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people tend to like or dislike cats for the same reasons. One chooses a cat's independence, while the other dislikes its alooseness. One respects the cat for his quiet, dignified nature, while the other suspects him of being sneaky.

Despite this mixed attitude, cats have now topped the American popularity charts. More than 57 million cats are kept in more than 29 million households nationwide, according to a survey conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association. "Man's best friend," the dog, now holds second place at 52.5 million.

So it seems the cat has become America's new "best friend." It also seems, however, that the cat, though widely loved, is still widely misunderstood. Our present dichotomous image of cats derives from the diverse treatment we've given cats over the past 4,000 years. Egyptians worshipped the cat as a god; denizens of the Dark Ages feared and thus abused the cat as the devil's familiar. By the eighteenth century, the attitude leveled out to a simple, unsympathetic coexistence.

Today, we keep them for companionship. We find them fascinating and complex beings with a wide range of behaviors, emotions, and needs. But we're only just discovering those needs. Animal control officers can attest to the fact that cats are given less care, less protection, and less respect than dogs. Perhaps this is because, unlike dogs, cats tend to be acquired without much forethought. Most frequently, cats arrive as free "gifts" from friends or relatives, or they may simply be "free" to the owners perceive their cats as self-sufficient, low-maintenance pets; too many cats are given less care, less protection, and less respect than dogs. Perhaps this is because, unlike dogs, cats tend to be acquired without much forethought. Most frequently, cats arrive as free "gifts" from friends or relatives, or they may simply be "free.

We operate with two realities when it comes to cats. On the one hand, fewer people recognize their care, protection, welfare, and status of cats, animal-care and -control agencies must be used for the educational purposes for which they are intended.

Six Shelter Goals for 1993

Adopting Out Pairs

To increase the number of pets adopted, shelters will train more employees to adopt out pairs. The HSUS predicts that in ten years, the vast majority of localities will treat dogs and cats equally in terms of funding and programs. The challenge of the animal protection movement is to help accelerate the process. Can and can do suffer just as much as dogs. And they are equally deserving of our consideration, above and beyond any public health arguments.

The American Humane Association, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, The Humane Society of the United States, and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have joined together to proclaim 1993 the "Year of the Cat." The goal is simple: to improve the care, protection, welfare, and status of cats.

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value purebred traits in felines than in personality and less on genetics and registration papers. On the other hand, feline owners are more likely to choose a cat by virtue of their cost (low versus their canine counterparts. Cat owners by virtue of their cost (low perceived source for cats; cats are perceived as more expensive than dogs. In addition to information on cat care, low-cost spay/neuter programs, and adoption events, shelters typically appeal to prospective cat owners by virtue of their cost (low adoption fees), services (vaccinations, information on cat care, low-cost spay/neuter services, etc.), and moral position (saving homeless animals). In addition to promoting those attributes to the public, shelters can take advantage of the Year of the Cat to help even more cats find lifelong homes by promoting the adoption of pairs of cats. Owners of more than one cat isn’t a new idea to many cat owners. Surveys of the pet and veterinary services industries show that nearly half of America’s 30 million cat-owning households are home to two or more cats. These pet owners know the benefits of paired cats. Cats, especially indoor-only cats who are left alone much of the day, are typically healthier and happier with another cat to spend time with and worry about. And though monetary costs do increase, the amount of care needed for two cats is only marginally more than that needed for just one. Shelters, of course, must do their part by ensuring that paired cats are screened for health and compatibility and spayed or neutered. By educating and offering incentives to prospective adopters, shelters can increase the number of multi-cat homes—keeping in mind that while pets of cats are wonderful, more than three cats may not be such a good idea.

The Indoor Cat

In tandem with espousing the virtues of adopting in pairs, animal-care and control agencies should educate cat owners about the necessity of keeping cats indoors. While many shelters do not stipulate that all adopted cats remain exclusively indoors, they can work to advise adopters of the many benefits. Indoor cats have a much lesser chance of being victimized by disease, parasites, poisoning, other animals, cruel people, traps, and traffic. They also won’t contribute to pet overpopulation or kill small mammals and songbirds.

The best way to persuade cat owners to keep their cats indoors is when they first obtain the pet; after that, helping an indoor-outdoor cat adjust to life inside is much more of a challenge, one that few pet owners are willing to meet.

