



Shelter Watch



Our Mission:

We are committed to saving lives and reducing suffering of homeless dogs and cats through education, advancement of knowledge and shelter outreach.

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From the Clinician's Desk

After my July newsletter piece on promoting wellness awareness among shelter staff ("When the Shelter Gets the Best of You", July 2011), I received really amazing responses that I will detail in the upcoming September issue. It was remarkably inspiring to see so many humane organizations not only recognizing the personal challenges of this profession, but taking active roles in helping their staff members endure. Thank you for that.



The sheer abundance of decisions that need to be made daily in a shelter can be overwhelming for even the most stalwart of individuals. Quite often these decisions must be made in light of limited information, limited funds, limited options, or all of the above. In every case, decisions need to take in to account the animals (of course), the people (staff, volunteers, the public) and the organization (resources, reputation, mission). Very few of these are easy – and creative problem solving often is its own reward when you deduce how to make a less than acceptable situation more

acceptable for each of these key players.

This issue of the newsletter highlights relatively easy reminders on how to address some of the more common issues we see in shelters -- inappropriate urination in cats, acute diarrhea, feral cat management, and kennel cough (in cats, nonetheless!). In some cases, this information could help keep animals out of the shelter; in others, perhaps it can aid in more complete management of some of your residents.

Our 2010-2011 Shelter Medicine Interns – Drs. Nicole Putney and Kate Gollon – join us with new and fun interests, and please note the Dr. Mike Greenberg has signed on for another year as a Clinical Fellow in Shelter Medicine. It promises to be a good year. Thank you for being a part of it.

Be seeing you at the shelter,

Elizabeth Berliner, DVM, MA

Dietary Support for Diarrhea: Which Foods?: Dr. Nicole Putney

During the past decade, several major pet food companies have started making large pet food donations to animal shelters. These foods may range from maintenance to specific prescription diets used to support treatment for a variety of conditions commonly seen in shelter environments. One condition that can present rather dra-

matically is diarrhea.

Diarrhea has a number of causes (parasitic, bacterial, viral, immune-mediated or simply stress-induced) and treatment should be aimed at these specific causes. However, diarrhea is not only a pathological issue,

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Purina OM is one of several diets available with increased amounts of dietary fiber.

“Fiber comes in two types: soluble, which decreases bulk and supports ‘good’ bacteria, and insoluble, which increases bulk and normalizes ‘transit time.’”



Heavy duty plastic storage containers with lids are easily transformed into feral cat shelters.

Dietary Support: (continued from Page 1)

but also a mechanical one. What goes in must, more or less, come out. An assortment of prescription diets are available, many formulated to be bland and fiber-poor, fiber-rich, or hypoallergenic in order to provide supportive care during a bout of diarrhea. Diarrhea can be divided into many categories based on pathology (small bowel vs large bowel, hemorrhagic, mucoid, etc), but clinically, it can also be viewed as “fiber responsive” or not. Often, it is a matter of trying one low fiber, bland diet (such as Hill’s i/d or Purina EN) and if a response is not seen, either changing your treatment protocol or trying another diet. Going to a higher fiber diet, such as Purina OM or Hill’s w/d, may be the next step, particularly with chronic diarrhea.

Fiber comes in two types: soluble and insoluble. Soluble fiber (e.g. beet pulp) has no effect on “transit time,” and actually decreases fecal bulk. It is known to increase bacterial fermentation, which may support “good” bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract. Insoluble fiber (e.g. cellulose) normalizes transit time (i.e. decreases it if it’s fast as in diarrhea, and increases it if it’s slow, as with constipation). It increases fecal bulk and draws water out of feces, making them more formed.

Below is a short summary of select diets which you may find in your shelter. Re-

member, supportive dietary management of diarrhea may be a matter of trial and error, but once you find something that works for a particular patient, constancy in diet is beneficial. Once the bout of diarrhea has resolved (if it’s not a chronic problem), the animal can be transitioned to a maintenance diet.

Selected Commercially Available Highly Digestible Diets:

In general, the commercially available diets in this category are formulated with highly digestible protein and carbohydrate sources, have moderate to low levels of fat, and some soluble fiber, but generally very low concentrations of insoluble fiber.

