



March 2, 2011

## **Heartworm an expensive problem**



John Cross Cami Baune, director of the Riverside Regional Pet Shelter, chills for a moment with Sheeba, a husky mix on the left, and Bree, a boxer mix on the right. Both have heartworm, a costly and rare ailment to treat. They are two of three dogs the shelter is working with that have heartworm. John Cross

**(<http://mankatofreepress.com/local/x1609120749/Heartworm-an-expensive-problem>)**

**By Robb Murray**

**The Free Press (<http://mankatofreepress.com>)**

MANKATO — If heartworm were rain, it'd be pouring at the Riverside Regional Pet Shelter.

After not seeing a case of the non-contagious but deadly ailment for more than two years, the shelter is now dealing with three cases. And heartworm can be costly to treat.

“We haven’t had one for quite a while,” said Cami Baune, director of the shelter.

She said the three dogs came to them recently from different owners, and routine testing revealed they had heartworm.

For dogs, adoption fees cover most of the cost of vaccinations and surgery to spay or neuter the animal. But when a dog gets heartworm, treating it requires highly concentrated doses of the usual heartworm preventive medicine.

The doses are expensive — in excess of \$500 — and dogs on the medication must remain calm for two weeks.

For these particular dogs, the costs are even more because none of them is spayed or neutered, and they can’t undergo that surgery for two months after their second dose of heartworm medication.

This means they’re taking up kennel space, too. When the first call came in, they had space. But the shelter is filling up with dogs, and they’re hoping foster families can take the

remaining two dogs — one is already in foster care. They're also hoping for financial contributions to help with the additional costs of treatment.

The first dog to test positive for heartworm was Oliver. He was at a different, smaller animal rescue shelter for a while, but when he and another dog couldn't get along and because that shelter's resources were insufficient to deal with a dog with heartworm, they sent an e-mail to other shelters to see if any could take him.

Riverside stepped up and treated him, but when he began having negative reactions to the medication, he needed to be placed immediately with a foster family.

A short time after Oliver came in, Bree was surrendered. Unlike with Oliver, the shelter didn't know Bree had heartworm until tests were done. The family that surrendered her also hadn't gotten any vaccinations for Bree or had her spayed.

Sheeba came last. She'd been abandoned on a farm site in Blue Earth County. After they ran the routine tests, she was determined to be heartworm victim No. 3. But in Sheeba's case, they weren't able to treat her immediately because she'd lost so much weight. She'll need to gain a few pounds before they can treat her, which will contribute to the amount of money the shelter needs to spend to get her back to health.

To donate to the Riverside Regional Pet Shelter, call 625-6373 or visit their website at [benchs.org](http://benchs.org).

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