Tenants and Pets

While cats are more commonly accepted in rental housing than dogs, they remain excluded from the majority of rental properties. The Year of the Cat is an excellent time to persuade landlords to accept cats—and allow pairs of cats. Tell rental property owners the benefits of allowing pets in their apartments, especially the fact that pet owners are more likely to remain tenants in rental properties for longer periods than non-tenants. If necessary, this happens because there is so little rental housing available to pet owners.

Responsible pet owners should require that cats be spayed or neutered and that declawing should not be a requirement of tenancy.

Helping Cats Keep Their Claws

Too many veterinarians and pet owners consider declawing a cat to be “routine,” when in fact such a painful surgical solution should be an absolute last resort for any cat. Humane agencies should teach cat owners the facts about declawing. The procedure for declawing a cat is called an onychectomy, which involves the amputation of the claw and end bone of each toe. Cats convalesce for one to two weeks, during which time the pain gradually diminishes. In essence, declawing is an invasive, surgical solution to a behavioral problem.

Cats typically undergo this painful procedure at the behest of pet owners too lazy to spend time solving the fundamental behavioral problem—scratching. Feral cats are a constant reminder of how much more of a challenge, one that few pet owners are willing to meet.

Animals and human feeders who ensure regular nutrition that feral cats’ lives, while not as free of suffering—and that as long as they are spayed or neutered, feral cats are better off living on the streets.

Feral cats can and do survive for varying lengths of time, but the odds of a feral cat dying a natural death are slim indeed. Feral cat ‘colonies’ are in a constant state of flux—with some cats succumbing to disease, starvation, or traffic and others entering the colony. Certainly, feral cat colonies with reliable human feeders who ensure regular veterinary care are better off than others. Regardless, feral cats deserve to be brought in from the elements and tamed and adopted, if possible, or euthanized if they cannot be placed.

The feral cat problem is one of the biggest challenges. With all the animal problems facing humane agencies, it’s a simple matter indeed to let feral cats continue leading lives of privation. But educating the public about the realities of feral cats, abandonment, and pet overpopulation must remain an integral part of the language of today’s humane animal shelter.

Changing Attitudes

Animal-care and control agencies should take advantage of the Year of the Cat to help further cats’ care and protection on all these fronts. Despite their reputation for doing what they please and trying exactly what they want, cats do not always get what they need. And the attitude some people interpret as indifference may simply be a defense mechanism that has become ingrained over time. “Perhaps a small part of the cat’s notorious reserve and aloofness is something like whistling in the dark,” observed prize-winning author Lloyd Alexander more than three decades ago. “A cat’s life can be as difficult as our own. And it may be that we comfort them for being as much as they comfort us for being human.” The Year of the Cat is the perfect time to spread the message that cats are indeed deserving of such comfort.
sounds, smells, noises, and other cats, he needs a 24-hour, calm-down period, however, cats who bite, have a good history, and are not aggressive to other cats, will not need to be isolated. Even cats that have been neutered may still be aggressive to other cats. The shelter personnel should make sure their cages are not without their banes. They allow cats to enjoy other cats’ company. They show cats off to better advantage to potential adopters.

Foster Home Programs

Cat lovers frequently volunteer to help socialize cats in animal shelters. Many times volunteers are willing also to serve as foster homes. Foster homes are a prime incubators of feline diseases, especially upper respiratory infections.

Small, poorly ventilated cat rooms can be prime incubators of feline diseases, especially upper respiratory infections.
**An investment in staff training can ensure that cat procedures are carried out with competence and compassion.**

as foster owners for surplus cats.

"We place over 400 animals a year through our foster program," says Mary Vozebule, director of humane education and adoption at the Montgomery County Humane Society (14645 Loribeg Dr., Rockville, MD 20850).

"Rather than put an animal to sleep because we’re out of space, we have foster-home families who will take the animal. We might, for example, have a cat and her litter of three-week-old kittens come in. We don’t have the space to hold those kittens, so we pair them up with foster-care people who will raise them and help to find homes for them. But foster-care volunteers are not involved in evaluating adopters. The potential owner visits the cat in foster care; the foster parent takes the application; and the application is returned to the shelter for evaluation."
Solving Behavior Problems in Cats

In addition to educating adopters about meeting cats’ basic physical needs and being responsible owners, animal shelters should also provide adopters with information on dealing with potential cat behavior problems. “There are so many myths and misconceptions about animal behavior,” says Hetts, “that people use problem-solving methods that are not based on behavioral or learning principles, and they end up not addressing the problem or addressing it in inappropriate ways.”

