different sets of conditions. Swimmers appear to not have the muscle development to draw their legs up under their body in order to stand.

FLAT puppies are not of an age to stand or walk. Their bones are soft and pliable, and although most are very large puppies at birth, they don't have to be.

DON'T SECOND GUESS YOUR ASSESSMENT, WAITING A FEW HOURS CAN BE FATAL! If your vet disagrees with this approach I can only say that you won't kill these puppies with this method of treatment and you may very well save them. Even if you suspect this might be the problem quick action will tell you very rapidly if you're on the right path.

Good luck and may you have many healthy happy puppies,

Donna Winslow

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