

ANIMAL Sheltering

July/August 2010

The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers

How to Hire a Shelter Vet
Coping With Kitten Season

**Collars
and Sense**
Identifying Cats



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The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers



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Collars and Sense

It's often said in the sheltering field that a collar and identification tag are a lost pet's best chance of returning home. That's especially true for felines: At a time when the homeless cat population is at crisis levels nationwide, only 2 to 5 percent of the millions entering shelters each year are reunited with their families. Shelters can help by modeling good cat identification practices to potential adopters.

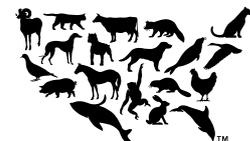


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All Roads Lead to Home

Moved by the extremity of the pet overpopulation problem in their region, veterinary students at the Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine launched the Homeward Bound Project, a transport program taking adoptable dogs from overcrowded shelters in the South to shelters in the Northeast, where there's often greater demand for them.

ALSO: For veterinarians, shelter work presents unique challenges, different from being in a clinic, a public health agency, in research, or a university setting. Hiring a vet begins with asking questions about your own organization—shelters need to define their expectations for a new veterinarian, create a clear job description, and find the candidate who's the best fit for their philosophy and mission.
The "101" Department, p. 37





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Joan Laisney and her team of volunteer seamstresses churn out thousands of free pet beds to make life more comfortable for shelter animals in the San Diego area; staff at the Toledo Area Humane Society nurse a burned cat back to health; this year's annual Spay Day Online Pet Photo Contest raises more than half a million dollars for animal welfare groups across the country and around the world; a groundbreaking symposium brings the dream of nonsurgical sterilization a little closer; a Mississippi shelter not only survives a hurricane and a fire, but goes on to expand its spay/neuter efforts; and more.

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In your space, you told us about the most heartwarming experience you've ever had in the animal welfare field.

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Thinking of hiring a veterinarian to join your staff? There's more involved than you might think. It's a process that starts long before you send an offer letter—a process that ideally follows a thorough evaluation of your shelter, its needs and capabilities, and the tasks you need a vet to perform.

43 Q&A

A pair of recently published books makes a convincing case that farm animals—chickens, pigs, sheep, cows, and others—are intellectually and emotionally complex creatures with social skills and needs not so different from our own.

47 Shelter Medicine

During the spring and summer—also known as "kitten season" to shelters and rescues—pregnant cats, nursing mothers, and kittens overwhelm facilities across the nation. Shelters have to take extra measures to protect young kittens from exposure to germs, and must provide them with a series of vaccinations, plus high-quality nutrition and proper deworming, to keep those mewing fuzz balls healthy.

53 Behavior Department

Being able to recognize the signs of stress in cats and dogs isn't enough these days—not when shelters are taking in a veritable Noah's Ark of homeless pets. It's essential that every species in your shelter receives appropriate, individualized care, which goes a long way toward reducing stress, improving health—and increasing the chances of adoption.

60 Off Leash

Marti Houge's bright bandanas give color-challenged pooches a better chance of catching someone's eye.

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A Better Bill for Horses

Thank you for your excellent article on the carriage-horse issue in New York City ["Trotting on Empty," May-June 2010, p. 10]. Our organization, the Coalition to Ban Horse-Drawn Carriages, had been opposed to the "eco-friendly replica cars" bill, Intro 86, because it did not consider what would happen to the horses. They would continue to fall through the cracks, being sent to slaughter auctions. But there is a solution, which should please everyone.

The current law indicates that horses are to be "disposed of ... in a humane manner." There is no description for what this means. It requires sales records to be submitted to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene if a horse is sold in New York City—but not if the horse is sold outside of the city. This means that the horse could go to an auction like those in Unadilla, N.Y., or New Holland, Pa., and the information would not be known or available to the public. Intro 86 would have continued with this provision.

Intro 92 is the reintroduction of Intro 658, the bill to ban the industry, originally introduced in 2007. It included a revision of the humane disposition section and required that horses could only be sold or donated to a private individual, animal sanctuary, or animal protection organization, who would sign an assurance that the horse would not be sold, would be kept solely as a companion animal, would not be employed in another horse-drawn carriage business or as a work horse, and would be cared for humanely for the remainder of the horse's natural life. Transfer records would be required to be sent to the Department of Health.

Council member Melissa Mark-Viverito, the sponsor of the car bill, has agreed to incorporate this section into her bill, and we are looking forward to supporting it. I believe all of the organizations and horse advocates will support this bill because they know it will really save the horses.