- Hill’s Prescription Diet i/d
- Eukanuba Low Residue
- Purina Veterinary Diets EN
- Royal Canin/Innovative Veterinary Diets Select Care Sensitive

Selected Commercial Diets with Increased Amounts of Dietary Fiber (generally insoluble fiber – Royal Canin IVD has both soluble and insoluble):

- Hill’s Prescription Diet r/d
- Hill’s Science Diet w/d
- Purina OM
- Royal Canin/IVD Select Care Hifactor

Feral Cat Shelters: Dr. Kate Gollon

In addition to the essentials of trap-neuter-return (TNR), vaccinations, and a reliable food source contributing to feral cats’ welfare, I believe providing durable structures for feral cats to call home is an important component of colony care-taking. Below are some practical tips on providing shelter for feral cats in your

community.

Why Provide Shelter?

Cats are vulnerable to the extreme variations in climate most regions experience. It has been argued, although there is no

(Continued next page)

published data pertaining to the issue, that providing warmth in the winter months is more important than providing food¹. Presumably, this is because a cat will expend more energy trying to stay warm than calories from the intake of food can provide. Just as stress reduction is seen as an essential tool in maintaining the wellbeing of shelter animals, reducing stress by providing a feral cat a reliably warm and safe place to sleep will enhance its overall health.

Sheltering cats can also give caregivers more control over a colony in the same way that providing food does, as cats can loosely be maintained in a given area. This will help to keep cats out of unsafe buildings and off the property of people who may not want them there².

Shelter Basics

For the reasons mentioned above, a shelter should provide warmth, especially in the winter. Straw is the insulation of choice, because cats can burrow their bodies into it, whereas fabrics should be avoided because they can become damp¹. Solar energy can be used in the form of pool covers by draping the cover over the structure. Another trick to keeping a shelter warm is by directing the door in a direction, usually south, that does not face the wind or blowing snow. Elevating the structure off the ground on cinder-blocks prevents moisture from seeping in and maintains a warmer temperature inside.

Physical placement of the shelter in a quiet, well camouflaged, area is essential. Ensure that cats do not have to cross a busy road to get from feeding stations to the shelter. A good choice for placement in a city setting is along the back of a quiet building. In rural areas, place the shelter in a well-hidden location, either in or along a wooded area.

Materials and Construction

Obtaining parts for and finding handy people to partake in building a feral cat

shelter can be achieved by using a little creativity. Ask lumberyards or contractors in the area to save pieces of scrap lumber. Host a “shelter-making” party or ask your local boy scouts to help by performing a community service project. Having communities partake in construction of feral cat shelters helps invest individuals in the care of these animals, as well as making them more aware of feral cat welfare issues in general.

Shelter Designs

Designs range from a Styrofoam cooler with a hole cut in it (stays cool for our southern feline friends!), to a chicken coop-style structure fit for dozens of cats. Remember that these shelters vary with respect to protection from predators, cost, ease of construction, warmth, and how many cats the structure will provide for. Consider these factors when trying to decide which will be best for a given colony. Excellent resources, including instructions, photographs, and tips on how to pick and build a given shelter can be found online at Alley Cat Allies², Community Cats Maryland³, Urban Cat League⁴, and Indy Feral Incorporated¹.

References

1. Outdoor Cat Shelters and Feeding Stations. *Indy Feral Incorporated* (2002). Retrieved May 7, 2011, from <http://www.indyferal.org/index.php?page=shelters>.
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3. Nemoff, P. Feral Cat Shelters & Care. *Community Cats Maryland* (2009). Retrieved May 7 2011, from http://www.communitycatsmd.org/files/cat_shelter_brochure.pdf or <http://www.communitycatsmd.org/shelters.html>.
4. Feral Cat Shelters. *Urban Cat League* (2007). Retrieved May 7, 2011 from <http://www.urbancatleague.org/Shelters.html>.



An adequate shelter for one to two cats can be made from a simple Styrofoam cooler.

“Providing durable structures for feral cats to call home is an important component of colony care-taking.”



Instructions and designs to create wooden structures are also readily available.



Cats prefer soft clumping unscented litter and the old-fashioned unscented clay litter.

