

ESSENTIAL CATTITUDE
an insight into the feline world



Edited by Claire Bessant



Claire Bessant is Chief Executive of the Feline Advisory Bureau and took the picture of ‘Mugi and the rose’ on the cover. Mugi is her rescued oriental tabby and the rose is the new rose (FAB at 50) named after the charity for its golden anniversary.

Our thanks to Petplan, our sponsors for our golden anniversary, and to MJL Advertising for their generous help with this project and throughout the year.

We are also grateful to Boehringer Ingelheim for sponsoring this book.

Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica is delighted to be working closely with the Feline Advisory Bureau and shares a longstanding commitment to animal welfare and well-being. Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica wishes FAB a very happy 50th birthday!



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THE WORDS . . . In 2006 the Feline Advisory Bureau brought together a group of feline behaviourists (*see earlier for a list of the panel members*) to begin to look at issues of feline behaviour which affect our everyday lives with our cats. Inevitably, as behaviourists, they are asked to deal with situations where the behaviour of cats may not fit comfortably with the desires of their owners – where the cat's natural responses and reactions to the situations in which they find themselves are not acceptable to that particular owner. In dealing with situations from the bizarre to the repetitive, behaviourists have had to think about how cats learn and react, why cats do what they do and how we influence that. FAB wanted to begin to gauge what the problems were and what information might enable owners to prevent or overcome such problems.

It very quickly became obvious that, for cats, problems often arise because we, as owners, do not understand what their natural drives and reactions are, what kind of environment they prefer to occupy, the companions they keep (or don't keep) or how simple things like how we feed them or provide litter trays can make a big difference to their lives. It is usually not complex psychology but relates to simple needs. The cat is a successful pet because it is highly adaptable in how it slots into our lives. In living closely with people, that adaptability can sometimes be challenged to the full and occasionally the cat naturally turns to behaviours which may be at odds with living densely with other cats or with people. Occasionally the cat has no natural way to adapt to the circumstances we place it in.

Understanding just what these circumstances are and just what a cat can and cannot cope with would help enormously in expectations of our relationship with our cats. The chapters in this book are written with this in mind – understand where the cat is coming from and how it is likely to react and you have a much better idea of how to make it relaxed and less likely to resort to ‘problem’ behaviours. Knowing what we want when acquiring a cat, understanding how it develops and crucial times in its life, being sensitive to the basics of feeding and keeping clean beyond the actual food or litter, having a feel for whether cats need companions or somewhere to get away, and realising the pressures of living indoors or the challenges faced outdoors will make us much better owners. In living closer to and with more cats we need to push forward the boundaries of our understanding – there are some new thoughts in the pages of this book.

... AND THE PICTURES We often say that there are two kinds of people – those who love cats and those who do not. We asked a series of cat lovers in the public eye to draw or illustrate their cat and to tell us why they like cats, or even a certain special cat. We also asked a group of talented self-confessed feline enthusiasts – members of the Society of Feline Artists (SOFA) – to illustrate their favourite cats and they very kindly sent us some FABulous pictures.

We have pulled all of this enthusiasm together as ‘Essential Cattitude – an insight into the feline world’.





WHAT IS A PET CAT?

THE behaviour group's first thoughts turned to actually defining what a cat is and, true to tradition, came up with nine points! The question was 'what is a pet cat?' but just as 'domestication' is a moot point when it comes to cats, the cat which makes such a good pet is the same as the cat which can also live a feral or wild existence with little or no contact with man at all.

So, when you look at the little bundle of cute fur curled up on the end of the bed that then so charmingly pats you awake just before dawn to get breakfast, remember that this is what your cat really is...

'Fat Ada turned up with her kitten in the garden shed of my London house. I moved her and the kitten into the kitchen and found a home for the kitten. As Ada stayed, my husband said 'Either I go or the cat does'. I swore I would find a home for her and week after week went by. I wasn't looking, of course. Finally, without him really realising it, we had a cat. First I liked having a cat, then I loved having a cat, then I couldn't think of not having a cat. I was hooked.'

Celia Haddon, journalist



A HUNTER

THE cat looks and behaves as it does because it has evolved physically and behaviourally to be a specialist hunter, motivated and driven by the sight and sound of prey, and is a top of the food chain predator. In order to be a successful hunter the cat's natural rhythms will fit the time when its main prey of small creatures are active and vulnerable – usually at dawn and dusk.

What does this mean for owners?

Cats come fully armed with claws they need to keep sharp.

They are likely to be physically active and attracted to movement.

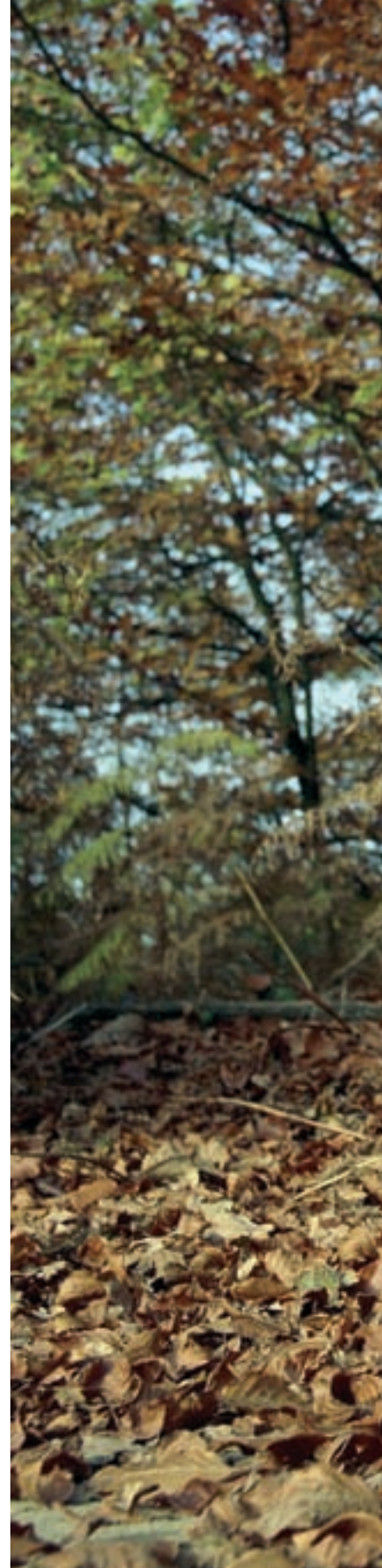
They can be especially active at dawn and dusk and during the spring/summer.

They are likely to bring prey indoors. Hunting behaviour probably peaks when cats are between one and three years old. After that it may decline as cats prefer sitting in the warm!

Cats need the space and opportunity to give the strong motivations for this behaviour an outlet.

Some cats will wander beyond their gardens in search of hunting grounds; others may disappear for long periods during peak hunting seasons.

Image by Jane Burton – cat photographer extraordinaire who sadly passed away at the end of 2007. Jane was a great friend to FAB over the years – her cat Cynthia is FAB's logo cat. Jane had a love of animals that was in no way sentimental. She knew the requirements of each animal in her care and made sure their needs were met. She had a deep understanding and knowledge of animals and was always ready to share her knowledge with other people. For a number of years, she selectively bred cats to produce a succession of beautiful kittens. Many of these are now distributed in homes around the country, and have grown into dearly loved – and much admired – cats.





ZORRO HUNTING BY JANE BURTON OF WARREN PHOTOGRAPHIC



AN OBLIGATE CARNIVORE

THE cat has been such a successful hunter that it does not need to revert to vegetable matter to bolster its diet. A cat is an obligate carnivore and cannot survive or thrive without nutritional components found in meat such as taurine.

What does this mean for owners?

Cats cannot be vegetarians.

Cats lack some metabolic pathways which process certain drugs. This means that many compounds suitable for people or dogs may be toxic to cats. Plants not toxic to other animals may be toxic to cats – such as members of the lily family. Indoor cats and young kittens may sample indoor flowers or plants out of curiosity or boredom or because they have not been given access to suitable plant material, such as grass, to chew.

‘Sakki was an expert hunter, fisherman and accomplished thief, but often preferred the easy pickings of neighbouring racing pigeons and Koi carp! Over the years he also brought Sunday joints, and bags of defrosting meat, including a frozen chicken. Caught one day by the postman dragging a plastic bag containing a pound and a half of stewing steak out of the neighbour’s house, we sheepishly returned it to the elderly couple who apologised for leaving it out on the kitchen table!’

Marian Forster, member of SOFA



FAT
LAT



the love
the love



TERRITORIAL

TERRITORY is the space that a cat would normally defend and which envelops the resources the cat needs to survive, thrive and carry out its normal behavioural repertoire.

What does this mean for owners?

Territory is extremely important to cats and they will want to defend it.

Cats are often more attached to their territory than to their owners!

Don't expect cats to get on with other cats in the same house or neighbouring houses.

Cats may feel threatened, fight, or try to hide because of threats to territory.

If we limit the cat's territory we need to ensure that what we provide instead is interesting and stimulating.

Cats don't enjoy being taken off territory, so when it is necessary owners need to be sensitive to their needs – for example choosing a good cattery or vet who understands cats' needs and fears.

Cats will use a range of methods to mark their territory, for example, rubbing, scratching or spraying urine.



'Cats have a superior intelligence and independent attitude which delights me. I prefer the affectionate ones who purr and clearly adore me, but I've had a few complicated cats who lie, betray and irritate me and yet have had complete power over me. A friend's cat used to growl and refuse people exit from her house – more terrifying than a crocodile. And she would lie centrally on her bed, taking up all the space and clearly did not want to share any comfort areas. A splendid, focused selfishness, a cat who wanted life to be led on her terms. No wonder the Egyptians worshipped cats. I have to have them in my life and I always will.'

