

Siamese Breeders Group of South Africa



***Sup Ch Sherlah Jay Natalie (Bluepoint Female) owned by Maureen Cannell & bred by
Lynel du Toit***

Photo by Elizabeth Wentworth

Newsletter

June 2013

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In or Out? That is the question

The debate on whether cats should be kept indoors or allowed to come and go as they please

The majority of cat owners in the UK give their feline companions freedom to come and go as they please. However, more and more are deciding to keep their cats completely indoors. Are these indoor cats better off or is it an unnatural hardship for cats to be kept indoors? Here we look at some of the points from both sides.

Until fairly recently most cats spent part of their day outside hunting, patrolling their territory and relieving themselves. It wasn't until the advent of cat litter in the 1950s that cat owners



had any choice about letting their cats out. Pet owners then began to keep cats indoors for their own safety. Indeed indoor cats can have longer, physically healthier lives than cats allowed outdoors. But on the down side, indoor cats are also more likely to suffer psychologically and develop behavioural problems than those allowed outside. Weighing up the pros and cons will help you decide what is best for your cat. It is easier to opt for an indoor only cat right from the start than to convert an outdoor cat successfully into an indoor one. The benefits of keeping the cat away from possible dangers outdoors have to be weighed against the effects on the cat's behaviour. While you won't have to put up with daily hunt offerings if your cat is kept indoors, you must balance that against the natural behaviours which your cat has missed out on and the need to provide alternative opportunity for the expression of hunting behaviours. Much will depend on the personality of the individual cat and your circumstances.

Cats which go outside

Letting a cat control its own movements in and out gives it freedom but lays it open to the dangers of the great outdoors. The main risks are outlined below.

- Injury – Road traffic accidents account for many cats' lives every year. If you live in a town or near a busy road then the risks are probably greater. Dogs, other cats and humans are also the cause of cat injuries.
- Poisoning –Cats can become poisoned by chemicals used in the garden or by eating poisoned prey.
- Disease – Contact with other cats (especially fighting) and the environment can lead to infections with, for example, feline immunodeficiency virus, feline leukaemia virus, cat 'flu or enteritis viruses.
- Infestation – Fleas and other parasites can be picked up from prey and the envi-

ronment.

- Loss – Cats can sometimes get shut in garages or are driven away in cars or vans they have climbed into. They may even move in with someone else.
- Stress – A timid cat may find the great outdoors very stressful and prefer to be inside.

However, there are also many benefits to letting your cat go out:

- Rodent control – Cats help to keep the rodent population around your home at bay.
- Social contact – Outdoor cats can have social stimulation if they want to interact with other cats in the area.
- Regular exercise – Outdoor cats are well exercised though hunting and generally being out and about, and are less likely to become overweight.
- Outlet for behavioural needs – less stress for the cat and therefore improved welfare.
- Good behaviour – Outdoor cats are less likely to develop behavioural problems such as inappropriate urination in the house, clawing furniture or stalking humans or other household companions. They are less likely to become bored or frustrated.

Minimising the risks for the outdoor cat

Before deciding that the myriad risks of a free-roaming outdoor cat are too great, consider ways in which you can minimise them.

- Let your cat out in the day but shut it in at night as this is a more dangerous time to be out and about. There are more wild animals around and cats can be dazzled by car headlights on the road and as a result can panic and run in the wrong direction. A reflective or fluorescent collar may help get it seen, particularly in the winter months when it gets dark earlier. If you can train your cat to come when it is called you will be able to let it out at dawn and make sure it is in by dusk each day.
- If you are near a busy road try to encourage your cat to come in during the morning and evening rush hours by feeding at this time.
- Ensure that your cat is vaccinated against all of the infectious diseases it is possible to cover (as yet there is no vaccine for FIV). Worm your cat regularly, especially if it is a hunter.
- If your cat is wearing a collar make sure it is of the elasticated type or one with a safety catch which will enable it to escape should the collar get caught up in a tree or fence. Write your name and phone number clearly on the collar so that if anyone finds your cat sick or injured they can let you know. Some people now have their cats microchipped. A microchip, the size of a grain of rice, that carries a unique number for your cat is injected under the skin. Cats taken to rescue

centres are automatically scanned for this and matched to the address on file. Cats can also be tattooed but the marks tend to become blurred over time.

- Make sure that your cat is neutered. The risks to entire animals are much greater than to neutered cats. An unneutered tom will wander for miles, often crossing busy roads. The average lifespan of an entire male is probably only a couple of years. Neutered animals do not wander so far, do not fight so much (and therefore are not at such a great risk of being infected with various diseases), and do not cause the noise and smell nuisance to neighbours that an unneutered tom can inflict. The risks of pregnancy to the entire female are also obvious.



The indoor cat

Keeping a cat permanently indoors away from all the potential hazards outside may sound the ideal solution, however, the benefits of safety need to be weighed up against the needs of that particular cat. Some of the potential problems are listed below:

- Behavioural problems – It has been found that cats in the USA have a much higher incidence of anxiety-related problems such as urine marking than cats in the UK, possibly because British cats are allowed out more whereas in the USA they are more commonly kept permanently indoors. There are many stress-linked psychological problems in indoor cats.
- Fear of change – Indoor cats may become over-reactive to changes within their small territory (the house) and become unable to cope with novelty, be it people or objects or new smells. It can be difficult to introduce a new cat (or even a new person) to your cat's restricted territory – there is no neutral ground to retire to for either party.
- Obesity – A lack of exercise can lead to weight problems.
- Overdependence – A solitary indoor cat will rely on its owner to provide stimulation, companionship and exercise.
- Cleaning litter trays – A chore those with outdoor cats don't have.
- Damage to the house – Your furniture and carpets may suffer from being scratched excessively. Cats may also expend energy climbing, jumping and generally whizzing around the house in mad moments – again damage can occur.
- Keeping doors/windows shut or covered so cats cannot escape can be impossible with children around.
- Household hazards – An active indoor cat will explore crevices that an outdoor cat would probably not bother to investigate. Boredom and curiosity can be a dangerous combination. Washing machines, toilets, medicines, cleaners, small holes, exposed wires and wobbly shelving are all particular hazards for curious

kittens. While outside, cats will often nibble grass or herbs. If there is no access to this they may turn to indoor plants, some of which are poisonous.