“There are many reasons why cats may start to eliminate outside the box- asking the right questions can help solve the mystery.”



If there are multiple cats in the household, there should be multiple boxes, in different locations.

Behavior Advice to Reduce Surrenders: Ms. Kelley Bollen, MA, CABC

We all know that behavior problems are the number one reason for relinquishment of an animal, despite what the owner may state at the time of surrender (i.e. moving). For this reason, it's important for someone at your facility to learn as much as possible about how to counsel pet owners on the most common behavior problems seen in companion animals. With this information you may be able to prevent some surrenders from ever occurring.

For the next few months I will provide information on the common complaints pet owners have about their pets. I will start with the cat, and the most common behavior problem seen in cats, inappropriate elimination.

There are many reasons why cats start to eliminate outside of their litter box so it's important that counselors ask the right questions to try to solve the mystery. Below are the top ten questions to ask in this situation:

1. What kind of litter do you use?
2. What kind of box do you use (covered, uncovered, self-cleaning, etc.)?
3. What size is the litter box?
4. Where is the box located?
5. How many boxes do you have vs. how many cats?
6. Do you use litter box liners?
7. How often do you scoop the box?
8. How often do you totally clean the box and replace the litter?
9. What do you use to clean the litter box when you do the above?
10. Where is the cat eliminating?

Based on the answers to these questions you may be able to give effective advice to the cat owner if you also know the following ten important facts about cats and their litter boxes:

1. Out of all the cat litters on the market, only two are preferred by cats – the soft clumping unscented litter and the old-fashioned unscented clay

litter. The others were designed for the human. If the cat doesn't like the smell or feel of the litter he may stop using it. A "litter café" can be helpful to tell the owner which kind the cat prefers (several boxes lined up with different types of litter in each).

2. Most cats prefer an uncovered box. Covered boxes trap odor. Additionally, cats can be ambushed by the dog or other cats when coming out of a covered box. Cats usually don't like the self-cleaning boxes because of their size or the sounds they make while cleaning.
3. Most cats prefer a large litter box so they have room to move around and bury their waste appropriately. If you have a kitten or a geriatric cat who may have arthritis issues, make sure the sides are not too high for them to get into the box easily.
4. Cats prefer their toilet be in a private location with plenty of visibility – not in a high traffic area or tucked away in the corner of the dark basement. If the litter box is in the basement it should not be placed next to the washer, dryer, furnace or any other appliance that makes loud noises. If the noise occurs while the cat is eliminating in the box – she may never go back.
5. If there are multiple cats in the house – there should be multiple boxes. It is equally important that the boxes are in different locations. Three boxes side by side is only one toilet area. The boxes should be spread out.
6. Most cats do not like litter box liners because their claws can get caught in them when they scratch to bury their waste. A bad experience like that can keep a cat from returning to the box.
7. Boxes should be scooped daily of solid waste and the urine clumps.
8. Boxes should be cleaned out weekly (all litter removed, the box washed and clean litter added).
9. Never clean the box with household cleaners that have a strong odor – these can deter the cat as cats are sensitive to smells. Use either a mild dish soap and warm water or an enzymatic cleaner.
10. Cats develop surface and location prefer-

ences for elimination. If they are deterred from using their box because of one or more of the above reasons and start to go elsewhere, they can develop a preference for the new place. The soiled area must be cleaned with a good enzymatic cleaner. Then you need to either deter the cat from returning to that location by laying down a texture they don't like (aluminum foil, double

sided tape, plastic carpet runner - nubby side up, etc.) or by changing the significance of the location by placing their food, toys or bed there (cats won't eliminate where they eat, play or sleep).

Knowing these ten questions and ten facts about cats and their litter boxes will help you keep more kitties in their home and out of the shelter. Its also great information to give to your cat adopters!



Enzymatic cleaners, like *Anti-Icky-Poo*, are essential for cleaning soiled areas.

Numbers Count: Getting a Handle on Intake: Dr. Mike Greenberg

Shelters devote a great deal of time and resources to entering data about their populations into computer programs. While recording these data is important, the real value comes from *using* data to make informed decisions about your shelter.