Miriam Margolyes, actress



AGILE

THE cat's unique combination of balance, coordination, flexibility and strength enables it to explore and exploit its three dimensional environment, to hunt silently and to get itself out of trouble. It also allows the cat to maintain its coat in perfect condition with flexibility to groom itself frequently and efficiently. Cats are sprinters, not marathon runners – short bursts of activity suit them best.

What does this mean for owners?

Cats will use all dimensions in the house, so provision of the opportunity to climb is equally important to cats as their floor space.

Cats often get into unusual and inaccessible places!

Owners need to provide opportunities to maintain the cat's fitness and suppleness with exercise – this should incorporate vertical as well as horizontal space.

Cats often have a 'mad half hour' of intense activity.





SCENT SENSITIVE

THE cat is highly sensitive to odours which we are totally unaware of. Cats use scent and their acute sense of smell as a private means of communication with each other and to define their territory – usually to keep other cats at a distance (except when looking for mates or scent marking members of their feline group). Cats use scents derived from glands over the face and body, and also use urine and even faeces in different circumstances.

What does this mean for owners?

Be aware that changes to the comfortable and reassuring scent profile of the cat's home can be very upsetting, for example, household cleaners and deodorisers, new furniture, visiting people or dogs, other cats coming in through the cat flap, decorating etc.

Cats will leave scent messages for self assurance. When they are relaxed they mark with face glands and if they feel insecure in their homes may resort to using stronger signals such as urine spraying.



'I am really a cat owner by proxy. Lola (a nine month old rescue kitten) is loved by all four of my children but she is eight year old Alice's special responsibility and friend.'

*Dermot Murnaghan,
broadcaster and presenter*

SELF-RELIANT

THE cat does not have to have others of its own kind around – the cat can hunt for itself, find its own den and defend its own territory. It can keep itself clean, its claws sharp and protect itself by being highly aware of its surroundings and using its agility, speed and strength to get itself out of trouble. If it feels escape is not an option, it will use its hunting weapons to defend itself. When it does have to meet other cats for reproductive purposes it is fertile and has good mothering instincts. Cats have no biological requirement for companionship like dogs (and humans) – they are happy on their own. Cats do not form structured packs like dogs and there is no dominance hierarchy among a group of cats.

What does this mean for owners?

Cats may choose not to be dependent and interactive with people.

Cats may not want a ‘friend’ – they are often content to live alone. Sharing territory with another cat can actually be stressful.

The need to keep themselves clean and ready to hunt is very strong.

If a territory is not providing what is necessary, a cat may move on to another.

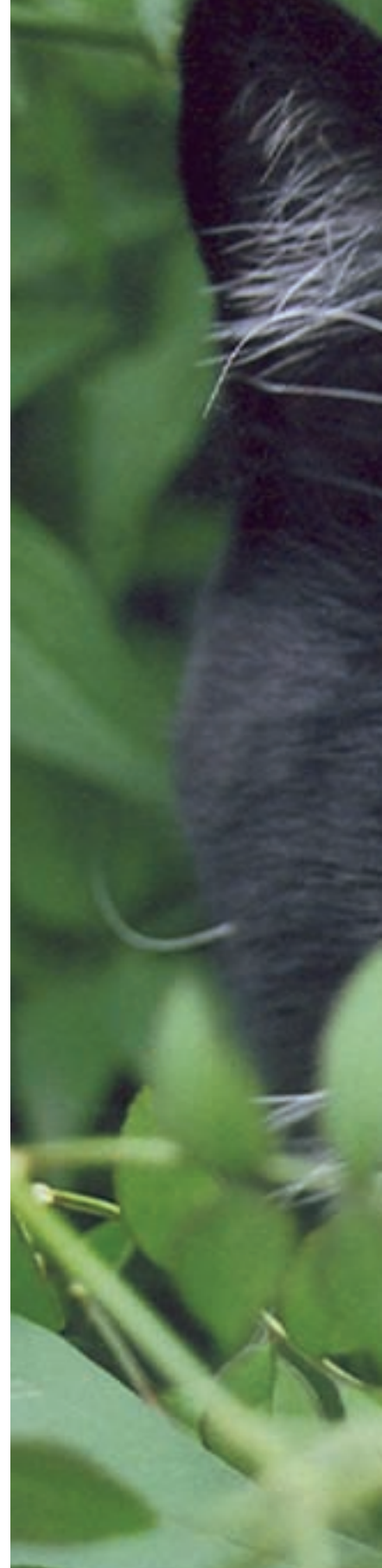
Cats will run away and hide if they feel they are in danger.

Cats are driven to keep their coats in tip top condition; this may mean that they groom off poisonous substances which they would normally avoid.

Cats are excellent at hiding signs of illness or pain – they tend to stay still and quiet so as not to attract attention. This is one of the reasons we find it hard to notice when they are ill or to notice and monitor pain.

‘Here is my cat Fusker, hiding in the bushes outside my front door and wearing the expression of pure hatred he reserves for my arrival.’

James May, journalist and presenter





Two extremely fine cats :



The late
Gordon
Maitland
Weir, one
of the great
cats of his
generation and
an example to
all of us.

R.I.P.

and his successor,
Basil Augustus, a cat
of great promise...



Kathleen McCall Smith.

HIGHLY AWARE

BEING a lone hunter, the cat needs a highly specialised system which allows it to react very quickly and successfully to food opportunities and to successfully avoid danger (perhaps this is where the concept of cats having nine lives is rooted). Being a small creature without a pack or group to help protect it or simply alert it to dangers, the cat also has to be highly reactive. It also needs to be aware of signs (usually scent) left by its own kind. While it may sleep for two thirds of the day, when it is awake it is highly aware of its environment.

What does this mean for owners?

Cats can be stressed by sights, sounds and smells in our everyday life, especially if new or sudden, and often things we are unaware of.

Cats may react quickly if disturbed or frightened.

'Cats are such elegant, mysterious creatures. They lead lives which are parallel to ours. They keep their own counsel. They watch us, but they don't condone us. I think that a cat completes a home. It provides a constant presence down at ankle level. Cats are completely necessary.'

Alexander McCall Smith, author



BRIGHT EYES BY JACQUELINE A GAYLARD





EMOTIONAL

WE may not think of the cat as an emotional creature because it does not have the facial dexterity which species such as ourselves, apes or dogs have to convey how we are feeling. However, just like us, in order to survive the cat must feel fear, pleasure and frustration, in order to learn about the quality of its environment and how to behave, and integrate what it learns into tactics for survival. A cat's natural response to threat is to run away and hide.

What does this mean for owners?

Like all mammals, cats are fast learners.

Emotions and behaviour can change very quickly.

Routine and predictability in a cat's life reduces stress and improves the cat's quality of life.

Changes in routine behaviour (such as sleeping more or avoiding contact) can occur because of emotional change or may indicate health problems.

'Chintz is my 11-year-old cat who inspires me everyday with her infinite supply of poses. Cats have tremendous therapeutic qualities – following major surgery on my spine I have really appreciated the attention Chintz has given me. She has the knack of knowing when I need a warm, fluffy friend, rhythmically purring by my side, exuding charm that is soothing and relaxing. I begin every painting with the cat's eyes, aiming to project the personality from the very outset. I trained as a graphic artist but have always been intrigued by cats.'

Jacqueline Gaylard, member of SOFA



"I am Cat, Hear me Roar!"



ADAPTABLE

THE cat can survive and thrive in a wide range of environmental and social circumstances. It can live in related groups (where it chooses its own companions) where food and shelter is abundant. It has adapted to cope with the high densities of cats we have in our homes and gardens. It has adapted to a lifestyle not necessarily active at dawn and dusk but to the activity patterns and availability of food when owners are home, and to a wide range of ‘companions’ from people to dogs and other animals.

What does this mean for owners?

Cats fit into a wide range of lifestyles with us – indeed they often appear to cope very well. Sometimes, however, we push them too far and they don’t cope any longer and that is when problems occur.



‘OK, I admit I was really a dog person growing up and when I came to get a pet I ‘settled’ for a cat, or three cats as it turned out, because they fitted into my lifestyle. What these three cats taught me is that cats have as much personality as dogs.

You only need to meet two cats before you realise this. They are all different. They love different things and interact in infinitely varied ways with their owners and visitors. I have taken to looking at Useless and thinking I have been so lucky with her. She has been such a fantastic companion, yet living her own life during the day. With a cat you get home and you ask your cat how their day was. I love her.’

Steve Leonard, vet and presenter





GINGER BY PAUL DYSON

NINE VIEWS

WHEN they live very independent lives alongside us with space and opportunity to just be cats, 'behaviour problems' are seldom seen in our felines. However, we are living more closely with our cats and controlling their lives more; we are expecting them to be happy to live with lots of other cats in the house or in areas where there is a high density of cats outside; we are even looking to them to solve our own emotional problems. Bless them, cats are very adaptable, but we can expect too much. When cats are stressed they may exhibit a range of behaviours, such as urine spraying or soiling indoors, fearfulness or occasionally even aggression, which are all part of their natural repertoire, but do not fit in with our expectations of them as pets in our homes. Thankfully there are now feline behaviourists (see contact list on page 67) who can help us to understand life from the cat's perspective and put things in place to help restore the situation or even just help us to improve how we live with them.

So, having tried to capture the essence of the cat, the behaviour group then identified nine key issues which, if we understood them better, would help to make us more empathetic owners in tune with our cats, understanding life from a feline rather than human perspective.

'Cats, whether domestic or wild, have a unique way about them, an independence and grace that appeals to me. My inspiration for painting big cats is greatly helped by studying the behaviour of my own cats – just to look closely at a paw or run my fingers through their fur helps me to understand the texture, shapes and dimensions of the animal. My cats Harry, Chip, William, Pie and Pemba have enabled me to breathe life into my paintings.'