—Elizabeth Forel, President
Coalition to Ban Horse-Drawn Carriages
New York, N.Y.



There was a time when most shelters couldn't dream of having a veterinarian on staff. It was just too expensive, and most shelters didn't have budgets that would allow for their expertise. In some cases, animal welfare agencies would even find themselves in conflict with local veterinarians in private practice: As shelters attempted to open subsidized spay/neuter clinics, some vets protested that the practices would affect their business and lure away their customers. Shelter staff would even hear that local veterinarians had advised against shelter adoption because the animals weren't healthy.

Though such problems still come up now and then, overall we can safely say that times have changed for the better! Veterinarians—especially those working in and with animal shelters—have become a great force for progress on animal welfare issues. And by building bridges, shelters and humane-minded vets have come together to make progress for homeless animals.

In the 1970s, veterinarians helped animal shelters put spay/neuter in the spotlight, making it a common practice and a standard for socially responsible pet owners. That's a change that's helped drive the huge reduction in shelter intake numbers over the past decades.

As shelters have become more professionally savvy, increased their fundraising capacity, and grown their influence within their communities, some have hired veterinarians

to support them in their lifesaving missions. These vets have helped shelters develop smart protocols to keep animals healthy and behaviorally sound. And as more shelters focus on saving as many lives as possible, the input of veterinary experts becomes more and more critical—because there's no point in saving animals from neglect and abuse if they simply come into the shelter and become too sick to treat.

Shelter medicine has become a recognized specialty in the veterinary field, with multiple veterinary colleges adding programs to their curricula. And in 2008, the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (hsvma.org) was formed, to serve as a home for veterinary professionals who care about animal welfare issues.

For many shelters, though, hiring a veterinarian can be a challenge, for financial and other reasons. In this issue's "101" Department (p. 37), we look at ways shelters can recruit and screen doctors to help them in their work—and the kind of internal assessment shelters should do before even placing a job ad. We also feature a story on the need for cat identification, both in and out of the shelter; an essay by two veterinary students about the transport program they started to save the lives of shelter animals in Mississippi; and much more.

—Carrie, James, Jim, and Amy
Animal Sheltering magazine staff

When Life Hands You Stuffing ...

California woman creates pet beds and “scratchers” for shelters

If you regularly came home to find piles of fabric and stuffing on your front doorstep, you'd probably get a little annoyed.

But for Joan Laisney, the piles represent comfort and joy—not for her, but for the hundreds of shelter animals the materials will end up with, once she and her team are done with them.

Laisney likes to sew and had adopted one cat, but she wasn't terribly familiar with animal shelters. Yet in October 2007, something possessed her to visit the County of San Diego Department of Animal Services' shelter in her home of Carlsbad, Calif.—and volunteer to repair the animal beds.

She stitched up a few, then realized it would be easier to make new ones.

After that, Laisney, a retiree who worked a variety of jobs, including one as an airline attendant, says things “just sort of evolved.”

Today, she's the founder and coordinator of Kennel Comforters, a group with about 40 core volunteers who cut fabric and sew, stuff, and deliver pet beds to three county shelters and several humane societies in the San Diego area. The group has produced nearly 4,700 free beds for shelters, “which sounds like a lot, but that's a drop in the bucket,” Laisney says. The three county shelters alone take in about 26,000 animals a year, according to department director Dawn Danielson.

The group relies largely on the kindness of strangers to supply its materials, and Laisney believes there's serendipity at work. “I mean, when we're totally out of stuffing, it appears. It just shows up,” she says. “When we're out of fabric, somebody will just drive up, either to the shelter or my house, and just unload bolts of fabric.”

She's not exactly sure how she got where she is, but she believes it's all happening for a reason.

Sometimes she returns to her home in Carlsbad to find donated fabric and stuffing sitting on her doorstep, waiting to be turned into pet beds. The locals depositing the

material know Laisney as “The Bed Lady.” “I'm sure that's what it's gonna say on my tombstone,” she quips.

Kennel Comforters volunteers come by Laisney's house to pick up fabric so they can work at home. Members of the group also get together monthly at the shelter in Carlsbad, where Laisney has earned a reputation as a stern taskmaster. “I get told I'm running a sweatshop,” she says. “... It's like, ‘Quit texting, let's go, ladies. ... I got a quota here.’ It's all in good fun.”

Laisney calls what the group does “slam sewing,” a quantity-first approach that runs contrary to the seamstresses' typical emphasis on precision. “My volunteers want the thread to match, or they want the bottom to match the top,” she says. But after making so many hundreds of beds herself, she doesn't care if the beds match anymore.