- Escape – An indoor cat that gets out may be disorientated and will not have any street skills. Escape from a high rise flat could be fatal. The cat may also be highly stressed to find itself suddenly in an environment that it has no experience of.
- Frustration/boredom – Cats may develop behaviour problems if they are stressed by the lack of opportunity to express their normal behavioural repertoire. They also have the problem of being unable to escape from another cat or situation that they find difficult to deal with.

The following are the benefits of keeping cats indoors:

- Fewer risks to physical health – Indoor cats can live longer lives because they are kept away from the diseases and accidents associated with the outside world.
- Parasite free – Presuming that humans or other animals do not bring in fleas, once they are clear they should not suffer from infestation again. Likewise worms should not be such a problem.
- Happy neighbours – There will be no complaints from neighbours about the cat using their garden as a litter tray.
- No dead prey on the carpet -With no access to the outside world owners won't be faced with the unpleasant discovery of animal corpses on the carpet.

Overcoming indoor drawbacks

The main problem faced by the indoor cat is lack of opportunity to display a normal repertoire of behaviours. The cat is a natural hunter and if it cannot go out it may be frustrated and develop behaviours that stimulate this activity. Thus, if you wish to keep an indoor cat content you will have to continue to be creative and produce new toys and games to keep your cat stimulated and exercised, physically and mentally. Kittens and cats love newspaper tents, cardboard boxes and paper bags, not to mention various cat play centres, fishing rod toys/laser spots etc that encourage stalking and pouncing.

It is best to get two kittens instead of one from the start. Another cat will bring change and interaction and really is a must in a totally indoor situation. It will also help you to get over feelings of guilt associated with leaving one kitten on its



own while you are at work. Having two kittens relieves you of some of the burden of having to stimulate and exercise it as they will happily wear each other out playing and then collapse in a heap to sleep. They will, however, need somewhere safe to play.

Make sure that you have regular visitors and life is not too quiet, especially when your kitten is small, because this is what it will come to see as normal. Because the cat's whole world may be made up of a couple of rooms in a flat which it knows inside out, it can become hypersensitive to change. Human or animal visitors or even changes in household routine can introduce a potentially huge novelty to the cat's day-to-day environment and cause stress.

Indoor cats, especially when young, are likely to have quite an impact on your furniture and fittings. Try not to be too house-proud about the ensuing damage. Prevent rather than regret. Move all the ornaments and imagine that you have a toddler that can fly! Provide places where cats can have a 'free for all'.

Your cat will need to act out its natural behavioural repertoires such as sharpening claws within your home. Outdoor cats usually use a tree or garden post. An indoor cat must be provided with a good scratching post and even with this it is likely to use the furniture occasionally too.

Monitor your cat's food intake if it is tending to put on excess weight either through lack of exercise or is overeating because of boredom.

A cat that goes outdoors will nibble on grass and herbs as part of his diet. It is believed that eating vegetation helps cats to regurgitate hairballs. You can overcome the deficit by providing the cat with an indoor window box. Grass, catnip (Nepeta), thyme, sage, parsley or wheat and oats can all be sown indoors in a potting mixture. Sow seeds every couple of weeks to provide a fresh supply for your cat.

Invest in some good nail clippers as your cat's claws may not wear down as quickly as they would if it went outside and walked on hard surfaces. Long claws can become snagged in carpets and upholstery.

Cat-proof your home carefully. An inquisitive kitten can get through a very small hole. If you live several storeys up, put mesh over the windows and train everyone in the family to keep doors shut.

The best of both worlds

A purpose built outdoor enclosure could provide your cat with the sights and smells of the outside world and give his life some variety without exposing it to many of the outdoor risks. Alternatively you might consider using high fencing and Elizabethan collars on trees to keep your cat within the confines of your own garden (see Fencing the garden to protect your cat³) You may also like to train your cat or kitten to walk on a harness and lead so you can both take safe walks in the garden or park.

Outdoors to indoors?

Some cats will adapt more readily to an indoor lifestyle than others. A cat, which has spent years outdoors, is unlikely to accept an indoor life. In the USA veterinary surgeons say that many cats may not adjust to this change and suggest a programme of 'behaviour modification' to get over the problems that may arise. This often includes temporary treatment with anxiety-reducing drugs. However, when the cause of the stress is not being able to go outside, a temporary course of these drugs is unlikely to work, as it does nothing to change the situation. As a consequence many cats in the USA end up being on long-term drugs regimen. It is wiser to let an active outdoor cat continue to pursue a happy but risky life outside than have a long and miserable one inside.

On the other hand, a very timid cat may be quite happy to stay indoors and avoid the circumstances that it may find very stressful. A controlled and predictable indoor environment may be ideal and many such cats choose not to venture outdoors a great deal anyway.