Paul Dyson, member of SOFA





THE CAT 4 U

RELATIONSHIPS are tricky, and those between cats and humans can be especially so! But, although there's no guarantee, initially weighing all relevant factors, and choosing carefully go a long way towards ensuring success. Failure of this particular relationship can result in feline health and behaviour problems, compromised welfare, and sometimes even complete rupture of the bond between owner and cat.

So, thinking with heads not hearts, what must we consider? Examine your circumstances. It's a myth that because domestic felines are diminutive creatures they don't need plenty of room. For a species that likes to eat well away from its loo, to change favoured resting places on a regular basis, and to hide in a variety of different locations when unnerving things happen, lack of space can make the difference between happiness and misery. This is especially, but not solely, important for any cat destined to live indoors or with other cats, no matter how well bonded they may be. These needs will be magnified if the individual's characteristics make it unusually sensitive to changes, small or significant, in the physical environment, or composition of its social group. In fact, the more individuals, two and four legged, with whom any cat shares a home, the more privacy and space are necessary to ensure emotional wellbeing.

Then, of course, the environment, inside and outside the home (if there's access to outdoors), must contain the resources required for each pet to indulge all its natural species' needs. This is something that's often overlooked, especially in multi-cat households. So even for a singleton, a variety of beds, litter trays, feeding stations, activity centres, scratching posts, additional suitable hiding places, and 'water holes' need to be accommodated from the feline point of view, not the perspective of human convenience. This becomes a particularly important issue in confined cats, who are totally dependent upon us providing them with opportunities to run, jump, chase, stretch, climb, hide and so on, in addition to the basic requirements of food, company and fun. If for whatever reason these can't be provided, acquiring a cat at all is highly questionable, and more than one is simply not on – see ideas for keeping indoor cats happy on page 59.

But it's not just physical factors that matter. How much owners are around to interact with, and care for, the cat is important. Some types of pet – the bright, reactive, emotional and easily bored breeds like Siamese for instance – or certain age groups, principally youngsters and senior pets, require a much greater input in terms of time than more mature, self contained individuals, and they may have increased veterinary requirements. Long haired cats are only really suitable for people who not only have adequate time to set aside each day for the task, but the temperament to persist with life-long regular grooming – a less than enthralling occupation!

'Cats instinctively come to me as their long lost friend. I've had a succession of great cats in my life, the Lady Torte de Shell, the Revd Wenceslas Muff, William Larkin, Sans Souci and now Lettice, Lady Laskett and Perkins, all far more important to me than many of my friends. Each one, when the time comes, is honoured with a specially commissioned headstone. These beloved creatures remain as vivid in my memory as they were when living'.

Sir Roy Strong



Then finance rears its ugly head, as potential illness – related expenses as well as routine veterinary care must be accounted for, with contingency funds available for accidents and emergencies (insurance is a great idea!). And all this is before the actual breed, sex, age, or source of the pet, or pets, even begins to be considered!

So what about the cat? We all tend to have particular favourites, a breed say, or an especially appealing colour. Some people prefer kittens, some always have mature ‘rescue’ cats, while others enjoy co-habiting with numerous animals rather than a lone feline. But whatever the preference, it’s important to remember that each cat is

an individual. Despite inheriting genetic material from both parents, which will undoubtedly influence such characteristics as sociability and boldness or timidity, he or she will be unique!

So whilst we now recognise different breeds have distinct personalities, it’s a mistake to assume that acquiring a specific breed means the cat that lives with us will perfectly fit with its type’s description, or that the current moggie will be a replica of a feline we previously loved and lost.

It’s a wise owner therefore who researches ahead to be sure of acquiring a feline companion with a complementary not contradictory temperament to his or her own, but then understands that family characteristics, and the unique essence that makes an individual different from any other, no matter how closely related, will combine to influence the personality of the cat that comes to stay.

Whether to choose a kitten or an adult cat is a dilemma faced by every potential cat owner. There are thousands of adult cats in rescue centres waiting for a new home – why do people tend to prefer to start with a kitten (apart from the cute factor)?

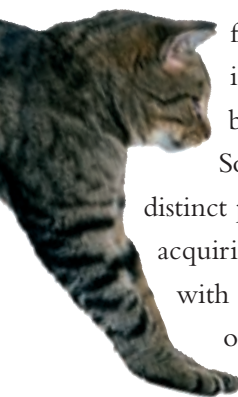
One reason, which probably stems from our beliefs about

dogs, is that we think we will be able to shape the way a kitten grows up so that we end up with exactly the kind of cat we want. All those niggling little problems we have heard about, like furniture scratching and indoor marking, will be avoided, and we will have a perfectly sociable and confident adult cat.

Sadly, the truth is somewhat different! While there is a definite benefit from training and teaching young kittens yourself, there is only so much that can be achieved because cats are highly independent and tend to develop their own routines and preferences regardless of what we do.

Kittens start their lives with a genetic inheritance that comes from their parents. The genes each kitten is born with will help to determine how large it will grow, the colour of its coat and, at least in part, what kind of personality it will have as an adult. So a kitten that is born to nervous or shy parents may appear confident and sociable at first, but it is more likely to grow up to possess the same traits. The other major factor that shapes personality is early experience. From the third to the seventh week of life kittens learn a great deal about the world they have been born into. If a kitten is reared as part of a family home with lots of activity, people and other animals it is likely to understand and feel comfortable with this kind of environment. All these factors mean that it may be a year or more before you discover your cat’s true personality.

The advantage of an adult cat is that you can see what you are getting, more or less. Even from 12 months of age most cats’ adult personality traits will be fairly clear. Even on a first meeting with the cat you can get a pretty good impression of what it is like, although as a rescue centre is not a natural environment, cats may change as they settle into their new home too. So a visit to a rescue centre can be a good way to find the type of cat that is perfect for you.





Being more independent and self-reliant than dogs, adult cats tend to cope well with re-homing as long as the home environment is right for them. Cats are rarely aggressive towards people and tend not to become over-attached so taking on an adult cat is relatively straightforward.

With a typical lifespan of about 14 years, kittenhood really is a very brief period in the cat's life. Although it's a special time, and full of amusement, most cat owners would admit that the relationship with their cat only got interesting when their pet grew up a bit. Cats tend to remain playful throughout their lives, so no cat is dull, but it is true that some enjoy play more than others. Once again, it is a question of picking the right cat for you – it may be waiting for you at your local rescue centre.

So choice is very important as is understanding what you can and can't control or change. And nowhere is this more important than when it comes to the multi-cat home. Not only should we choose with care the individuals we expect to live together, but we need to be aware that even siblings raised together, the ideal choice it seems, are likely to become more independent from each other as they mature. 'Throwing together' as adults a group of felines from different genetic stock and dissimilar backgrounds is a recipe for overt, or subtle and frequently unrecognised, stress, the development of problem behaviours, and is as unwise as it is unfair.

So the upshot is – get it wrong and everyone, especially the cat or cats, can suffer; but consider carefully, research options, have realistic expectations, make sensible not emotional choices and the chances are you'll end up with the right cat for you, and everyone will enjoy a long and happy relationship!

Janet Pidoux produces fine and detailed work that is unusual in a medium such as pastel. She is known for her animal paintings which often feature her own cats. Janet is a member of SOFA









'Honey is a tortoiseshell Burmese and one of our three cats. We have shared our home with Burmese cats for over 25 years and find them delightful and exuberant companions as well as being very beautiful. This picture illustrates one of the things that most fascinates me about portraying cats, which is the way they move. I paint a variety of subjects, including dancers and musicians, there is much similarity in portraying a dancer moving across a stage and the fluidity of a cat playing.'

Lesley Fotherby, artist





I WANT TO BE ALONE

As a social species ourselves, we have empathy for people in situations where we feel they are suffering because they are lonely. We understand the relief which comes from sharing a problem or the joy of sharing an achievement or emotion. We automatically think that animals are the same and that they need a ‘friend’. However sometimes our assumptions are based on poor understanding of how other species live. Do our pet cats want/need company?

Are cats social or solitary?

Although the domestic cat evolved from the African wildcat, a largely solitary and therefore territorial species, it has evolved the ability to live in social groups, but only in specific circumstances. ‘Natural’ groups of cats, as found in feral or farm colonies, are very friendly, cooperative societies where individuals spend a lot of time rubbing and grooming each other. By rubbing against each other the cats swap their individual scents to produce a group scent profile; therefore the cats can recognise each member of their social group because of how they smell. The cats do not have to compete for resources as they still hunt independently, consequently there is very little aggression within the group. However, if cats from outside the social group try to hunt on their territory, colony members (usually all related females) will show extreme aggression to get rid of these cats as they represent a threat to the group’s food and other resources. In the domestic situation, we provide our cats with enough food, but, as we have seen, cats are still highly motivated to protect their territory and this can include cats that live in the same household. If two cats have not grown up together from a young age there is a high risk that they will never accept each other as part of the same social group and will therefore feel threatened by the other’s presence.

Do cats show their feelings?

Because African wildcats are rarely in close proximity to each other, they did not need to develop a complex visual signalling system, like more naturally social species such as the dog. Because our cats have only recently been domesticated, they still have this inability to show lots of visual signals. This means that they are not particularly good at reading each others’ moods or dealing with situations of conflict. Therefore, in the domestic situation where they cannot easily avoid other cats they get into aggressive encounters, or become stressed by other cats, relatively often. This lack of ability to express subtle emotions will also affect interactions between cats and humans as owners may not realise that their cats are unhappy in certain situations. Cats can also be divided into two groups – those which will express their anxiety through behaviours such as



*Elizabeth Emanuel, cat lover
and clothes designer*

aggression or spraying, and those that tend to seem not to respond. Indeed they may actually stop doing lots of things – eating, sleeping or grooming, or even just playing. They may appear to be less stressed but are actually struggling hard to find ways to cope with the stressful situation.