For example, says Hetts, when a cat stops using its litter pan, its owner is usually advised to confine the cat to a small area with his food and water and a litter box for several days to several weeks to a month. “Assuming there is not a medical reason for the cat’s misbehavior and assuming that the cat uses the box when he’s confined, what’s going to happen when you release the cat from confinement? The same problem is going to occur unless the owner has addressed the reason for it.”

The first step in solving the problem, says Hetts, is to determine the reason for the problem. Perhaps an owner is using a clay litter box. If the cat has started to urinate on the carpet because it is a softer, more agreeable surface. If the cat is confined to an area where his only choices are clay litter and the linoleum floor, he might find the clay preferable to the linoleum. But as soon as the cat has access to the carpet, the undesirable behavior will resume.

Instead of confining the cat, the owner should make the litter box resemble the cat’s preferred elimination surface. Putting a piece of washable carpet in the box is one option, but it is usually better to put something in the box that is softer than the clay litter—not some fine-grained, clumping litter, or even sand.

Better Policies, Better Results

Policies and procedures regarding cats in the shelter should be targeted toward reaching one goal to ensure the prevention of suffering to as many cats as possible. It is not in the power of any animal-care and control agency to prevent all animal cruelty and neglect in its community. However, it is in its power to ensure that all the cats who enter and leave its doors are treated in the best way possible.

In a nutshell, animal-care professionals must keep in mind two fundamental tenets. First, effective shelter policies and procedures guarantee healthier, happier cats. And second, knowledgeable adopters make better, more responsible pet owners.

Weekly Newsletter

The best time to educate adopters—and their kids—about proper cat care and responsible pet ownership is when they first obtain their new companion.

SHELTER SENSE—DECEMBER 1992/JANUARY 1993

By Jill Shepherd

It seems that, in the minds of many Americans, dogs and cats require different levels of care. In fact, many local animal-control ordinances reflect this imbalance; laws are often directed specifically toward dogs, while cats are covered only generally, lumped in with “other animals” or ignored altogether. The issue of cat licensing provokes heated public debate. Cat owners who fiercely defend what they call the cat’s “basic right to roam freely” also fight what they feel is a threat to their own “basic right to privacy.” They see cat licensing only as another way for the government to interfere in the life and deive into the “kets of the average citizen. Changing the attitude of the public toward animal control and toward the licensing of cats (and dogs) can be accomplished by selling the concept of licensing as a service—an essential system to help pet owners protect the health and safety of their pets. This requires several steps, educating the public about cat behavior and cat needs, promoting identification as a form of pet insurance; and convincing the public that animal-control and law enforcement agencies act in the best interest of the public to organize an identification system.

As the public warms up to the idea of identification, agencies can work on educating city and county officials about the benefits of mandatory licensing, pointing out that the program can eventually become cost-effective in terms of funding. After the idea is accepted, the agency can work with its municipal or county officials to develop a complete animal-control ordinance, one that includes cat licensing, differentials, and other important elements.

A Basic Course in Cat Needs

The first essential action shelters and humane societies need to take is to educate about cats. “Up until recently,” says Marc Paulhus, HSUS vice president for companion animals, “we haven’t concentrated on cats in our public outreach. We don’t have PSAs that tell people that reclaim rates at shelters for cats are abysmally low; that it’s not natural for cats to disappear for days at a time; that, if they don’t see them for several hours they should be frantic.”

Because cats are often indelibly acquired—they show up as gifts or prizes or gifts from friends and neighbors—people may not have planned for them or made a commitment to the quality of care typically given dogs. Because cats are often perceived as self-sufficient, they are allowed to roam at large. Because they are capable of hunting, they are sometimes not fed with regularity. Because they are often out of sight and out of mind, they are frequently not provided humane companionship or regular veterinary care.

Cat owners need to be schooled in basic cat psychology. They need to be taught that the process of domestication has bred a certain degree of dependency in cats. “Despite popular belief, pet owners must be shown that a domestic cat is not the household equivalent to a wild cat,” says Paulhus. “They have been bred to display the qualities of adolescence indefinitely, so they never lose their inquisitive, semi-independent characteristics. They may not be always by their side, like dogs,” Paulhus adds, “but cat owners should begin to take notice that they are watching, through the cat’s eye, the life of mother.”

Leashing

While it is true that many animal-control professionals themselves are resistant to the concept, all cats should be leashed in indoor cats. It is the ideal in cat control, from protecting the animals themselves to curbing feline overpopulation to making cat ordinance enforcement easier.