In the end it is up to you, the owners, to weigh up the pros and cons and to judge how their cat is coping with the risks and strains put upon it by the different lifestyles.

Respect for Cats

If, as some scientists believe, the domestication of dogs started some 135,000 years ago and their evolution ran parallel to ours, cat-human relationships are more recent. Of course, some may argue that the domestic cat, *Felis catus*, is not really 'domesticated'. However, the relationship between cats and man has radically changed over the last 20 years, at least in this country.

We love our cats, but do we love them 'well'? Do we respect their nature? Do we care about their basic behavioural needs? Are we forgetting that they are not small dogs? Are we abusing their compliant and apparently undemanding needs and thus making them ill? In many cases, we keep cats in an urban environment; we deny them access to heights; we force them to share their territory with other cats or other animals; we keep them locked indoors; and we don't want them to hunt. Some owners want their pet to be vegetarian while others transform their pet into a cat 'couch potato'.

It is time, therefore, to consider cats' behaviour so that we are better able to understand what they really need and offer them an interesting and fulfilling feline life.

But what is a cat's life?

The 'natural' cat is a solitary animal. Unlike dogs, they don't live in packs and have no hierarchical social organization. They eat fresh meat and their main activity is hunting. An average cat needs between 10 and 15 mice a day to cover its nutritional requirements. Because only one in 15 hunting expeditions is successful, a 'natural' cat spends between six and eight hours a day hunting. They use a lot of energy and are always alert. Nature doesn't allow them to reach a severe hypoglycaemic stage before they start looking for food. That's why even a well-fed cat will go out and catch prey. Don't overfeed your cats in the vain hope that they won't kill birds or mice. They will still do it . . . but won't eat them. What a waste!

Because hunting requires intense and sudden bursts of energy, cats sleep a lot. In the wild, they spend about 12 hours a day sleeping but that can increase to 18 hours a day for a bored domestic house-cat.

After catching their prey, cats have two options: eat it or leave it for a while. If they are not hungry they may choose the latter, because one never knows when the next 'catch' will occur. But cats only store food for a couple of hours, no longer. This is why they may turn their nose up at a bowl of food unless it is fresh. Eating is not a social activity for cats. It is only when the parenting instinct is involved that a cat will share its food, otherwise it will usually find a quiet and safe place to enjoy its prey.

We all know the importance of grooming to a cat. In fact, it's an activity that can take up to a third of the cat's waking time. We talk about 'allogrooming' when one cat grooms another. Unlike sharing food, this is important social behaviour. But grooming is also a stress regulation mechanism, and over-grooming is recognized by behaviourists as a self-soothing activity. Some cats do it secretly and it may be difficult for an owner to understand why their cat is becoming bald when in fact it is simply grooming excessively.



Cats need to play. Play keeps their reflexes accurate, maintains their catching skills and provides an opportunity to socialize. Keep playing with your cat all through its life because the need doesn't stop after kittenhood.

Cat society is not based on hierarchy. Cats don't share meals, they don't have elections or parties, but they will play, rub and groom each other. Unlike dogs, cats have no need for social interaction. We should always bear that in mind before acquiring a second cat. It could be an unbearable stress for one of them and it is not uncommon to find

one cat running away and seeking another territory if it is forced to share.

As human beings we are very limited: we usually only move in two dimensions – and we either walk or we run. Cats like height! We should allow them access to an elevated observation post: a cardboard box on the top of the wardrobe is ideal. Furthermore, cats seem to use a fourth dimension – time! They seem to come to an arrangement with neighbouring cats, as if to say “You use this garden in the mornings and I will go in the afternoon. I’ll make sure you know I’ve been there by scratching the bark of the tree and by rubbing my scent at strategic places”.

Cats need different locations for different activities: playgrounds, sleeping quarters, latrines, a feeding station, and nap places all have to be separate. Even if it is practical, litter trays must not be placed near food bowls. You wouldn’t have the loo in the dining room yourself!

We must also make sure that those allocated places are not in a ‘passage’ zone. In the wild, cats regularly change their lair and resting-places. It’s a natural way of avoiding massive infestation by parasites (you wouldn’t want to sleep in a nest full of hungry fleas).

Making your cat happier

Now that we know about all those ‘catty’ behavioural peculiarities, what can we do to make our cats happier?

Feed them 10 to 15 meals a day. Dry food is easy to use and it stays fresh even if you are not there to serve the meals at regular intervals. Do not use food as a bribe. The cats will drift from their real nature and become obese. Make them ‘hunt’ for their food by hiding it, by varying the location of the food bowl and by using puzzle feeders.

Encourage them to play from an early age. If you teach them to catch a fluffy pink ball they’ll be less interested in birds and small wild mammals. Learn feline socializing play: allogroom, allorub, do not force them to sit on your lap. Leave clues of ‘prey’; a ball of tin foil thrown in the middle of the living room will do. Learn to play like a cat: a laser pointer dot appearing behind the curtains, a piece of string tied to your ankle as you walk, a cork thrown from the top of the stairs, an empty cardboard box or a paper bag – all of these can be exhilarating toys for a cat!

Allow your cat to climb, scratch, explore and hide. Respect its need for privacy during the ‘elimination’ business. If you have several pets, avoid the stress of competition by providing several litter trays and feeding places – you don’t like to queue for the loo or a table at the restaurant, do you? Build an outside toilet for cats in the garden by digging a well-drained, hidden space with gravel in the bottom and sand on the top. Above all, try to think ‘cat’.

Respecting its real nature will allow you to truly appreciate what an honour it is to share the life of *Felis catus*.