The shelter pets don't seem to either. “I've never had a customer complain,” she says.



PEOPLE POWER
BY JAMES HETTINGER

Beyond the fun, the beds serve a serious purpose: Laisney firmly believes that they reduce stress and produce happier, more comfortable animals who are more likely to appeal to potential adopters.

The pillow-like, often brightly colored beds lend “a friendly and positive image to the cage,” helping to enhance a shelter's institutional look, says Danielson. “... It softens it up. The animals seem to be happier with them. Maybe it's like a little taste of home.”

At the Escondido Humane Society, executive director Sally Costello says her shelter previously had animals sleeping on towels and a mishmash of donated beds. Now it has Kennel Comforters' custom beds made from bright, durable fleece fabrics—measured to fit, with a consistent look. “We looked a little more disorganized, and now we look bright and more cheerful and uniform,” Costello says.



KAREN BENTSON

Joan Laisney, founder and coordinator of Kennel Comforters, says hello to a cat who's enjoying one of the group's beds.

Animal Sheltering Online

Your magazine isn't just in print—it's on the Web, too. Check out this issue's online extras.

- More answers to this month's Coffee Break question are at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.
- Go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces to download a poster encouraging pet owners to place a collar and identification tag on their cats.
- As a supplement to our Shelter Medicine column on coping with kitten season, check out answers to some common questions about vaccination protocols at animalsheltering.org/resource_library/magazine_articles/jul_aug_2006/hurley_vaccination_station.pdf.



Kennel Comforters volunteers gather for a sewing session at the County of San Diego Department of Animal Services shelter in Carlsbad, Calif.

Kennel Comforters also produces cat cage curtains, which provide a little privacy for new arrivals and frightened kitties, and can help thwart the spread of disease. “It really keeps down—excuse the language—the snot factor” in a roomful of cats with upper respiratory infections, Laisney notes.

And an entirely different enterprise grew out of Kennel Comforters. As Laisney spent more time in shelters, she noticed the multiple scratch marks on crates. She had an “aha” moment that led to her first (and she swears her last) invention: cardboard “scratchers” that attach to the inside of cat cages with twist ties, providing a simple way for shelter cats to relieve stress.

Laisney contracts with a cardboard company to produce the scratchers, which she stores in her garage. She sells them (at \$85 for a case of 50) to shelters around the country through StretchandScratch.com. She encourages shelters to put the scratchers on their wish lists, so people can buy and donate them. When cats are adopted, the scratchers can go home with them; the new owners

can cut off the ties and set the scratchers on the floor.

The business is “so far in the red, it’s pathetic,” Laisney says, though she has about 400 customers and hopes to one day make enough money from the scratchers to sustain Kennel Comforters and possibly fund bed-making groups nationwide. The scratchers have garnered rave reviews from shelters and even attracted the interest of researchers studying stress in cats in small environments, she says.

The path might have chosen her, but Laisney (who has since adopted a second cat) appears to be pleased with the results. “I didn’t start out with a big plan,” she says. “I just started out with an idea, and I am frankly amazed what one person can do if they just put their mind to it.” **AS**



Recognizing that shelter cats need to stretch and scratch, Kennel Comforters coordinator Joan Laisney designed cardboard “scratchers” that attach with twist ties to the inside of cages.

[scoop]

A Lost Pet is Not a Lost Cause

Website aims for happy reunions

Searching to find a lost pet can be an agonizing and often fruitless experience. But The Center for Lost Pets (thecenterforlostpets.com) hopes to fundamentally improve the way people look for their missing companion animals and increase the number of happy reunions.

Created by Liz Blackman—founder of Help4Pets Inc., a company founded in 1996 to help shelters by promoting adoption, raising funds, and providing pet identification solutions—the website serves as one central location where people who have lost or found pets can connect.

Her website also acts as a portal with links to nine other sites where users can click to search for their missing animals. The Center for Lost Pets gives owners an all-inclusive place to turn for help—kind of a “one-stop shopping” approach, according to Betsy McFarland, senior director of the

Companion Animals section of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

The HSUS is partnering with Blackman’s site because the number of lost pets entering animal shelters who are reunited with their families remains low. “Clearly, that’s a big problem, and part of helping to end euthanasia in shelters is trying to get lost pets back home,” McFarland says. The HSUS wants to increase the number of pets being returned home, as well as make it easier for people to know where to go when they’ve lost a pet.