Most cats can be taught to accept a harness and leash.

Few cat owners are ready for such a law, however. For most communities, an ordinance that requires cat licensing with mandatory identification is a more logical and realistic step.

One interim goal to consider is requiring mandatory microchipping of cats. “What we have to do in legislation is be willing to compromise,” says Nicholas Gilman, HSUS field representative. “What’s being heavily disputed in the country is leash laws and confinement laws, so you can write ordinances that specify other levels of responsibility: An owner will keep his or her cat confined if complaints are received from neighbors.”

Stefanie Friedland/Marin Humane Society

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Collars and Tags

Following an educational campaign on cats, communities may better understand why identification for free-roaming cats is logical and necessary. Still, this is where animal control is bound to encounter stubbornness. Everyone likes to think their cat is “different.” It’s in the nature of cat owners. Shelter workers often hear “he just refuses to keep a collar on.” This is often true, but cat owners should be taught, as with any other cat training, to be comforting but determined.

The most common argument against a collar and tag is that cats will get hung up or strangle themselves on collars. “Besides,” says Paulhus, “in terms of life and death, it is far more likely that a cat will be caught and killed by a car than as a result of getting hung up by a collar.”

“Animal shelters should include in the adoption fee the price of a collar and the installation of the ear tags,” says Gilman. “No animal should leave the shelter without wearing one.”

Rabies Control Through Identification

In several states, rabies in cats is reaching near-epidemic levels. In fact, cats are now one of the most common rabid animal reservoirs in the U.S. California is representative of much of the country. “At the present time, there are over six million owned cats in California based on the current human census data) and the population is increasing,” says a letter by the Veterinary Public Health Unit of the California Department of Health Services. "The vast majority of these cats (more than five of every six) is unvaccinated for rabies. Cats are involved in over 10,000 reported animal bites a year [in California alone] requiring local animal-control agencies to place these cats in rabies quarantine for 10 days. Due to the fact that cats are not required to be licensed, it is extremely difficult in most bite exposure cases to even identify ownership.”

Mandatory Licensing

After animal-care and -control facilities are in order and that staff are properly trained in the trapping and handling of cats. Funding should be set aside for this purpose, and, after the ordinance is enacted, revenues from licensing can be used to reimburse this original expense and pay for upkeep of facilities.

The Assets of Licensing

Setting up a mandatory identification system not only benefits pet owners, but also can be a tremendous help to animal-control agencies, both in achieving goals and in increasing revenue. “A licensing system that works, that has a high rate of compliance, will ultimately help community animal control gain more control over more community animals,” says Gilman.

Licensing itself should include a set of mandatory prerequisites. Pet owners should present proof of rabies vaccination and spay/neuter surgery upon purchase of a license and pay differentials based on the altered or unaltered status of the animals.

The ordinance should set fines for failure to comply with licensing as follows: For licensed animals immediately claimed to their owners, there is no imprisonment fee, though a citation may be issued for allowing the animal to run at large. For unlicensed animals who are impounded, owners may be charged additional fees for not obtaining a license, for the purchase of a license, and for impounding and boarding.

Animal control agencies can also issue temporary licenses at a lower rate for kittens and puppies. This way, the owner and animal will enter the system soon after the pet is acquired, when enthusiasm is high for providing the best care for the animal. The Progressive Animal Welfare Society (WA), for example, instituted a “juvenile” license ($5) for animals eight weeks to six months old. After six months of age, those owners must purchase either an altered ($10) or unaltered ($5) animal license.

Mandatory identification offers several advantages over automatic impoundment. “It’s like a parking fine,” says Paulhus. “I’d rather get a parking ticket on my car than find my car towed. Automatic impoundment is like mandatory towing. Licensing solves the whole problem. We know where the animal lives, we take it home, we give the owner a citation, and they pay a small fine. When owners of unlicensed, impounded animals reclaim the animals, they will find that it would have been much cheaper, and much less of a hassle, to buy a license.”

A Pet Warranty

“Customers buy their pets as a gift,” says Gilman, “and the retailer’s obligation is to present the pet in the best possible condition. The contract should state that the animal will be licensed. If the animal is not licensed at time of sale, the retailer should bill the buyer for the first license, and should also provide the buyer with a rabies certificate.”

For those still adamantly opposed to collars and tags for cats, a new form of identification may be more acceptable—ear tags. A small tumbled and polished metal tag the diameter of a pencil eraser is inserted like a pierced earring into the base of the ear.