Introducing a new cat

Many of us like owning more than one cat but realising how stressful this can be means we need to be very careful in how we introduce unfamiliar cats, because of the cat's evolutionary history. The new cat should be settled into a room of its own with all the necessary resources like food, water, comfortable resting areas and a litter tray. Keeping the new cat in this room for several days will not only allow it to settle into its new surroundings more easily but will also give the owner the chance to introduce the scent of the existing cat to the new cat and vice versa before they come face to face; this is essential as scent is the most important aspect of group recognition in cats. To do this the owner should start by swapping over the cats' food bowls; this way they will associate the pleasure of eating with the scent of the other cat. Then swap the cats' bedding and toys. The owner can then simulate the action of the two cats rubbing against each other and transferring their individual scents to produce a group scent profile by alternatively stroking each cat. The next stage is to introduce the cats visually, but at a distance to begin with, perhaps with each cat at opposite ends of a long corridor. Give each cat a bowl of food so that they associate the other with positive feelings then separate them again after they have finished eating. This can be repeated at every meal time and the cats gradually left in the same room for longer periods while moving the bowls closer together.

To increase the duration of the visual contact the owners can give each cat a fuss after they have eaten but they need to ensure that the cats are enjoying themselves. If at any point either cat looks anxious, eg, tensing or flattening

ears, then the cats need to be separated and the process repeated again at the next meal time, but with the cats at a greater distance from each other. Owners should gradually increase the length of time the two cats are in visual contact until they no longer need to be separated. Continuing to swap scent all the way through this programme will help the cats identify each other as members of the same social group. Not all cats will become the best of friends after following this programme but they will hopefully learn to accept each other and not feel threatened or stressed in each other's presence.



How cats feel about people

Although some cats will never accept living with another cat in the same household, most cats will enjoy human company. However, cats have to learn to enjoy interacting with people at a very young age if they are to accept people in later life. As has been said before, experiences that kittens have within their first two months of life are very important in influencing their behaviour and expectations right into adulthood. As kittens do not have an inbuilt need to be with people, they need to

experience interactions with people during this very important early learning period; if they do not, they are likely to be fearful of people as adult cats and may not settle in a human environment.

However, owners may not realise that their cats are only tolerating other household cats or the owners themselves as the domestic cat does not have the ability to express a wide range of emotions through body language like the more naturally social domestic dog.

THROUGH THE CAT FLAP

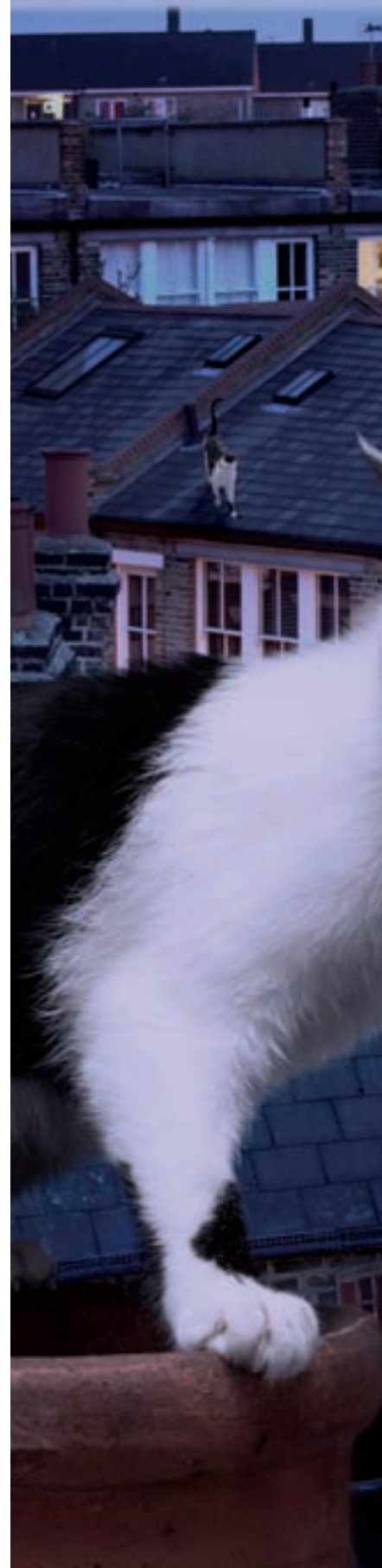
THE cat flap is an amazing device that enabled the cat apparently to set its own timetable and range. Modern flaps allow owners a significant degree of control, from free access in and out, to entirely shut in, and allowed in but not out. They also come with magnetic or electronic ‘keys’ which recognise the resident cat’s collar, but keep others out. Until relatively recently few buildings had glass in windows so cats travelled from the household part of their range to the outside part without restriction. Unlike dogs on leashes, or confined behind fences, cats set their own limits, just like their wild ancestors. True wild cats, including Scottish and European Forest Wildcats (*Felis silvestris*), normally range widely, but neither they nor household cats once through the cat flap just wander without limits. So what shapes those limits?

We often use the term ‘territory’ quite loosely, but in behavioural terms it is the area that a cat is prepared to defend. The territory is a bit smaller than the ‘home range’, which is the area the cat normally uses. For most animals that is the area it needs to support itself, so for a female wild cat it is the area it needs to hunt over to provide its food needs. In areas where prey is abundant a wild cat does not need as big a home range as in terrain where food is sparse.

As our household cats are fed off a plate they don’t need to hunt to survive, but they still have a strong drive to establish territories and ranges as these are the basis of the social structure of the cat.

In the centre of towns household cats’ territories and ranges are smaller than those in the suburbs and much smaller than those in rural areas. While it is true there is less to hunt in a town centre than more rustic venues, the main reason is us! Our housing is more tightly packed in urban areas, gardens are smaller and consequently the number of owned cats is higher.

However, although traditionally we think of the cat as ‘a loner’ social realities are still relevant. Our cats are ‘loners’ when they do go hunting, as the ancestry of the cat family is from an enclosed wooded landscape where solitary stealth hunting works best. This is unlike the dog, whose wolf ancestor hunted in a more open landscape after herds, where working as a group is more successful. The dog has inherited a ‘pack social mentality’ where it gains its confidence from the group. This is the opposite of our cats whose survival and hunting success depended on the integrity of their individual home ranges and territory. Consequently cats are cautious, and concerned about intrusions into their area.





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Understandably for species survival, sex is important and where social structure overrides territorial exclusivity. Male (tom) ranges are normally much larger than female (queen) ranges (usually from three to 10 times). Toms (particularly unneutered) are larger than queens, but not 10 times larger, so the larger size is not just for food requirements, but due to how cat society works. The range of male cats will generally overlap that of female cats (for wild cats, as well as the domestic cat). The tom defends a larger area within which those queens with whom he is most likely to mate are able to rear their young more securely.

For the average suburban household female cat her range outside of her house is normally her garden area, and a bit more. A tom additionally will range across a number of adjacent gardens.

However, there is not a 'set size' for a household cat's range or territories for it tends to depend on the property density and hence on the local cat density. (In one study of terraced urban London with small gardens, the external home ranges of the queens was only about half the size of the floor area of the two storey houses).

In our homes our cats are fed on a regular basis, so this internal world becomes like the core area of a feral group, and seemingly we are like other cats of our cat's group.

Our cats cannot have a complete view within the house and outside at the same time so just like their wild ancestors they scent mark to claim their outer range. They mark by an assortment of methods, all of which we can find in the garden. When a tom cat that has not been neutered sprays it leaves a pungent invasive mark. Cats have scent glands on their lips and chin, the top of the head and along the top of the tail. When a cat rubs around us it is these areas that it rubs against us leaving their scent, and similarly they mark in the same way on twigs, branches and other objects in their territory. Cats will also claw on trees and fences leaving both a visual and faint scent mark.

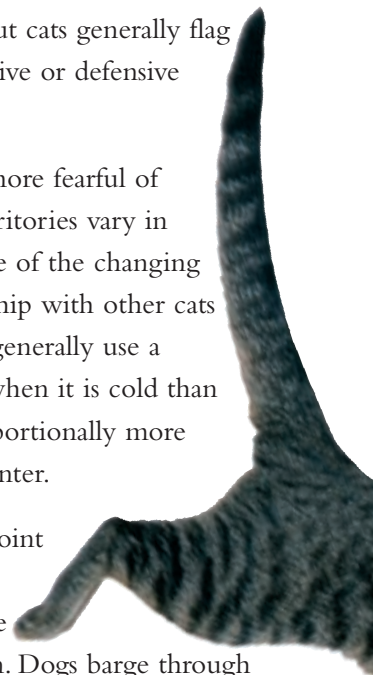
When a cat moves about its territory if it only detects its own scent its confidence of ownership is reinforced. However, when it sees an intruder or detects their presence by scent its confidence is challenged. It will cautiously investigate scent marks. The stress can make it mark more assertively, and neutered male cats may 'spray' (appearing to spray, but in reality urinating in a spray-like manner without the strong scent). It may also leave its droppings prominently sited rather than bury them.

Confrontations can lead to fights, but cats generally flag up their intentions, whether aggressive or defensive very clearly.

However, it can also make the cat more fearful of using its entire territorial range. Territories vary in size across the year for a cat, because of the changing balance of power with the relationship with other cats and with seasonal conditions. Cats generally use a reduced area in the outside world when it is cold than when warm, and usually spend proportionally more time inside the cat flap in a cold winter.

The cat flap itself is the transition point between the inner safe 'core' of the cat's territory and the riskier outside world so cats approach with caution. Dogs barge through doors, cats go carefully through their own cat flaps. They will check the scents at the door that may be wafting in from the outside, and with good reason. An assertive intact neighbourhood tom will note the role of the flap from the scent of the resident cat on the flap and the sides – and that can induce him to scent mark on or around the flap. At such times, washing down the outside of the flap can lessen the cat's anxiety.

Owners often overlook how important their presence can be for their cats, outside of the cat flap. The more they sit outside, or garden, then the more confident the cat will feel on its own patch beyond the cat flap!