Roundup of Cat Show results from March 2013 to May 2013

Detailed below are the Siamese, owned by members, which were the top Siamese exhibits at the shows since the start of the 2013 show season. Photos are included where suitable ones were available.

Congratulations to all the owners and breeders.

EASTERN CAPE CAT CLUB Show – 9/3/2013

Best Adult – Ch Taldi Alaska (Lilacpoint Female) owned & bred by Johan Groenewald & Ian Taylor

Best Neuter – Sup Pr Wizz Billy the Kid (Sealpoint N/Male) owned & bred by Rita Wiseman



Sup Ch Taldi Alaska

Best Kitten – Sweet Cats Amsterdammertjie of Taldi (Imp) (Sealpoint Male) owned by Johan Groenewald & Ian Taylor

ALL BREEDS CAT CLUB Show – 9/3/2013

Best Adult: - Gr Ch Sherlah Jay Natalie (Bluepoint Female) owned by Maureen Cannell & bred by Lynel du Toit

Best Kitten – Koosje van Tutte's die Kaapse Oorkapi of Mai-Thai (Imp) (Seal Tabbypoint Male) owned Charlotte van der Riet



Sup Ch Sherlah Jay Natalie

TRANSVAAL CAT SOCIETY Show – 22/3/2013

Best Adult – Ch Siamlove Seal'd with a Kiss
(Sealpoint Female) owned & bred by Elizabeth
van Renen



Gr Ch Siamlove Seal'd with a Kiss

S A ABYSSINIAN & SOMALI SOCIETY Show – 22/3/2013

Best Adult – Sup Ch Sherlah Jay Natalie
(Bluepoint Female) owned by Maureen Cannell
& bred by Lynel du Toit

Best Kitten – San-Shing's Gypsy Rose (Sealpoint
Female) owned & bred by Paul & Tania Prime



San-Shing's Gypsy Rose

BREEDERS OF SPHYNX & REX Show – 13/4/2013

Best Adult – Gr Ch Siamlove Seal'd with a Kiss (Sealpoint Female) owned & bred by
Elizabeth van Renen

Best Kitten – San-Shing's Honey Bee (Chocolatepoint Female) owned by
Beryl Webber & bred by Paul & Tania Prime



San-Shing's Honey Bee

CAT FANCIERS CLUB Show – 14/4/2013

Best Adult – Gr Ch Siamlove Seal'd with a Kiss (Sealpoint Female) owned & bred by Eliabeth van Renen

Best Kitten – San-Shing's Honey Bee (Chocolatepoint Female) owned by Beryl Webber & bred by Paul & Tania Prime

THE BIG CAT CLUB Show 27/4/2013

Best Adult - Sup Ch Sherlah Jay Natalie (Bluepoint Female) owned by Maureen Cannell & bred by Lynel du Toit

Best Neuter - Gr Pr San-Shing's King's Best (Caramelpoint N/Male) owned by Michelle Bolton & bred by Paul & Tania Prime

Best Kitten - San-Shing's Beauty in Blue (Bluepoint Female) bred by Paul & Tania Prime

What a super feat by Paul and Tania, taking all three sections!



Gr Pr San-Shing's King's Best

EASTERN CAPE CAT CLUB Show – 4/5/2013

Best Adult – Gr Ch Taldi Alaska (Lilacpoint Female) owned & bred by Johan Groenewald & Ian Taylor

Best Neuter – Sup Pr Wizz Billy the Kid (Sealpoint Siamese N/Male) owned & bred by Rita Wiseman



Sup Pr Wizz Billy the Kid

All photos by Krystal Callaghan and Theresa Fouche.

WESTERN PROVINCE CAT CLUB Show – 25/5/2013

Best Adult – Sup Ch Sherlah Jay Natalie (Bluepoint Female) owned by Maureen Cannell & bred by Lynel du Toit

Best Neuter - Gr Pr San-Shing's King's Best (Caramelpoint N/Male) owned by Michelle Bolton & bred by Paul & Tania Prime

Best Kitten - San-Shing's Gypsy Rose (Sealpoint Female) owned and bred by Paul & Tania Prime

PROVINCIAL CAT SOCIETY Show – 1/6/2013

Best Kitten (tied) – Michele's Murari (Redpoint Male) owned & bred by Michele and Dudley Fleischman

S A CAT COUNCIL NATIONAL Show – 15/6/2013

Best Adult – Sup Ch Sherlah Jay Natalie (Bluepoint Female) owned by Maureen Cannell & bred by Lynel du Toit

Best Neuter - Sup Pr San-Shing's King's Best (Caramelpoint N/Male) owned by Michelle Bolton & bred by Paul & Tania Prime

TRANSVAAL CAT SOCIETY Show – 22/6/2013

Best Adult – Sup Ch Siamlove Seal'd with a Kiss (Sealpoint Female) owned & bred by Elizabeth van Renen

Best Kitten – San-Shing's Honey Bee (Chocolatepoint Female Spay) owned by Beryl Webber & bred by Paul and Tania Prime

EASTERN CAPE CAT CLUB Show -29/30 June 2013

Best Adult – Sup Ch Taldi Alaska (Lilacpoint Female) owned & bred by Johan Groenewald & Ian Taylor

Best Neuter – Sup Pr Wizz Billy the Kid (Sealpoint Neuter Male) owned & bred by Rita Wiseman

Best Kitten – Taldi Monet – (Lilacpoint Female) owned & bred by Johan Groenewald & Ian Taylor