The Brazos Animal Shelter (P.O. Box 4191, Bryan, TX 77805-4191) has been conducting a pilot program with 90 cat owners. “The community and all the cat owners are very excited about it,” said Kathy Rice, Executive Director. The shelter, which has been licensing cats since 1984, found that the major problem with compliance was that people would buy tags but not make their cats wear them.

Veterinarians sell licenses in the county along with rabies vaccinations, and install the ear tags. Few complaints have been aired by pet owners or vets.

“Only the owners who came back for reinstallation (because tags were either too tight or fell out) were anxious to replace them. The cats are amazingly unaffected-there’s no trauma, upset, bleeding, or restraint required to install the tags, and the cats have no problem at all with them after installation. If installation is correct to begin with, cats are identified for life.”

Ear tags may prove to be the wave of the future in cat identification.

Agencies have made a convincing argument that identification is imperative, the public will be more willing to accept a mandatory identification system. But before any ordinance is introduced, local shelters and societies have to “sell” licensing as a service—both to the public, and to city and county officials.

“The way for animal-control agencies to get the public to accept licensing is to change the image to a more positive one—it may even help to change the term ‘licensing’ to ‘mandatory identification,’” says Paulhus. “Licensing for dogs is perceived only as a tax and government intrusion rather than as a vital factor in keeping pets safe. We simply cannot follow this example for cats.”

Agencies must install instead of only accepting the benefits of licensing. “The public has to start seeing licensing as an insurance policy for their pets,” says Paulhus. “Penalties for noncompliance need only be a secondary issue. (See sidebar.)

Funding

City and county officials, as well as humane agency personnel, will need to be convinced that cat licensing will support itself in terms of funding. ACOs will be concerned that cat licensing will require additional duties without the revenues or training to do the job.

Before mandatory identification is instituted, shelters must ensure that cat owners are convinced that cat control services are the responsibility of the pet owner and that it is the pet owner’s responsibility to license their pets. This is logical and necessary.

The single most significant reason for requiring animals to be identified is so that animal-control agencies can return them to their owners,” says Marc Paudhus, HSUS vice president for companion animals. Information about the other benefits of mandatory identification to the pet owner can include any or all of the following:

It’s an easier, more accessible, more organized system for identification of community pets.

If a cat (or dog) is picked up on the street, the animal control officer may be able to immediately identify the owner and return the animal to his or her home—without having to impound the animal at the shelter.

If pets are found injured, veterinarians are more likely to authorize immediate emergency care—even if owners are tracked down.

Since proof of rabies vaccination is required when purchasing a license, a licensed animal who bites someone will not have to be placed under observation at the shelter.

Licensing supplies a source of revenue to the community.

Ultimately, taxpayer money, pet owner expense, and the lives of many pets will be saved. Because licensed animals can be returned to their homes instead of being impounded, taxpayers will not be required to pay for as many animals’ impoundment, board, or euthanasia.

Mandatory identification is only successful, however, if licenses are easy and convenient to obtain. The following will help ensure compliance:

• Extend the hours in which licenses are sold beyond nine to five.

• Since licensing is a community service, station license personnel at licensing booths in central locations, such as city hall, shopping centers, grocery stores, or even schools.

• Send renewal notices (including an addressed envelope for checks) by mail.

• Reach new residents by SFAs, newspapers, and notices sent with utility bills.

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ENHANCE YOUR ACTIVITIES WITH YEAR OF THE CAT MATERIALS

Celebrate the Year of the Cat in your community with the help of specially produced materials. Created specifically for distribution by non-profit humane societies and public animal-control departments, the promotional items include a poster, brochure, T-shirt, and bumper stickers.

Artist Sury Becker, author and illustrator of All I Need to Know I Learned From My Cat, has lent her talents to create the lively Year of the Cat poster and brochure. The whimsical poster encourages readers to celebrate this special year through such steps as adopting a cat, neutering a cat, and being loved by a cat.

T-shirts and bumper stickers both feature the attractive Year of the Cat logo. They are priced to enable humane agencies to sell them as fund-raisers.

To order, please send the form, along with a check made payable to Year of the Cat/MSPCA, to Year of the Cat, 350 S. Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02130. For more information, call (617) 522-7400.

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T-SHIRTS

$7.00 each, 1-9
$6.00 each, 10+

YEAR OF THE CAT POSTERS

$2.00 each, 1-49
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