'Forget the nude! The cat is the epitome of beauty – one moment an inscrutable feline model of elegance and the next a racing whirlwind chasing an imaginary mouse and having a wonderful time – we could learn a lot from the cat. I've always lived with cats and been interested in trying to capture them on paper. Here Cassie is lying on the kitchen table (where she isn't supposed to be) gazing out of the window watching the birds. She is known as The Boss and maintains a benevolent tyranny over humans and cats alike.'

*Denise Laurent,
member of SOFA*

WHEN IS A CAT GROWN UP?

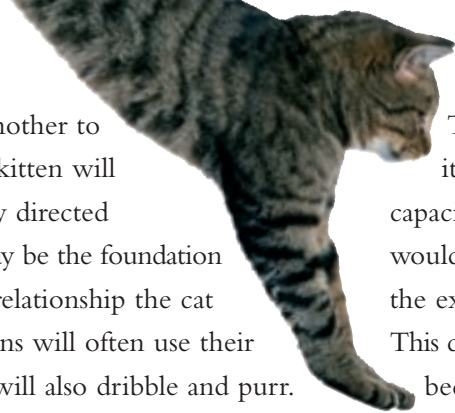
ONE of the miraculous aspects of cat ownership is that when we watch a kitten growing up we are witnessing the development of a genuinely 'wild' animal in a domestic setting. Cats, unlike dogs, are not domesticated, in the sense that selective breeding has had very little impact on the basic patterns of the cat's behaviour.

Due to regular breeding between pet and feral cats, particularly feral tom cats, there is always a strong relationship between the animal cosily snoozing in our living room and others who live a completely independent free living life outside. Indeed, most pet cats could at any time revert quite successfully to a feral lifestyle.

So as the kitten grows up it needs to learn all of the same skills that any cat possesses, wherever in the world it may live.

During the early part of kittenhood the kitten learns its social identity and how to feed itself. Its mother will wean it from suckling on to eating dead and, later, live prey. This process gradually introduces the kitten to every part of killing and hunting the prey it needs to survive. In a domestic setting the kitten also practises hunting behaviour using the objects, and other kittens, that are around it. This is the origin of the amusing batting, chasing and pouncing behaviour that all kittens spend a great deal of their time rehearsing. They also need to learn how to climb, balance and jump; behaviours that often cause the kitten owner concern, as they look dangerous and may be destructive. By participating in the play activities of kittens, using toys and games, we are taking part in their development in a very similar way to mum and littermates.





Without the presence of a mother to snuggle up with, the young kitten will also redirect some maternally directed behaviour towards us. This may be the foundation of the somewhat confusing relationship the cat has with its owners. So, kittens will often use their front feet to 'knead' us, and will also dribble and purr. This is what they would normally do around feeding times when the kneading is intended to stimulate mum to release her milk. As kittens get older, mum would normally encourage independence and the value of this kneading would decline because kittens no longer rely on her milk. However, we encourage and reward kneading, by stroking and talking to the kitten. Because we like the close contact and tactility of cats we tend to promote and maintain infantile behaviours like this, which would normally become unimportant to an adult cat. So, as kittens develop we encourage them to have a dual relationship with us as play partner and surrogate mother.

As kittens approach adulthood they develop an adult set of personality characteristics that are partly determined by their genetic inheritance, partly by their early experience and partly by the environment and how we treat them.

On average, puberty in cats begins at around nine months of age, but can be earlier or later depending on what time of year the kitten is born. This is because the cat's reproductive cycle is controlled by the increase in day length during spring and summer. From this time until full social maturity, which is at around two to four years of age, we notice gradual changes in that cat's personality. The cat starts to take possession of its own territory and may show changes in personality. In some cases kittens change from being sociable and bold, to become more solitary, self-reliant and cautious. The general level of a cat's sociability is very much related to the sociability of its parents because this trait is strongly inherited.

This period in the cat's life represents the time when it truly discovers the value of its territory and its capacity to live as an individual. In wild or feral cats this would also be when male cats gradually move away from the extended family group in which they were reared. This can be a worrying and upsetting time for cat owners because the young cat is straying further from home and entering into conflict with other cats. This is when the value of neutering takes effect, because unneutered male cats will roam and become solitary. Neutered males will be content to live within a much more limited territory and will not need to seek out opportunities to breed.

Although all cats are capable of hunting, the pet cat has less opportunity to learn the full range of hunting skills from its mother. It may never be able to hunt very effectively, and many cats are unable to catch anything more difficult than the butterflies and insects that provide their wild or feral cousins with 20 per cent of their nutrition. Additionally, unlike the villages and towns that cats originally prowled, looking for vermin that was so abundant, our modern communities support far fewer rats and mice. So, although the urban pet cat is able to hunt to a limited extent, its skill and the size and quality of its territory are never likely to provide a secure living.

This is where we humans step in yet again. From its earliest days we have provided the kitten with a source of play and comfort. Now, for the adult cat we supply the food the cat needs to make up for its inadequate hunting opportunities and the play that is needed to provide an alternative outlet for its desire for activity and hunting. Throughout the cat's life we provide various forms of support that mean that it never needs to become fully independent, and we reinforce the comfort seeking behaviours that were part of its kittenhood.





WHERE'S THE LOO?

MANY people know that cats are naturally clean animals, but they can confuse this with thinking that the cat will naturally agree with them as to where the loo is. Sure, they may both agree about what makes for a comfortable loo – somewhere quiet, where you can have a bit of privacy – but what is good for a human is not necessarily good for a cat.

Cats will often naturally bury their eliminations, and as a general rule deeper (within limits) is better – that might make the big plant pot a better tray than anything else in the house. For cats a comfortable place means somewhere that they can easily dig and scrape. Paws are sensitive organs and so digging in some substances might simply be unpleasant. If it's heavy, rough, has the wrong consistency or smell for a cat, it just might not do; regardless of how wonderful it says this cat litter is on the bag. Cats are individuals and while the majority have been shown to prefer sand or Fuller's earth as a litter, that does not mean they all do! So when you first get a cat, it's important to offer it a range of litters and see which one this cat prefers. This can help prevent problems from arising in the first place.

'Cats have always been an important part of my life – my present cats Coco, a Siamese, and Lexy, an Egyptian Mau, are two among many who have a place in my heart.'

Diane Elson, member of SOFA



Similarly outside, that newly dug bit of the garden or that expensive piece of fine gravel work recently invested in as part of a piece of minimalist gardening to create an oasis of calm, might be by far and away the best place to dig your doings! Not only is such a place easy to dig, it gives space, and many litter trays are simply too small. Try placing your cat in its litter tray and then look at it and ask can it really scratch around, turn and walk past its elimination, with ease, in this space? Just as you wouldn't want to squeeze past dirty toilets on your way to wash your hands or when leaving the toilet, nor does a cat want to squeeze past these things when it has finished its business.

Let's face it, cat poo and pee are not the nicest smelling things in the house, and so it might be tempting to go for something that is more fragrant in the litter box. But if it's fragrant to us at about two metres, what is it like closer to ground level as a cat, especially when you have more smell sensitive cells in your tiny head compared to a human, and a greater sensitivity to smell in your brain? If it's overpowering it's not very pleasant and so we shouldn't be surprised if the cat starts to look elsewhere. The same goes with cleaning agents. Simple is best.

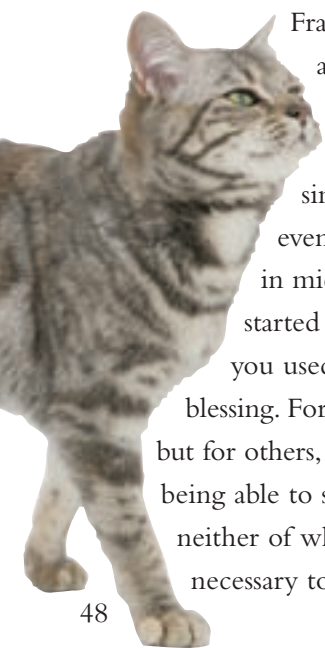
Fragrant or strong smelling cleaning agents, such as those that contain bleach or ammonia, may be unbearable.

Self-cleaning litter boxes can cause similar problems, concentrating smells, or even worse, being activated when the cat is in mid-flow! Would you ever use a toilet that started groaning and grabbing at you while you used it? Litter box covers can be a mixed blessing. For some cats they give a sense of security, but for others, they concentrate smells and stop them being able to see what is going on around them, neither of which is desirable. So again it may be necessary to see which your cat prefers.

'When ya gotta go, ya gotta go!' So what happens if you can't get to the toilet? You find somewhere else of course! There can be many reasons why a cat might find its way blocked. If there are other cats, they might monopolise the tray or access to it. Some cats just like to take control of such important resources, and will stop others using their private toilet! Some owners, in their desire to give the cat privacy, put the tray in too private a location, perhaps somewhere that doesn't always have the door open. Cats are much less likely to adopt a 'hold it till you can go' philosophy than a dog, and so it is essential that the cat has free access to the litter tray. As a general rule it's also worth having one litter tray per cat, plus one; to make sure there is always one free and preferably clean. This will only work though if they are scooped out regularly and placed in different locations, as a bully might end up blocking access if they are all in the same area.

So what makes a good toilet area? In nature a cat's latrine area is away from its hunting, feeding and main activity area and it tends to use different areas for urinating as opposed to defecating. If we want to make things work we should try to accommodate this, not only by following the number of cats plus one rule, but also by making sure that we don't put the tray next to the food bowl or close to a busy thoroughfare, such as the hallway. Rather we should look for somewhere more secluded and quiet. So next to the washing machine, dishwasher, tumble dryer or toilet are not the best starting places!

