What Is Your Diagnosis?

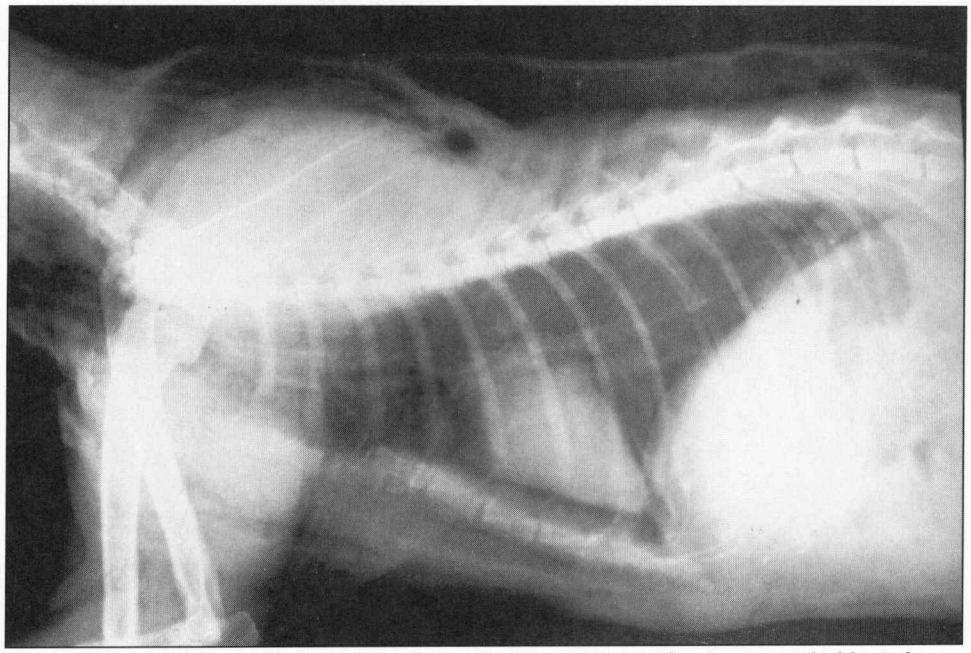

Figure 1—Lateral radiographic view of the thorax of a 9-year-old cat after it was attacked by 2 dogs.

History

A 9-year-old neutered male Persian cat was admitted after it was attacked by 2 dogs. The cat was lethargic and sternally recumbent. Mucous membranes were slightly pale. Subcutaneous emphysema was detected, especially over the thorax. Moist lung sounds were auscultated, and mild inspiratory dyspnea was evident. Liquid, compatible with saliva from a dog, was observed on the coat near the T13-L1 junction dorsally and near the throat. A brief neurologic examination did not reveal abnormalities.

An IV catheter was placed, and dexamethasone was administered. Thoracic radiographs were obtained (Fig 1). While the films were processing, the cat rapidly became cyanotic and dyspneic. The skin in the pharyngeal region ballooned with each expiratory effort. Oxygen treatment was instituted.

Make your diagnosis from Figure 1—then turn the page ▸

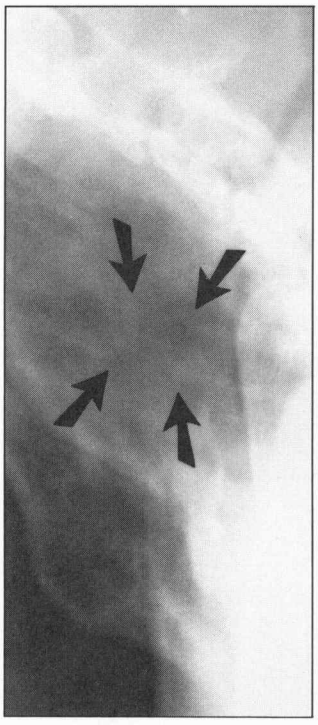

Figure 2—Close-up of the cervical area of the lateral view of the thorax in Figure 1. Black arrows indicate the severed, separated trachea.

Diagnosis

Radiographic diagnosis—Severed cervical trachea (Fig 2) and substantial subcutaneous emphysema. The sternum is luxated between the 3rd and 4th sternebrae, and the 8th and 11th ribs are fractured. Pronounced pneumomediastinum, mild pneumothorax, and numerous pulmonary contusions also are evident. The ventrodorsal view was of poor quality as a result of motion by the cat during exposure. The decision was made to stabilize the cat's condition prior to attempting another exposure.

Comments

The owner elected to have the cat euthanatized because of financial considerations involved with surgical correction of the tracheal defect. A limited cosmetic necropsy was allowed. The trachea had been cleanly and completely severed, leaving a 2-cm gap. A 3-cm, longitudinal laceration was in the caudal portion of the dorsal tracheal membrane. There were no skin lacerations, and internal hemorrhage was minimal.

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