ALL BREEDS CAT CLUB Show – 6/7/2013

Best Adult – Sup Ch Sherlah Jay Natalie (Bluepoint Female) owned by Maureen Cannell & bred by Lynel du Toit

Best Neuter - Sup Pr San-Shing's King's Best (Caramelpoint N/Male) owned by Michelle Bolton & bred by Paul & Tania Prime

PROVINCIAL CAT SOCIETY Show – 6/7/2013

Best Adult – Ch Michele's Moraine (Blue Tabbypoint Female) owned & bred by Michele & Dudley Fleischman

Best Kitten – Michele's Mayland (Redpoint Male) owned & bred by Michele & Dudley Fleischman

The spectator's guide to Show Etiquette

you're a cat lover and have never attended a cat show, you are missing out on an extraordinary experience. Cat shows are sanctioned by registries such as the Cat Fanciers' Association and The International Cat Association, and usually are sponsored by local cat clubs. If you wish to attend a cat show as a spectator, you are certain to find one nearby.

When you step into that exhibit hall, keep in mind you have entered a different world and are expected to follow the unwritten Rules of Cat Show Etiquette. These "rules" are extremely important -- and abiding by them will make your day at the cat show an enjoyable and unforgettable occasion.

The Touching/Handling Rule

As fluffy and/or shiny these beautiful show cats look, the number one rule for everyone is "DO NOT TOUCH!" Almost every show cage will have a sign saying as much, but spectators often ignore it or get carried away when they see a gorgeous feline. It's only natural to want to pet or hold such a stunning creature. But bacteria and viruses can easily spread from cat to cat (via your hands), which is why most exhibitors frown on their cats being handled. If you watch a competition ring, you'll notice the judges disinfect their hands and the show table between each cat they touch. If a kind exhibitor invites you to pet their prized puss, they will ask you to first wash your hands, which is a

small price to pay for such a great honor.

The Right-of-Way Rule

The show hall is often crowded and difficult to move around in. At most shows, the public can walk through the benching area (where the cages are set up for cats to rest when they aren't in the show ring). If you are talking to an exhibitor about their cat (or perhaps they have kittens for sale), don't be surprised if they suddenly get up and quickly take off with their cat. They only have a few minutes to get to the judging area. And, when a cat's number gets called, common courtesy says you give the right-of-way to exhibitors carrying kitty to or from the show ring.

The Loose Cat Rule

A frightening announcement you may hear during a show is when someone yells out, "Loose cat!" This means someone's feline has gotten away, and all the doors to the hall will swing shut. Stand still and out of the way while the show people deal with the situation. Don't try to be a hero and chase the cat -- it only scares kitty more. If you spot the cat, however, it's OK to signal the location to the search team and/or owner.

The Judging Ring Rule

While going to a cat show is fun for you, it's quite serious for most exhibitors. They spend months and years preparing for their feline's moment in the spotlight. When you are near a judging ring, it's essential not to talk loudly or do anything that might distract the judge or the cat being judged.

Many judges explain to the spectators and or the exhibitors what they are looking for as they judge each breed, so it can be fascinating to stand by quietly and listen. It's also common etiquette not to make comments or pass judgment on the quality or condition of the cats that are on show. This will ensure that all have a fun filled day with people that share the same passion for cats as you do.



The Judges Rule

Judges are also required to abide by a strict code of conduct that's required from the governing body in their respective country and club. The same level of professionalism

is expected from a judge as is expected from the exhibitor whilst maintaining a high level of integrity and offer support to breeders and exhibitors on the show standard of various breeds.

Tackling Ringworm in Cats

Ringworm is an infection caused by a fungus that grows in the superficial layers of the skin, hair or nails. It has nothing to do with worms. The scientific name for ringworm infection is dermatophytosis, and fungi which cause the disease are called dermatophytes. There are approximately 40 different species of dermatophyte, each tending to cause infection in particular species of hosts. In the cat, the cause of more than 90 per cent of cases of ringworm is the dermatophyte *Microsporum canis* (*M canis*). This organism can also cause infection in many other species, including dogs and humans. Other dermatophytes that may occasionally cause ringworm in cats are *Trichophyton mentagrophytes* and *M persicolor* (acquired by contact with infected wild rodents) and *M gypseum*, *M fulvum* and *T terrestre* (isolated from the soil).



Ringworm infection on human skin

How do cats become infected with *M canis*?

Ringworm is contagious. Spores are the infectious stage of dermatophytes and are produced by *M canis* during an infection. They are typically found in clusters around infected hairs and can only be seen using a microscope. Infected hairs are shed into the cat's environment. Cats may become infected either by direct contact with an infected animal or by exposure to a contaminated environment or object such as grooming tools, clippers or bedding. Spores in the environment are very robust and without treatment can remain infectious for up to two years. Spores attach to the skin and germinate to produce hyphae that invade abraded skin and hair. It is not known how many spores are needed to start an infection. Self-grooming, particularly licking, may be an effective way of harmlessly removing spores from the skin and haircoat. Intact skin is very resistant to infection. Mites and lice are generally uncommon. The point being made here is that some degree of self trauma is probably required to en-

able fungal infection to develop and that ectoparasite infestation may be an additional predisposing factor.

Ringworm seems to be more common in young cats less than one year old, and longhaired cats, particularly Persians. The reasons for this are unknown. It is speculated that young cats may have immature immune defence mechanisms which limit their ability to resist infection. In long-haired cats grooming is less efficient and the skin surface is more protected from exposure to the sun (which dermatophytes don't like) than in short-haired cats.



