



### 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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# Shelter Watch



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## From the Director's Desk

It is my pleasure to welcome you to our first newsletter! A monthly newsletter has been on our wish list for some time and we are all very excited that it has now become a reality. Our Maddie's Shelter Medicine program is located in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University. The Program mission includes education, service and research. We provide shelter medicine courses for veterinary students, internship training in shelter medicine, continuing education workshops for veterinarians and shelter staff, and consultation with and evaluation of shelters on request. We also conduct non-invasive, applied research to improve the welfare and health of shelter animals. All of our activities are directed at improving both the physical and behavioral health of shelter animals, thereby improving their likelihood of finding their forever homes. The intent of this newsletter is to provide our readers with information that is helpful and informative. Since it is a work-in-progress, we welcome your feedback regarding the format, content, and helpfulness. If you would like us to address a specific

topic or provide us with other feedback, please don't hesitate to contact us. Each month we will provide information regarding shelter medical, behavioral and statistical issues, as well as share questions and answers from our shelter email service. We'll also share a little about our backgrounds and the services we offer to animal shelters in our vicinity. We look forward to being of service to you all!

*Jan Scarlett, DVM, PhD.*



## Thoughts on Kitten Group Housing: Dr. Elizabeth Berliner

Many shelters are embracing the benefits of communal cat housing, creating esthetically pleasing adoption spaces housing multiple cats who have been carefully screened for infectious disease. Anecdotally, shelters employing group housing are reporting lower levels of diseases related to stress.

However, contrary to common belief, in this arena kittens are not just small cats. Kittens

are especially prone to infectious diseases. They have immature immune systems up until at least 4 months of age, which makes them both likely to get disease, and to shed disease. Mixing kittens leaves them open to respiratory, viral, parasitic, and other disease elements that will show up months, even years later. *Overall, kittens from different litters should not be mixed together except*

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A pair of group-housed, same-litter kittens at an area SPCA.

**“The APPMA reported that there were an estimated 77.5 million and 93.6 million owned dogs and cats, respectively, in the U.S. in 2009.”**



## Kitten Group Housing (continued from Page 1)

*under very rare circumstances.*

Several diseases are of increased concern in kittens, including but not limited to feline leukemia, ringworm, ear mites, panleukopenia, intestinal parasites, and feline upper respiratory disease. However a lesser known, serious complication is feline infectious peritonitis (FIP).

FIP comes from a mutation of a very common coronavirus. Coronavirus mutates commonly, and affected kittens shed it at very high rates in their stool. In most cases, the mutation is harmless, causing minimal disease. The virus is passed in litterboxes, grooming, and on the coats of kittens who may or may not be showing signs of disease at the time.

Increased shedding leads to an increased opportunity for mutation, and that mutation could result in FIP. A mutation to FIP is fatal 100% of the time, although it may occur months or even years after infection. While this disease is relatively rare in individually owned kittens and cats, it can occur at higher rates in shelters and catteries, particularly when kittens and young cats are allowed to mix and the virus finds more opportunity for mutation.

Ultimately, the optimum housing for kittens is within their litters, and preferably off-site, at adoption annexes or other areas where there are no interactions with other shelter residents.

*Interested in more information about FIP? Visit the Cornell Feline Health Center at <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhcl/brochures/fip.html>*

## Numbers Count: Dr. Jan Scarlett

There is no census of pet ownership in the United States although several humane groups over the years have tried to persuade the U.S. Census Bureau to add a question to the decennial human census. Rather, organizations such as the American Pet Product Manufacturers Association (APPMA) conduct their own surveys of American households at periodic intervals. The APPMA reported that there were an estimated 77.5 million and 93.6 million owned dog and cats, respectively, in the United States in 2009.

If Americans can acquire their pets from a variety of sources, what proportion of prospective guardians get their pets

from animal shelters, and is that percentage rising? A 2010 PetSmart survey of American households suggests that animal shelters are gaining in their market share of pet adoptions. Twenty-four % of pet-owning households in this survey had acquired their pet from an animal shelter. This is the highest reported percentage to date, up from 18-20% during the 1990's. Animal shelters have worked hard to change their image as a sad, depressing place from which to acquire a pet. Rather, modern shelters strive to provide happy, welcoming environments to showcase their wonderful animals. The PetSmart data suggest these efforts are working!!

## “Kennel Cough” in Cats: Dr. Kate Riley

The term “kennel cough” is usually used to describe an upper respiratory infection in dogs, caused by the bacteria *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. Of course, there are many agents, both bacterial and viral, that can cause upper respiratory disease in dogs and cats. To identify the cause of disease in a particular animal, diagnostic tests such as bacterial culture and virus isolation or PCR are required.

We recently cared for a group of ten young adult cats, between 6 and 18 months of age, all of which had signs of upper respiratory infection upon entering the shelter. Virus isolation and PCR revealed both herpes and calici virus in this population of cats. Some of the cats improved following treatment with antibiotics and saline nebulization. However, two cats continued to have severe con-

gestion and green nasal discharge. The cats were anesthetized for a nasal flush with sterile saline. Bacterial culture of the flushed material revealed *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. Although this bacteria does not as frequently cause disease in healthy cats as it does in dogs, we know that many shelter cats are suffering or recovering from viral upper respiratory infections, and these cats are susceptible to secondary *Bordetella* infections.