Litter box problems can also relate to disease. If a cat has had a painful bout of elimination, it may well associate the pain with the place instead of the act, and so start trying out other places. Imagine you got electric shocks off a toilet seat; would you really want to use the seat next time you needed to go? Also as cats get older, their joints can get stiff and their preferences can change. They may be less mobile and that previously wonderful high



sided deep littered tray may now become an insurmountable barrier to climb, and so it's always worth getting your cat checked over by a vet if it starts having a problem.

Finally, cats don't just wee and poo because they want to go to the toilet. Both substances can be used in marking and can be a response to highly charged emotional situations. Urine marking is not just a sexual behaviour and often happens when a cat feels threatened.

This might be because of a new cat or something else in their environment that they don't like. Marking is not necessarily on vertical objects and the volume of urine can be just as great as when going to the toilet, so it's important not to assume that the problem is necessarily associated with the toilet; it might be associated with

some other stressors. Cats can also eliminate as a result of the distress caused by separation from their owners, in which case the elimination is more likely to be on items associated with the owner's scent, such as clothing and bedding. In such cases it is essential to address the underlying stress which is causing the problem and not think that they are being spiteful.

Cats are neither miniature dogs nor miniature humans and so see the world very differently. It's their unique catty features which make them so endearing so we shouldn't expect them to necessarily have the same preferences as we do. We should recognise what they are trying to say and give them the chance to express themselves as a feline individual.





FOOD AND WATER FROM A FELINE POINT OF VIEW

THE most common method of feeding for our pet cats is probably the provision of two or three meals per day in a feeding bowl. While such an approach is common there is simply no basis for it in terms of natural feline behaviour and a better understanding of how cats search for, acquire and consume food leads us to the conclusion that fixed meal feeding is simply not appropriate for our feline friends!

There are some very important differences between the feline and human approach to food, both in terms of the pattern of feeding behaviour and the social significance of food.

The main features of feline feeding are:

the need for exploration to locate a food source

the division of feeding into multiple small periods of consumption throughout the day

the time consuming nature of food consumption over a 24 hour period

the self regulation of food intake

the desire to eat alone

In the feline world feeding is purely a functional behaviour during which cats refuel ready for their next bout of energy-consuming activity. As a result they are designed to take in very small amounts of food on frequent occasions throughout the day.

When they are faced with 50 per cent of their daily food ration offered in one sitting, their most likely response is to take a couple of mouthfuls and walk away.

Unfortunately owners can interpret this as a sign that the cat does not like the food.

Owners can react by replacing the food with something more palatable and the cat may respond initially by eating more but, after a while, it settles back to a more natural feeding pattern and begins to pick at the food again. This can be misinterpreted that the cat no longer likes the second food and the process begins again!

So if we can, we should encourage the cat's natural tendency to regulate how much it eats itself. It is helpful for kittens to be exposed to an ad lib supply of food from a very early age and to be encouraged to actively locate their food by hiding it or by using puzzle feeders. It is also important to consider the links between highly palatable foods and the sensitivity of satiation control. If palatable food is only available for short periods of time in set locations (ie, twice daily meals) then cats will learn to continue eating past the point of satiation (full and satisfied) and eventually the sensation of satiation can be overridden.

'Pushkin died aged 19 after a life of old maid hedonism. My late husband, Jack Rosenthal, lavished her with love and affection and home-cooked food and she, unfairly, only had eyes for me. I now have a Basenji dog who behaves like a cat and I'm her total slave and she only has eyes for others. What goes around, comes around...'

Maureen Lipman, actress, pictured with Pushkin



This can be a problem when changing diet from fixed meals to an ad-lib diet because cats are unable to restrict their own intake. In such circumstances it can be helpful to use a system of restricted self-service where owners dictate the overall amount of food that is given per day but the cat is able to regulate when it eats it. Supplying small quantities of food more frequently at times when you are at home may help to decrease begging for food and avoid the temptation to increase the amount of food. If the cat shows no regulation of its own food intake this may be a sign of possible underlying problem or behavioural disorders.

Food is the ultimate survival resource and, for cats, it is a private affair. Given the choice they will search, acquire and consume their prey in solitude and, with the exception of mothers teaching their kittens to hunt successfully, the feeding process is not a socially interactive one. Therefore behaviours such as leg rubbing and vocalising are actually signals of initiating social interaction, rather than signs that a cat is hungry and wanting food. However, they are commonly misinterpreted and many owners will offer more food. The cat will quickly learn that it can use these behaviours to control the supply and, since owners derive comfort from their pet seeking them out in this way, they will often increase the amount of food that they offer as a way of rewarding the social interaction. We need to understand the meaning of rubbing and vocalising behaviour, and play or interact rather than feed so that the cat returns to a more natural method of feeding. Risks of overfeeding and obesity will also be reduced.

The fact that cats prefer to eat alone is highly significant. A house with lots of cats needs lots of feeding places so that each cat can get to food freely, quickly and on its own. Even when cats enjoy each other's company they will prefer to eat alone. Where there are several groups of cats in the house the need for separate feeding stations becomes even more important. A willingness by cats in

the same household to come together at feeding times is often taken as a sign that they get along with each other just fine. However, it is important to remember that food is a vital survival resource and, since food delivery is controlled by owners at certain times and places cats may have to suppress feelings of conflict to gain access to food. Cats may suspend hostility for long enough to eat their meal but the level of tension between the cats at other times may actually increase.

Water is another issue and understanding natural drinking behaviour can help to ensure the cat gets enough. In the wild the cat eats food with a high water content, such as mice, and this provides the majority of its water. The cat does not often simply drink. However, pet cats are often fed on foods low in water content. Less water can be a risk factor for medical conditions such as cystitis.

To encourage cats to drink, water should be sited away from food areas. Cats will naturally drink in separate locations to where they consume food. In multi-cat households cats are unlikely to override social tension to get to water. Free flowing water is often more attractive to cats than water in a bowl. This relates to a natural instinct to avoid static water which may be stagnant. Running taps or cat drinking fountains can offer convenient ways to provide moving water. Multiple water bowls that allow cats to drink alone are important. Avoid materials such as plastic, which can taint the water – use glass, metal or ceramic containers. Provide the water in a large wide container which enables the cat to lap from the edge. Keep the water topped up so the cat does not need to lower its head into the container and lose sight of the meniscus of the water.

Our pet cats are still very close to their wild ancestors in terms of behaviour. By paying attention to how cats naturally eat and drink we can significantly reduce stress. We can also reduce the risk of certain medical conditions, such as obesity and lower urinary tract disease, which can be made worse if we get it wrong.





THE ART OF BEING IN CHARGE

'You own a dog, but you feed a cat' so the famous saying goes, and although the concept of owning any animal is now frowned upon and deemed non-PC, the notion that a dog is dependent on us, but a cat is independent, is certainly true. When you share your home with a cat, you would be a fool to think that you are master or mistress of the house – that title definitely belongs to your mog.

The cat is in charge of its own destiny, survival and wellbeing: it knows that independence is the ultimate self-protection. If you rely on someone to provide all the resources necessary to live, then your future is reliant on the benevolence of another, as many abused dogs have found out to their cost. If a cat is not fed, watered, or given shelter, warmth, security and love, then it will soon up sticks and find herself another home, usually hunting or scavenging for food and well able to get by living feral in the meantime. A dog, often devoted to its owners, regardless of how little love it receives, would die from its misplaced loyalty.

The cat maintains independence by living on its wits and relying on no one. Familiarity provides security; the unknown does not. Anything new in the home or outside territory is viewed with caution – it could be a threat. The adage that curiosity killed the cat might be true in some cases, but 'curiosity saved the cat' is probably a fairer truth.

If something new enters the cat's territory – even if it's an empty cardboard box – a cat must assess whether it poses a danger and can only do this by investigating it and by going on high-alert. Eyes will focus intently; the body will prepare itself for

fight, or more likely, flight. The cat may initially hide from the unfamiliar object from the safety of a high vantage point, or from a defensible position under the furniture, and watch it from a distance; but once it feels safe to approach, the cat will do so, slowly and cautiously, head bobbing, neck outstretched, to catch any scent. If the item shows no signs of danger, it will be examined more closely, and, once it's been fully watched, examined, sniffed, and jumped inside of, then the cat will feel comfortable enough to relax and snooze with it in the same room, though perhaps initially with one eye open, to double-check it's not going to do something unexpected.

This independence, where the cat relies on its own wits for her personal safety and has maintained all the instincts necessary for survival, has served the cat well through 13 million years of evolution – sharing a home with a loving family that provides for its needs is no excuse to relax and switch off those well-honed instincts! But the cat doesn't just rule its own destiny – it is very much in charge of cohabitantes as well. Often the smallest member of the house, the cat is a major influence on group dynamics. How many times have you seen a dog sleep on the hard floor, squashed into a corner somewhere, while the cat lies outstretched, luxurious, in the dog's comfy bed? Or how many times have you found yourself trying to creep your way down into three inches of spare duvet, precariously perched on one corner of your own bed, rather than even contemplate shifting the sleeping puss who has bagsied itself three-quarters of the double bed and is snoozing contentedly?

'Cat Pester Power is a form of torture. Our champion of feline/human martial/psychological arts came from a rescue centre. Little did we know at first glimpse of this elongated moggie how much he would come to eschew feline subtleties for direct action. No laden table escaped infra-red cats' eyes and the kitchen had to be off limits to our mafia of one. The painting displays stealth action, a Sherman technique.'

Lois Sykes, member of SOFA





A cat doesn't just train us to let sleeping cats lie, it is also in charge of all resources. First, food. Cats know what they like and how to get it. If not hunting for it, the cat will simply make you hunt for what it wants! If you put something in the bowl that isn't up to her personal tastes and standards, she'll sniff it, look at you as if you're crazy, and wait for you to reconsider. You can try to take a stand but it is difficult. The independent feline may march off, fetch a mouse and crunch it up in front of you to teach you a lesson; march next door or to some other cat-friendly home to be fed; or sit tight and stare at you until you can stand it no more. Convinced she's going to expire from malnutrition, you'll eventually give her a pouch of her favourite gourmet cuisine. At your next shopping trip, would you risk buying anything other than her preferred food? No – cat 1, you 0.