There are countless *metrics* (measured, quantitative numbers) that you can use to assess your shelter and aid in its management. The specific metrics that will be of use to your shelter will depend on your shelter's mission and goals. However, there are a handful of metrics that will be useful in most, if not all, shelters. We will explore these metrics in this and upcoming issues of *ShelterWatch*.

Broadly speaking, an animal's path through your shelter can be pictured in three stages -- *intake*, *time-in-shelter*, and *outcome*. Metrics can be used at each of these stages to assess progress towards shelter goals and to characterize how animals *flow* through your shelter. With this framework in mind, let's look at some of the basic metrics associated with intake, and how they might be useful to your shelter.

Annual Intake

Annual intake is the number of animals taken in over a 12 month period. It provides a broad measure of what is required of the shelter regarding care; forms the basis for many other metrics; and provides a sense of the shelter's size as compared to others. In addition, annual intake can be useful for assessing changes in the homeless pet population. For example, if your

shelter has community initiatives to reduce the number of homeless pets (e.g. spay-neuter or humane education), changes in annual intake can be used to measure the efficacy of such initiatives. As with many shelter metrics, it is typically useful to refine annual intake, calculating by age-group and species.

Monthly Intake

Intake can fluctuate dramatically over the course of a year -- an all too familiar example being "kitten season". Having a more refined estimate of fluctuations will enable your shelter to better plan for necessary increases in animal housing and shelter staff. For example, being able to predict *drops* in monthly intake may provide your shelter with an opportunity to plan other activities (e.g. fundraisers, renovations) so as use staff time most effectively.

Numbers and proportions

Intake can be measured using numbers or proportions (often referred to as rates). Numbers provide insight into the actual numbers a shelter will need to house and feed, and rates provide a measure of the relative contribution to intake of one subgroup compared to others. Rates also can be used to measure the risk of an event (e.g., the risk of developing upper respiratory disease after entering the shelter).

In future issues, we will look at additional metrics of shelter intake, as well as *in-shelter* metrics and those related to *outcome*. If your shelter has questions about metrics, please do not hesitate to contact our program; we'd be happy to hear from you.

"There are countless metrics that can be used to assess each shelter and aid in its management."



The real value comes from using the stored data to make informed decisions & plans.

Can Cats Get Kennel Cough?: Dr. Jan Scarlett

Did you know that one of the agents causing kennel cough in dogs could also infect your cats? This organism is called *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, and it is a bacterium that can infect many species including dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs and, very rarely, people. Several studies strongly suggest that dogs and cats can share the same *Bordetella* strains in the same shelter at the same time. For this reason shelters with kennel cough should take extra precautions to prevent transmission of this agent between species.

The hacking of dogs with kennel cough is readily recognized by shelter staff, but the signs of bordetellosis in cats are not always as distinct. Many cats infected with *Bordetella* exhibit signs indistinguishable from those infected with the more common viral respiratory agents and co-infections are common. Other infected cats exhibit coughing, a sign that is highly suggestive of *Bordetella* infection, and still others may show no signs at all. In young kittens (≤ 8 weeks of age), respiratory disease may be severe, and an increase in kitten mortality may be the first sign of *Bordetella* infections in shelter cats.

If you have kennel cough in your facility, staff and volun-

teers must take precautions to avoid carrying *Bordetella* back and forth between species. Ideally, kennel staff treating infected dogs should not care for cats or vice versa, and maximum biosecurity measures should be in place. These measures include changing of smocks, thorough washing of hands, cages, door knobs, and pens, no sharing of utensils and attention to any other objects that might act as fomites (i.e., be contaminated with bacteria). Fortunately, these bacteria are easily killed following thorough cleaning and disinfection (with common shelter disinfectants).

Bordetella is not a regular agent causing respiratory disease in cats, but should be considered if your shelter experiences an increase in the frequency of infected cats or an increased kitten mortality from respiratory disease, and you have infected dogs in your facility. *Bordetella* can be identified by having samples from the oropharynx or nose of several sick cats cultured or by having the samples tested with the IDEXX respiratory panel for cats. Recovery in one or two cats does not necessarily signal *Bordetella* as a cause of respiratory disease in cats.

Events Calendar

August 2011						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
ASPCA/Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program Mini-Conference		Dr. Berliner HSVMA (RAVS)				
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Cornell Extern						
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



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