What does a cat with ringworm look like?

The appearance of cats with ringworm is very variable. Some cats have severe skin disease while other cats have only very minor lesions or no lesions at all and look completely normal. Typical skin lesions are discrete, roughly circular areas of hair loss, particularly on the head, ears or extremities of the paws. The hairs surrounding affected areas appear broken. The affected skin is often scaly and may look inflamed. However, ringworm can look very similar to many other feline skin diseases, including some of the clinical manifestations of flea allergy dermatitis, and may present as symmetrical alopecia or even feline acne. Some loss of hair is usually involved, but the amount of inflammation, scaling and itchiness (pruritus) can be very variable.

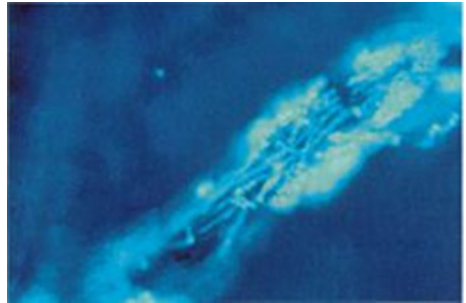
How is ringworm diagnosed?

It is impossible to diagnose a cat as having ringworm based on its appearance alone because this is so variable and can easily be confused with other skin diseases, or look like a normal cat. Diagnostic tests are used to confirm the presence of *M canis* or other dermatophytes. Most veterinary dermatologists will use at least one of these tests on any cat with skin disease to investigate the possibility that ringworm might be involved. There are three tests that can be used to diagnose ringworm.

The ultraviolet Wood's lamp can be used to examine cats suspected of having ringworm. It is shone onto the haircoat in a dark room and infected hairs may fluoresce with a characteristic apple-green colour. The fluorescence is thought to be due to a metabolite produced by *M canis*. Unfortunately, not all dermatophyte species, or varieties of *M canis*, fluoresce, so failure to demonstrate fluorescent hairs does not rule out the possibility of ringworm. In addition, extraneous substances may cause a similar

fluorescence. For these reasons the results of Wood's lamp examination is not definitive, but it can provide a very useful method of selecting hairs for further examination, either by fungal culture or microscopic examination.

Microscopic examination of suspect hairs can provide a very rapid positive diagnosis. The observer looks for fungal elements and spores associated with hairs. Interpretation can be difficult and it is best performed by an experienced mycologist. It is not possible to determine which species of dermatophyte is involved using this method alone. A negative result is unreliable and may only mean that the sample of hairs examined was not representative and did not include infected hairs.



Microscopic appearance of a ringworm-infected hair demonstrating the presence of numerous tiny spores around the outside of hair and hyphae invading the hair

Fungal culture is the most reliable way of diagnosing ringworm. Cat hairs are collected and used to inoculate plates of a special culture medium, which are then incubated in a laboratory. Hairs for culture can be selected because they are damaged or closely associated with skin lesions or because they fluoresce when examined with the Wood's lamp. Hairs are collected from cats that look completely normal by whole body brushing using a sterile toothbrush or massage brush. Culture enables precise identification of the species of dermatophyte involved, but because dermatophytes are slow growing it may take several weeks for laboratories to report a result. A positive result indicates that the cat is infected with ringworm or is carrying dermatophytes on its coat (due to exposure to an infected environment). If one cat in a household is diagnosed as having ringworm then all the other animals will need to be examined, even if they seem to be completely unaffected. In most cases all cats in a household will be culture-positive and require treatment.

Please note that the absence of dermatophytes on microscopic examination of a skin biopsy does not rule out dermatophytosis.

How is ringworm treated?

Although in most healthy cats ringworm infection will resolve spontaneously after many weeks, treatment is necessary in all cases to speed this up because of the risk of infection of humans and contact animals. Some cats will not eliminate infection unless they are treated. In some cases, prolonged courses of treatment will be

needed to achieve a cure. Treatment can be broken down into several elements, all of which are essential.

Treatment of predisposing conditions

Any pre-existing skin condition or ectoparasitic infestation (particularly fleas and cheyletiella mites) which causes skin damage can predispose to ringworm and should be treated specifically.

Treatment of the affected animals

All affected animals should be treated by administration of both oral medication (systemic therapy) and by treatment applied directly to the haircoat and skin (topical therapy).

Systemic therapy:

The principal product licensed for veterinary use in the cat is Itrafungol (Elanco Animal Health), a liquid containing **itraconazole**. The recommended regimen is one week of therapy followed by one week off therapy, repeated for three weeks of treatment. This approach is used because studies have shown incorporation of the drug into the skin and slow break down, leading to a depot effect or build up of the drug. The product is safe to use in kittens from 10 days of age and caution should be employed when considering treatment of pregnant queens.

Historically, griseofulvin has been the drug most commonly used for the treatment of dermatophytosis. In recent years, the veterinary licence has not been renewed for commercial reasons and only human and farm animal versions are available.

Terbinafine (Lamisil; Sandoz) There are reports of the use of this expensive product which is used for various persistent human dermatophyte infections. There is a long duration of activity and this may allow relatively short courses of therapy followed by careful monitoring. The recommended dose in cats is of the order of 10-30 mg/kg per day, with two to six weeks of therapy. There is a persistent effect for several further weeks.

Lufenuron (Program; Novartis) Lufenuron is available as a flea control product.

Lufenuron is a very safe product and very unlikely to cause adverse effects - even at high dosages and has been investigated as a treatment for ringworm. However, carefully controlled experimental studies have failed to demonstrate that lufenuron can prevent dermatophyte infection, or result in faster resolution of infection, when cats are challenged by direct inoculation or contact with an infected cat. In some situations it may be useful as an adjunctive treatment.