The website features advice on what steps people can take if a dog or cat is missing, as well as tips on how to use Internet search engines to look for more lost-and-found resources, including in local communities.

“It allows them to go and see what else they can do, in addition to going to the animal shelter, which of course we encourage



everyone to do,” McFarland says. “So I think it’s just one more tool in the toolbox for shelters to use in order to reunite people with their lost pets.” 



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Carriage Horse Update

In our May-June 2010 issue we reported on efforts to abolish the horse-drawn carriage business in New York City—a longstanding tradition that many animal welfare advocates consider inhumane (“Trotting on Empty,” p. 10).

After that issue of *Animal Sheltering* went to press, the New York City Council adopted an industry-backed bill that increases the rates that carriage drivers may charge for rides and calls for some improvements in the way the horses are treated. The bill, which the council approved 43-4 and Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed into law in late April, mandates stalls that allow horses to lie down and requires that horses get five weeks off per year, among other provisions.

Patrick Kwan, The Humane Society of the United States’ New York State director, called

the council’s action disappointing, noting that the bill “will not protect carriage horses from being sent to slaughter, and the horses will continue to be forced to work in dangerous traffic conditions every day, and often in harsh weather, where their lives and welfare are threatened.”

Advocates continue to push for two other bills before the council, one that would ban New York’s carriage horse industry immediately, and one that would phase it out by replacing the horse-drawn carriages with eco-friendly replicas of antique cars.

Correction: “Trotting on Empty” incorrectly spelled the last name of Jake Dilemani, a lobbyist for New Yorkers for Clean, Livable, and Safe Streets.

Book Review

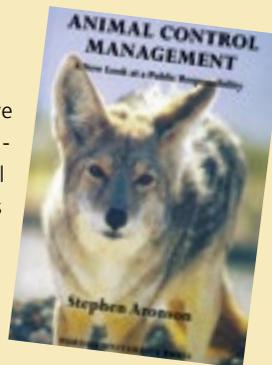
Animal Control Management: A New Look at a Public Responsibility

Any new director of an animal care and control department—regardless of whether she has longtime experience or is coming into her position from another field entirely—is likely to have lots of questions as she examines what about the agency is working smoothly and what needs to be improved. What are the advantages of managing a municipal animal control authority through the public works department versus the health department? What skills should an animal control manager have, and what are some questions a new department leader should ask when assessing top job priorities? What are the basic forms and records an animal control department needs? How should its website function?

It’d be difficult to come up with a question about modern animal control that’s not addressed in Stephen Aronson’s comprehensive new book, *Animal Control Management: A New Look at a Public Responsibility* (401 pages, Purdue University Press, \$39.95). The

book should serve as a valuable resource for animal control directors evaluating their agencies’ work, ACOs and other staff seeking to learn about the bigger picture, and for city managers and other decision-makers who may need a basic education on the staffing and funding needs of an effective animal control department.

Aronson delves into everything from the complications of contracting and working with rescue groups to managing staffing issues and dangerous-dog legislation. He also provides a series of useful appendices with forms for hiring, requests for service proposals, and sample agreements for partnering with rescues. —CA



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[scoop]

Closer to the Magic Pill?

Symposium brings together those interested in nonsurgical sterilization

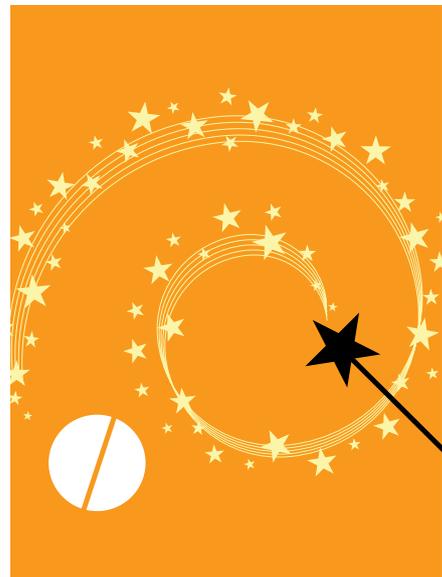
BY ARNA COHEN

For decades, those laboring in the trenches of animal care and control facilities and humane societies have dreamed of the magic pill—or, more likely, the magic shot—that would render animals sterile without the need for surgery. The dream is a particularly big one for those working in developing nations, where stray and feral dogs still roam the streets in packs, and where resources for spay/neuter surgeries are even more limited than they are stateside.