Freedom is another case in point. Cats are free spirits. Their independence is vital to them, and they like to come and go as they please. Shut an internal door in the house, to keep draughts out in the winter, and a cat is likely, immediately, to wake and want to go through it. It will sit, mewing plaintively until you open it. You put the newspaper down, get up from your comfy chair, open the door and shut it afterwards. You sit down, start reading the paper... and the mewing starts up again. Or the scratching. Or the jumping at the door handle. You get up, let the cat through. It only takes a couple more of the same to train you to leave the door ajar, draught or not. Cat 2, you 0.

The same applies to the back door, of course – it takes new owners no more than a couple of weeks at most to be trained to install a cat flap. At the end of the day, it's that or a knee-replacement operation from the endless getting up and down to let the cat in, out, in, out, in again, back out, ad infinitum. Cat 3, you 0.

Put the litter tray in too busy a thoroughfare and you will find poo in a quiet corner under the stairs instead. How many accidents does it take for her to train you to put the tray where the cat wants it? Not many! Cat 4, you 0.

Ditto the bed. If you put the bed in the wrong place, it will collect dust and the cat will sleep on the pile of freshly ironed clothes instead. Cat 5, you 0.

And so it goes on: the cat tallies scores on the board daily, where you stagnate at zero... In all things, your cat is in charge. You can try to kid yourself that you are top of the food chain – but look above your shoulder, and you'll see a tail hanging down!

'I was asked to unveil a poster by Battersea Dogs Home and was persuaded to make a tour! I came across little Saffy, a mournful thin six-year-old seal-point Siamese cat. She was fastidiously cleaning herself with one back leg raised up in the air, toes pointed, like an elegant ballerina. Saffy had a reputation for being 'vicious', and as a result the Home would not let her go anywhere with children. I took her out and she hissed at everyone – except me. She lived pampered and adored until she was 16 years old. She never bit anyone and allowed my very young nieces to carry her around however and wherever they wanted without minding a bit. One of her most endearing traits was to 'hold hands'. She would come up to me, let out that deep meow familiar to her breed and gently tap my arm until I extended my hand and she could sit beside me with her paw resting in it. I have tried to capture Saffy's spectacular blue eyes in my drawing. I do miss her.'

Lynsey de Paul, singer and songwriter





My Beautiful Saffy the Siamese





CAN CATS BE HAPPY INDOORS?

WHEN we keep our cats entirely indoors we are limiting their territory and with this their ability to carry out all of their natural behaviours. Therefore we have to think carefully, find out what cats need and then make the effort to keep them challenged and active. Where safety outdoors is the issue, there are options such as fencing in the garden or providing an outdoor run which can help provide the cat with stimulation.

The provision of certain 'cat resources' within the home will ensure the entertainment, stimulation and security of the indoor cat. These resources include basic necessities such as food and water together with other provisions to allow the cat to exhibit natural behaviour.

Food

The availability of food twice a day, or even 'ad lib', in a bowl in the kitchen is often the norm for the indoor cat. The idea of 'foraging', using dry food, works on the principle that obtaining smaller amounts more frequently in a variety of locations represents a more natural way of feeding (see page 51). Once your cat is used to obtaining food in novel locations the acquisition can become more challenging. For example:

Build cardboard pyramids of toilet roll tubes. Place biscuits half way along each tube and allow the cat to obtain the food by using its paw. Attach the base to a carpet tile or piece of wood to provide stability.

Place biscuits inside cardboard boxes, egg boxes or paper bags.

Place a couple of biscuits inside a rolled up piece of tissue paper.

Throw some cat biscuits across the floor – some cats enjoy chasing them.

'I have lived with cats all my life and for me home is not a proper home without at least one cat. They are visually beautiful, their marking and the texture of their fur as well as their graceful agility makes irresistible subject matter for my paintings.'

Celia Pike, member of SOFA



Water

A variety of receptacles can be placed away from the cat's food to provide interest and encourage drinking. Pet drinking fountains, indoor water features, resin tumblers or ceramic, stainless steel or glass bowls can all be used.

Vegetation

A source of grass is essential for the house cat to act as a natural emetic to aid the elimination of hairballs. This can be purchased as commercially available 'kitty grass' or pots of grass and herbs can be grown indoors specifically for this purpose. FAB produces a comprehensive list of potentially harmful plants and flowers to avoid indoors.

Litter trays

The ideal number of litter trays in an indoor environment is 'one tray per cat plus one', placed in different discreet locations. These can be covered with hoods or open shallow trays containing a commercial litter with which the cat is familiar. Some cats can be averse to polythene liners and litter deodorants.

The locations should be discreet, away from busy thoroughfares, feeding areas and water bowls.

The trays should be cleaned regularly.

The type of litter should ideally reflect the cat's natural desire to use a sand-like substance.

Never expect an indoor cat to share a tray with another.

Social contact

It is important to allow the indoor cat to dictate the type and pace of contact with owners. It is best to respond to a cat's approach rather than initiate it as this can be irritating or, at the worst, distressing for the cat. Predatory play, grooming and verbal communication are important social contacts between owner and cat so these areas

should not be neglected in favour of the more popular stroking. Some cats enjoy the company of their own species so the introduction of two littermates initially may be useful if cat(s) are left at home alone during the day.

High resting places

Cats are natural climbers so the home environment should reflect this by providing:

Areas to rest and observe proceedings from an elevated vantage point.

Tall scratching posts.

Free-standing cupboards and wardrobes; place furniture nearby to give your cat a halfway platform for ease of access.

Shelving can provide sanctuary if a small area is cleared for the cat's use.

Securing a section of closed weave carpet to a wall represents a challenging climbing frame.

A heavy-duty cardboard tube from the inside of a roll of carpet can be utilised indoors.

Private areas

Cats need 'time out' from owners and other cats so there must be a number of places where they can hide without fear of being discovered, such as under the bed, inside cupboards or wardrobes or behind the sofa. These places are sacrosanct and a cat should never be disturbed or acknowledged while using a private area.

Beds

Cats like to sleep in different places depending on mood or time of day. A radiator hammock is great in the winter but there is little substitute for the owner's duvet. A synthetic thermal fleece can personalise the cat's area to contain any fur or muddy paw prints.

Scratching posts

Cats need to scratch to maintain their claws and mark their territory; if provisions are not made for this then cats may scratch furniture. Scratching posts or panels should be tall and rigid to allow the cat to scratch vertically at full stretch. Some cats prefer to use horizontal surfaces so a variety of scratching areas should be provided.

Predatory play

Fishing rod toys are ideal to simulate the movement of prey. Laser penlights are popular but can be frustrating toys as the light is impossible to catch. Many cats enjoy retrieval games and this can represent an opportunity for social contact as well as play; towelling hair bands are just the right size for a cat to pick up.

Toys

It is also useful to have toys that the indoor cat can play with when it is on its own. Toys soon become boring if they are allowed to remain motionless in the same place so a random selection should be brought out daily to maintain their novelty. Toys made from real fur (as a by-product of a food source) and feather, of a similar size to prey animals, are popular.

Rubbish can also be fascinating:

A rolled up piece of paper thrown across the floor
(tin foil works just as well)

A cork

The plastic seal on the top of a milk container
(under supervision only)

A walnut

An empty crisp packet tied into a knot

Novel items

Novel items, such as wood, cardboard boxes and paper bags (with handles removed), should be brought into the home on a regular basis to challenge the cat's sense of smell and desire to explore novel things.

Fresh air

There are a variety of secure grills that can be fitted to open windows that will allow fresh air, carrying exciting smells, to enter the house without the risk of your cat falling.

As we saw in the introduction, cats are active, intelligent and sensitive. Providing an indoor environment with them in mind can improve their quality of life considerably.



GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY– SUPPORT FOR THE OLDER FELINE

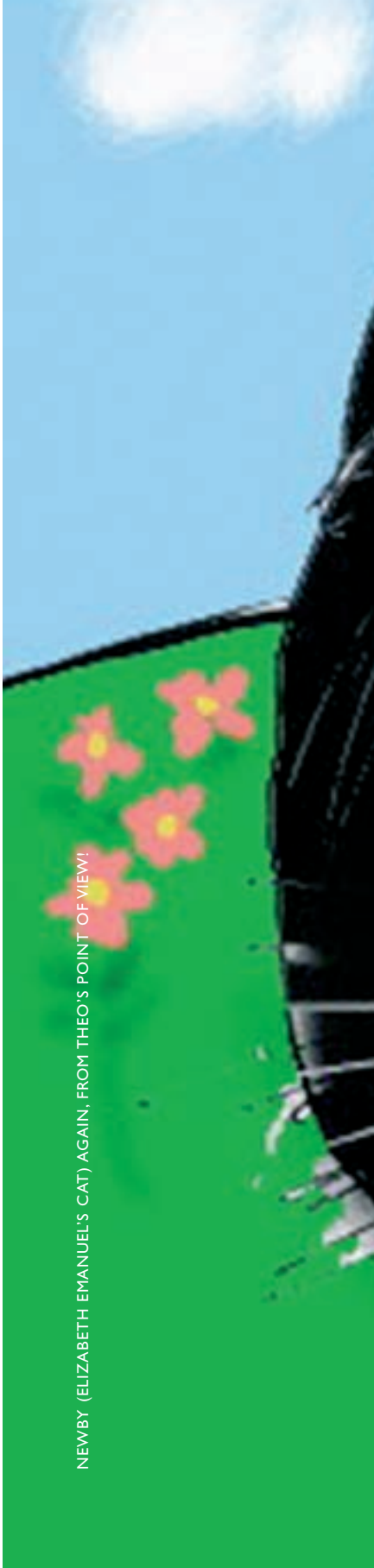
CATS are the UK’s favourite pet. The UK domestic cat population is approximately 9.2 million (2003 figures) and more and more of these cats are living longer. In fact around two million are over eight years old and many are between 16 and 20. And because of their independence and ability to hide illness, maintaining the wellbeing and quality of life of these ‘older’ cats can be particularly challenging.