Topical therapy:

Topical therapy can play a very important role in reducing environmental contamination. Spot therapy with one of the human anti-fungal creams is not recommended because the area of infected skin is often considerably wider than the skin lesions might suggest. Topical therapy is best applied to the whole body by either shampooing or dipping. Clipping of cats will make this much easier, particularly for long-haired cats, and also reduce environmental contamination. Clipping should be done with care to avoid traumatising the skin, as this can spread infection and make the skin lesions look worse for a short time. It is advisable to repeat clipping several weeks after the start of treatment with systemic agents, as by this time the drug should be incorporated into the hair. If whole body clipping is not chosen then local clipping around the lesions should be done with care. It is recommended that clipping should extend 6 cm around visible lesions. It is normally necessary to sedate cats to clip them safely. Infected hair should be disposed of by burning and clippers should be disinfected carefully.

The only product licensed for the topical treatment of ringworm in cats is a **chlorhexidine and miconazole** shampoo (Malaseb: Leo Laboratories). It is usually applied twice a week. The coat is first completely wetted and the shampoo is then lathered on and massaged well down into the skin. The shampoo is left in contact with the skin for 10 minutes (timed with a clock) before rinsing. Most cats tolerate this remarkably well. Leo Laboratories have produced a leaflet giving tips about shampooing cats. The shampoo should be used with caution around the eyes and if shampoo enters the eye it should immediately be rinsed with large amounts of clean warm water. In order to obtain a veterinary licence a product has to be both effective and safe and, unless there is a very good reason for not doing so, such products should be used in preference to unlicensed products. Other products which may be suggested for topical therapy, but which are not specifically licensed for use in cats, include:

Enilconazole (Imaverol; Elanco Animal Health) is used as a dip. It is licensed for use in dogs, horses and cattle. There have been some reports of cats suffering fatal toxic reactions following its use. These have not been well documented. Limited experimental work has failed to reproduce these effects. Enilconazole appears to be effective at killing *M canis* spores on hairs. Owners who decide to use Imaverol will be doing so at their own risk. To reduce the risk of toxicity it is recommended that cats have an Elizabethan collar fitted following dipping until the coat has dried.

Chlorhexidine (eg, Hibiscrub) - recent studies suggest that some other products, such as Malaseb, may be better at killing *M canis* spores on hairs.

Pet Virkon (Germicidal skin cleanser; Antec) may be useful as a topical treatment. It is applied as a spray or dip and then rinsed off after 10 minutes. It is not a licensed veterinary medicine.

Decontamination of the environment and objects

Decontamination is much easier if infected cats can be restricted to one easily cleanable room and this will reduce human exposure to the cats and sources of infection. All areas of the house to which infected animals have had access will require decontamination, but the majority of effort can then be concentrated on the room in which the cats are confined. Any contaminated objects such as collars, baskets, igloos, bedding, soft toys and grooming tools which cannot be disinfected should be disposed of, preferably by burning. Cardboard boxes can be used as temporary disposable beds and these should be disposed of at least once a week. The source of environmental contamination is fungal spores on shed hairs. The amount of contamination can be reduced by topical therapy and clipping as discussed above.

Decontamination is achieved by a combination of two approaches: physically removing the infected hairs from the environment and the use of chemical agents in the environment to kill the spores.

Physical decontamination

Thorough vacuuming of contaminated rooms and/or cages on a daily basis is recommended. Vacuum cleaners with a beating action are best for cleaning spores from carpets. Heating and ventilation ducts and fans often become contaminated and should be vacuumed. Vacuum bags should be disposed of by burning. Under suitable circumstances a blow-lamp can be used to burn hairs off wire runs and cages. Steam cleaning is of limited use because the temperature of water that contacts the item being cleaned is unlikely to be sufficient to kill spores.

Chemical disinfection

Many disinfectants that claim to be effective against dermatophytes do not have very good activity against *M canis* spores on hairs. Recent experimental work has demonstrated that there are two products that do work. These may not be suitable for use on carpets and other soft furnishings.

- Bleach. The stronger the better, but dilutions up to 1 in 10 of household bleach with water have been shown to be adequate. Use for washing all hard surfaces (floors, worktops, litter trays and cages) at least twice a week.
- Virkon (Antec) is a disinfectant powder that is made up with water to a 1 per cent solution. Use for washing all hard surfaces at least twice a week.

Treatment regimes in particular cases

The single cat household

Dermatophytosis affecting a cat in a single cat household is usually relatively easily contained and managed. The problem of infection being transmitted to humans is an important issue as in any outbreak of *M canis* infection. However, once the cat is on a programme of treatment and environmental contamination is carried out the problem will usually resolve within a couple of months.

The multi-cat household

The situation where there is an outbreak in a multi-cat household is very different, particularly if longhaired cats are infected in a domestic environment. All cats in the unit could be tested by fungal culture to identify those which are infected. However, it is usual to find that all in-contact cats are culture-positive and clearance is most rapidly achieved by treating all the cats from the outset. In any case, separation and isolation of cats is frequently impossible so treatment of all the cats in the unit is the only practical option. If culture-negative cats are separated this should be to an uncontaminated environment and topical therapy is recommended, as is intermittent monitoring by fungal culture. When cats on full treatment become culture-negative, ideally they should be kept as a third group until a second or third consecutive negative culture result confirms the permanence of this state. Complete resolution of the problem can take from months to years and be very time consuming and expensive to achieve. However, with commitment and determination this is achievable. Throughout the period of infection the household should be isolated, no cats should enter or leave and breeding should cease.