This case is an excellent example of why good work practices such as cleaning, sanitation, quarantine, and isolation are so important in the shelter environment, not just among groups of the same species, but between cat and dog areas as well.



## Open Paw® & Behavioral Health in the Shelter: Dr. Mike Greenberg

If every dog and cat in your community were surgically sterilized today, your local shelter would still have an overpopulation problem tomorrow. While unwanted litters account for millions of animals brought to shelters each year, behavioral problems account for millions of shelter intakes as well. Community and even statewide spay-neuter programs have done a great deal to reduce the occurrence of unwanted litters. Efforts to systemically address behavioral issues have not been as widespread, but *Open Paw*® is working to do just that.

*Open Paw*® is a non-profit organization that seeks to address the shelter over-population problem by addressing behavioral wellness at the individual and population levels. The OP program is not simply about training; rather, it is a structured behavioral program that educates owners/adopters, shelter staff, and shelter animals. It was introduced nearly a decade ago by Certified Pet Dog Trainer Kelly Gorman, and animal behaviorist, Dr. Ian Dunbar. *Open Paw*® materials are freely available for download at [www.OpenPaw.org](http://www.OpenPaw.org).

Within the shelter, the pillars of *Open Paw*® are its *Minimum Mental Health Requirements* (MMHR), and its training programs for people and animals. The MMHRs are extensive addressing feeding behavior; interaction with humans and other animals; mental stimulation; “quiet” time; and several other aspects of behavioral health. The training programs use positive methods, employing classical and operant conditioning (similar to “clicker” training). They offer specific protocols for the people involved;

there are four “levels” for dogs and five for cats. Obedience and “tricks” are included in the training protocols, but much of the work is focused on setting animals up for success in the shelter, and eventually, in the home. For instance, dogs learn how to sit quietly in their kennels and keep all four feet on the ground when getting ready to go for walk, while cats learn to approach strangers and solicit attention. In addition to offering detailed materials for the MMHR and training programs, *Open Paw*® offers detailed protocols for how to go about implementing the programs in your shelter. In addition, they offer educational materials for shelter staff as well as owners and adopters.

As with any comprehensive behavior program, *Open Paw*® takes time and staff, both of which are typically in short supply in shelters. *Open Paw*® shelters deal with these challenges differently. Some elect to only implement portions of the program. Others have a team of “*Open Paw*” volunteers. Still others choose to apply the protocols only to animals with particular behavioral needs. Regardless of your shelter’s goals, *Open Paw*® recommends that a pilot program be the first step, implementing the program with a small group of animals before attempting to implement it throughout the shelter. In addition, *Open Paw* recommends that shelters collect data with regard to intake, adoptions, and relinquishments, so as to track the program’s success.

**“Shelter  
Medicine is  
creative  
problem-solving  
101.”**



Food-filled Kongs (above). Dogs in *Open Paw* shelters do not eat out of food bowls.



Cardboard boxes, like the Hide, Perch & Go™ box, can help reduce stress in shelter cats.

## Stress Reduction in Shelter Cats: Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC

Everyone knows that the shelter environment is stressful for most cats, especially during the first few days. Upon entry to the shelter the cats are bombarded with unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells, as well as the stress pheromones of other cats. The most effective way to reduce stress in shelter cats is actually quite simple and inexpensive – it comes in the form of a cardboard box. Hiding is the number-one coping mechanism cats have to deal with stress and fear. By providing every incoming cat with a hiding box you will be allowing them the opportunity to adjust to

this strange place using a strategy that comes naturally to them. Some cats will spend only a couple of hours in the box before they feel brave enough to venture out, while others may hide inside for a day or two, but each cat will benefit from the opportunity to hide in the beginning of their stay. While a cardboard box cannot be sanitized and will have to be thrown out if it gets soiled, it also takes on the scent of the cat who is using it. The box and its familiar scent can then be moved with the cat as she moves through the shelter helping to reduce stress during her entire stay.

## Events Calendar

December 2010						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2 <b>National Mutt Day</b>	3	4
5	6 <b>Release of ASV Shelter Standards!</b> <a href="http://www.shelternvet.org">www.shelternvet.org</a>	7	8	9	10 <b>Shelter Consult—NY</b>	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20 <b>Shelter Consult—PA</b>	21	22	23	24 <b>Cornell University closed</b>	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

## Out and About

The staff of the Shelter Medicine Program have recently had some great opportunities for outreach and education.

- October 16, 2010: Staff provided a full-day conference for the North Country Animal Coalition at the invitation of Dr. Sandra Young. Topics included infectious diseases, including respiratory, gastrointestinal, and dermatological pathogens. There was also a short presentation on Foster programs in the shelter. This packed event was highly successful and very well received. We look forward to making this an annual event.
- Road Trip 2010: Drs. Berliner, Greenberg, and Riley traveled to Humane Alliance in Asheville, NC for advanced training in high-quality, high-volume spay neuter services. On the way they visited many shelters up and down the East coast, acquiring a look at “best practices” as well as challenges in many varied shelter settings.



Maddie's® Shelter Medicine Program is underwritten by a grant from Maddie's Fund®, The Pet Rescue Foundation ([www.maddiesfund.org](http://www.maddiesfund.org)), helping to fund the creation of a no-kill nation.