So, how old is ‘old’? The most well known rule of thumb is that one human year equates to seven ‘cat years’, but it is a little more complicated than that. The cat spends the first two years of its life racing through childhood and adolescence and on to early adulthood. Thereafter, the process slows down to a more leisurely four cat years per human year, as shown in the table.

It is generally agreed that a cat may be classified as ‘senior’ at around 11 to 14 years old (60 to 72 cat years) and ‘geriatric’ at over 14 (over 72 cat years). The term ‘geriatric’ is often used in a derogatory fashion that implies disease rather than the normal ageing process.

In the preceding chapters we explored ‘what a cat is’ and how this information could help us improve the cat’s quality of life. But what additional challenges do older cats present? The stoical cat is remarkably good at masking when it is not feeling well. So it falls upon you to be aware of the most common problems that can afflict older cats. The most common chronic diseases of older cats include kidney problems, thyroid problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, dental problems and arthritis. It is beyond the scope of this section to discuss each of these conditions in detail, but here are some facts that will help owners to identify and sometimes prevent potential problems.

Age of human	Equivalent age of cat
1 year	15 years
2 years	24 years
3 years	28 years
6 years	40 years
9 years	52 years
12 years	64 years
15 years	76 years
18 years	88-91 years
21 years	100-106 years



NEWBY (ELIZABETH EMANUEL'S CAT) AGAIN, FROM THEO'S POINT OF VIEW!



Thyroid problems

An overactive thyroid gland (hyperthyroidism) is a common condition in older cats and the first signs are often unexplained changes in behaviour such as inappropriate elimination around the house, changes in grooming and eating habits, together with weight loss, vomiting and diarrhoea. It can also be related to high blood pressure which, apart from damaging vital organs, could also cause unpleasant effects such as headache, migraine and dizziness.

Dental problems

Dental disease is very common in older cats and can be extremely painful and unpleasant. Common signs are loss of appetite and weight loss, running away from food, chattering teeth, clicking sounds when eating, bolting down food and bad breath. Surprising as it may seem, some cats suffer in silence despite advanced dental decay and painful teeth.

Arthritis

Arthritis is not generally considered a common condition in older cats. This is a mistake. Owners should not assume that the reason their cat sleeps more and is reluctant to go out, play with toys or jump up on the kitchen table is just part of 'getting old'. Joints need to be used to keep them working smoothly. Sleeping more and doing less exercise can lead to further deterioration of joints and muscles and more pain. Appropriate pain relief can transform the cat's quality of life.

Dehydration

Older cats do not respond so well to being thirsty and so can become dehydrated – this can be a serious problem if they are already unwell. Ensuring a good supply of easily accessible fresh water in wide bowls strategically

positioned around the house can help (see page 52).

Some cats can be encouraged to drink more by flavouring the water with a little fresh fish or chicken stock.

Feeding

There is little specific, hard scientific data on the optimal diet for healthy older cats. The best advice is to feed a good quality commercial complete adult maintenance diet. Feline prescription diets formulated for specific conditions such as diabetes (high fibre), inflammatory bowel disease (select protein) and renal disease (restricted protein and phosphorus) are helpful. With advancing age taste is further diminished and cats can stop eating, especially if they are unwell, or their familiar routine is disrupted. So, whatever the diet, owners should choose a brand that their cat likes and readily eats, and that does not cause vomiting or diarrhoea. The best diet in the world is useless if your cat won't eat it!

Eyesight and hearing

Eyesight of older cats does not deteriorate excessively but can be affected by high blood pressure or other diseases common in old age. Hearing loss on the other hand is common and some older cats become completely deaf. Blind and deaf cats adapt remarkably well, provided their familiar routine and surroundings are not suddenly altered. In fact owners might be quite unaware of the problem until they inadvertently disrupt something in their cat's life. For example by moving litter trays, redecorating, moving house, or getting another pet. Blind or deaf cats should never be let outside unsupervised because they are so vulnerable to everyday hazards like other cats, dogs and traffic. Unexplained changes in behaviour, such as not using the litter tray, reluctance to go outside, and excessive sleeping may be clues to impaired sight or hearing.

Grooming

Older cats spend less time grooming themselves and keeping their coat in tip-top condition. This renders the coat a less efficient insulator. Owners should therefore groom their cats regularly to remove excess hair and debris and spread natural oils. In addition, the ability to regulate body temperature decreases in older cats and adequate provision of coolness and ventilation in the summer, and warmth and protection from draughts in the winter is vital, particularly in thin and frail cats.

Dementia

A gradual decline in the brain's ability to process information is a normal part of ageing in all mammals. The formation of 'senile plaques' in the brains of humans

has been shown to cause senile dementia (Alzheimer's Disease), and similar lesions have been identified in older cats. Feline cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS) can result in a range of behavioural changes including increased irritability, aggression, decreased interest in owners, changes in sleep patterns, excessive vocalisation, aimless pacing or walking in circles and inappropriate elimination. Some vital brain neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine may also be depleted in aged cats and this could result in a depressed mood state.

With increased owner awareness of some of the special requirements of their older cats, there is every reason for them to live long, happy and fulfilled lives. Further information on all of the conditions mentioned can be found on the FAB website at www.fabcats.org





THE SOCIETY OF FELINE ARTISTS

THE SOCIETY OF FELINE ARTISTS (SOFA) was founded in September 1994, with the specific aim to promote the work of the best cat artists, whether established or unknown, and many of their members have been staunch and valued supporters of the FAB and have used their considerable talent to help us over the years.

Their subjects range from the moggy and the friendly domestic tabby to the more exotic breeds like Siamese, Burmese and Bengals and of course the big cats. From the nobility and drama of the wild cat to the playful kitten – all are painted with the mastery of artists who know and understand their subject. To find out more about this remarkable collection of artists visit www.felineartists.org

MORE INFORMATION ON FELINE BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC)

The APBC is an international network of experienced and qualified pet behaviour counsellors, who, on referral from veterinary surgeons, treat behaviour problems in dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, horses and other pets. The APBC also runs seminars and workshops, both for its members and others interested in the field of pet behaviour therapy. www.apbc.org.uk

Centre of Applied Pet Ethology

COAPE aims to instil an understanding of the animals' view of our world and how we harness this knowledge to improve and develop happy relationships between pets and their owners. COAPE offers study courses, from Foundation Level to Diploma. There is also a list of COAPE Companion Animal Behaviour Practitioners and Affiliates. www.coape.co.uk

Companion Animal Behaviour Therapy Study Group

If you are a vet, you may be interested in the Companion Animal Behaviour Therapy Study Group (CABTSG) which exists to facilitate the exchange of information, experiences and ideas between its members. As an affiliate of the British Small Animal Veterinary Association, its members are also involved in producing educational materials and lectures for the veterinary and related professions as well as disseminating information and advice to other organisations on issues relating to animal behaviour. Its aim is to try wherever possible to promote greater understanding of behaviour problems in companion animals. www.cabtsg.org

'I fell in love with my first cat, Tobbers, when I chose him from a litter of kittens in a drawer. From autocratic Siamese to sweet natured tabbies, they have all won a place in my heart. Cats make the most wonderful, if not the most willing, subjects. As a printmaker, my cats and those of friends have been the subject of many etchings and linocuts trying to capture the mood and the moment. Whether it is the look of alert anticipation as a bird settles nearby, or the satisfied sleepy look of the well fed cat in front of the fire, each expression and pose provides endless material for my attempts to capture that elusive 'essence of cat'.'

Alex Johnson, member of SOFA



WHAT IS THE FELINE ADVISORY BUREAU?

THE FELINE ADVISORY BUREAU is the country's leading charity on issues relating to the care of sick cats and the health of all cats. Established in 1958 FAB seeks to raise the standard of treatment and care provided to cats – by veterinary surgeons, boarding cattery operators, those involved in rescue work, breeders and the general cat-owning public. FAB receives no public funding – it is reliant on membership, donations and legacies.

In addition to funding feline residents and lecturers at UK veterinary schools, FAB offers information on a wide range of cat-related health and behavioural issues. Our website features over 500 pages and tells you everything you ever wanted to know about cats – www.fabcats.org. Information sheets and advice are available from the FAB office which can be contacted between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday on 0870 742 2278.

FAB has produced three best-selling manuals which are considered to be the standard in their field. *The Boarding Cattery Manual* is full of advice and information for anyone thinking of opening or taking over an established cattery. It clearly demonstrates how a cattery can be built and managed to provide cats with a healthy, secure and comfortable environment.

The Cat Rescue Manual considers every aspect of practical cat rescue work from the initial establishment of a shelter through to management, staffing, homing, publicity and fund-raising. It is invaluable for anyone starting out on the road to rescue work and remains a valuable reference book for even the most experienced and battle-hardened rescuer.

Many people drawn to help feral cats hadn't planned to do so! They often have the passion and drive to get involved but not the knowledge or experience to deal with the inevitable problems. FAB has drawn together people who have valuable and well-honed experience in this field and together they have written *The FAB Feral Cat Manual* to guide people involved or about to become involved in this field.

FAB organises study days and conferences for vets, vet nurses, breeders and pet cat owners.

In the mid 1990s, FAB founded the European Society of Feline Medicine for veterinary surgeons throughout Europe – which produces a bi-monthly peer-reviewed journal and is responsible for a major conference in Europe each September.

Membership of FAB is open to anyone who has an interest in cats and full details are available through the website – www.fabcats.org