The pregnant queen

There are no systemic agents that can safely be used in pregnancy. Queens should be isolated from other cats and clipped and treated topically twice a week. Once the kittens are born the itraconazole can be added to the regime from 10 days of age.

Kittens

Topical therapy can be used from about four weeks of age, taking special care to keep the kitten warm when wet. Kittens should not be rehomed until two negative fungal cultures have been obtained at intervals of two weeks. The need to reduce direct con-



tact with kittens, particularly by children, to avoid human infection should be stressed.

How long will it take for cats to get better?

Treatment should be continued until all of the affected animals have recovered and are negative on fungal cultures. Skin lesions will often resolve before the cats have eliminated the fungal infection, so it is necessary to monitor progress by taking hair samples (whole body brushing) for fungal culture. If treatment is stopped prematurely the ringworm may seem to recur after a time, although in fact it was never eliminated. In most cases cats will need treatment for a minimum of six weeks and in some cases much longer. Typically, the more cats in a household, the harder it is to resolve the problem.

Prevention

New cats are an important potential source of ringworm. To prevent the introduction of *M canis* into a house or cattery, new cats should be sampled for fungal culture and isolated until the results of this are known. Any situations where there is mixing with unknown cats carries a risk of exposure to dermatophyte spores, even if there is no direct contact between cats. Cat shows are a common example of this. There should be no sharing of grooming equipment with other exhibitors at shows. Bathing, spraying or dipping using an antifungal agent after a show is the best available means of preventing any dermatophyte spores on a cat from starting an infection. Similar precautions should be taken whenever a cat returns to the cattery from anywhere where direct or indirect contact with other cats is a possibility, eg, other catteries or the veterinary surgery. Although ringworm is dreaded by cat breeders, by taking sensible precautions and using good husbandry it can be avoided.

***M canis* infection in humans**

Ringworm can easily be spread from cats to people. Children are particularly at risk. Direct contact with infected animals should be minimised. Gloves and protective clothing should be worn when administering treatment. Efficient environmental decontamination will reduce exposure to dermatophyte spores. Dermatophytosis in humans presents as circular patches of thickened, inflamed skin or hair loss with scaling. These may be itchy. Lesions may occur anywhere on the skin or scalp. If any skin lesions develop the family doctor should be consulted. Ringworm in humans usually responds well to treatment.

The Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF) and ringworm

Some understanding of procedures regarding cat showing and breeding required by the GCCF following notification or identification of ringworm in a cat and the reasons for this is helpful. If any skin lesions (remember that ringworm may be associated with any type of skin lesion) are noted when a cat is presented for vetting in at a show it can be given a section D rejection. The exhibitor will then not be allowed to exhibit any cat at that show or to attend the show. The cat should be presented within seven days for a veterinary examination and fungal culture. Until the results of the culture are known exhibition or attendance at shows is prohibited. If the culture is negative then a clearance certificate is given. If the culture is positive or an owner self-reports that a cat has ringworm, then the GCCF requires that all cats in the unit are presented for veterinary examination, microscopic examination of hairs and fungal culture from whole body brushings. No cats are allowed in or out of the unit and all breeding should cease. The owner is not allowed to exhibit at or attend cat shows or meetings. These conditions remain in force until a clearance certificate is issued. This will only happen when there are negative culture results from two sets of tests taken eight weeks apart for all the cats in the unit. Following the first negative result no topical therapy should be used. This regime may seem harsh but it is necessary to ensure that ringworm has been completely eradicated and that cats are unlikely to pose a risk to other cats or people.

Chronicle of an 87 year old grandmother and her beloved cat

This is an enchanting story of a 87-year-old grandmother and her beloved cat. Get the tissues ready.

Misao Ihara, a 87-year-old resident of Chiba Prefecture in Japan, found a tiny odd-eyed kitten in the shed about 9 years ago. He was born to a stray cat from the farm. Many odd-eyed white cats are deaf, and this kitty didn't escape that fate. When Misao found him, she named him Fukumaru "in hope that 'God of fuku' (good fortune) comes and everything will be smoothed like a 'maru' (circle)."

12 years ago, Misao's granddaughter Miyoko Ihara, Japanese photographer, started to take photos of her grandmother as part of her project. After her grandfather passed away, Miyoko decided to dedicate a series of photographs of her grandmother to commemorate her life. Since Misao had never taken many photographs when she was young, she was happy to be her granddaughter's model. In 2003, Miyoko started docu-

menting the chronicle of her grandmother and her beloved cat.

Fast forward to today, Misao and Fukumaru have lived together for about 9 years. Due to old age, Misao is losing hearing and her best furry companion has never been able to hear, but they seem to understand each other just by looking into their eyes.



Despite being in her late 80s, Misao continues to work in the fields, planting and weeding under the open sky, and Fukumaru never leaves her sight. The two are inseparable. There is a strong bond and mutual love that connect them. They don't have to say much and they are both hard of hearing, but they get each other right away as if they can read each others mind.

"We'll never be apart!", says Misao to Fukumaru. "Both of them live in a tiny world, with dignity, with mutual love. Still today, under the blue sky, Misao and Fukumaru work in the fields and in these natural surroundings, where they shine like the stars."

Read more at <http://lovemeow.com/2012/11/chronicle-of-87-year-old-grandmother-and-her-beloved-cat/#DSi0QhCuefiVmQhe.99>