While the dream is not yet a reality, the exchange of information and ideas at a groundbreaking symposium held in April in Dallas has the potential to bring it a little closer. The 4th International Symposium on Non-Surgical Contraceptive Methods of Pet Population Control brought together 185 scientists, veterinarians, animal welfare professionals, public health advocates,

pharmaceutical company representatives, and funders from 25 countries to discuss advances in the development of long-term, nonsurgical contraception for companion animals. The meeting also spotlighted the Michelson Prize and Grants in Reproductive Biology—a \$25 million award to be given to the first entity to create a safe, practical, and permanent nonsurgical sterilant for male and female cats and dogs, and up to \$50 million in other grants for promising research.

The symposium, co-sponsored by the Alliance for Contraception in Cats & Dogs (ACC&D) and the Found Animals Foundation, featured two tracks—a science-focused track that reviewed current animal-related research as well as human-centered studies that could have applications in animals; and an implementation track that discussed how nonsur-



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gical techniques could be employed in the field. The implementation track also included a discussion and hands-on training session on the use of EsterilSol, a permanent injectable contraceptive for male dogs that has been used in some developing countries.

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The Michelson Prize, established in 2008 by the Found Animal Foundation's founder Gary Michelson, M.D., is specifically for the creation of a single product that will work on both male and female cats and dogs, but the symposium sponsors are also interested in treatments that would be effective for one gender or species or for shorter time periods, explains Joyce Briggs, president of ACC&D. Studies and experience have shown that the lifespan of feral cats and street dogs is frequently less than three years. "If you could suppress reproduction for three or three and a half years, you could make a huge dent in the number of litters born," she says.

A nonsurgical approach is "so much less intensive" than surgery, says Nancy Peterson, feral cat program manager for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), who participated in the implementation track and notes that anesthesia—required for surgical sterilization—often creates complications. EsterilSol, on the other hand, requires only mild sedation, involves almost no recovery period, no pain, and much less time—a

real bonus for owned animals and ferals, Peterson points out.

Symposium attendees came from as far as Australia and Africa, where an effective nonsurgical contraceptive would be a tremendous boon in areas with little or no medical resources. Gudush Jalloh traveled from Sierra Leone, where he is the only private practice veterinarian in the entire country and has singlehandedly vaccinated and sterilized almost 56,000 community and street dogs. "It was really inspiring to hear people like him talk about their desperate need for nonsurgical sterilization to really be able to make a difference," says Briggs.

The big money behind the Michelson grant is attracting interest from scientists working in areas such as human immunology and genetics who otherwise might not have considered that their research could apply to animals. "We're seeing people coming from all kinds of different scientific disciplines that are not necessarily veterinary-related and trying to use their techniques and their approaches to apply to this problem," says

Aimee Gilbreath, executive director of the Found Animals Foundation.

Scott Coonrod, associate professor of epigenetics and reproductive biology at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, expressed his enthusiasm and optimism for the project during his opening remarks for his own presentation on the immunological approach to sterilization. He attended the very first ACC&D meeting in 2000, he said, and while it left him hopeful, he wasn't sure what the long-term effect would be. "Today ... I'm so optimistic that the new nonsurgical sterilant is going to be developed. I think it's in the near future, not long term like I imagined a few years ago." **AS**

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Hidden Blessings

Mississippi shelter survives hurricane and fire, expands spay/neuter efforts



VALERIE RACHAL/SOUTHERN PINES ANIMAL SHELTER

Anna White performs surgery at the spay/neuter clinic of Southern Pines Animal Shelter. White is the full-time veterinarian at the freestanding clinic, which opened about six miles from the shelter in July 2009.



VALERIE RACHAL/SOUTHERN PINES ANIMAL SHELTER

The local fire department responds to a fire in December that destroyed an office building at Southern Pines Animal Shelter in Hattiesburg, Miss.

In the three days following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Southern Pines Animal Shelter lost electricity and had no running water. Located about 65 miles north of the Gulf Coast, the shelter didn't take the brunt of the storm, but still struggled in its wake.

Virginia Cheatham, who's managed the Hattiesburg, Miss., shelter for the past 12 years, remembers that she and her husband, who live about halfway to the coast, gathered water from a creek in garbage cans, brought it to the shelter, and gave it to dogs by flashlight.

But Southern Pines officials say some good rose out of the devastation, as Katrina set in motion a chain of events that led to the shelter partnering with national humane organizations and, last summer, opening a spay/neuter clinic.

After Katrina, Southern Pines was "blessed" by a visit from representatives of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and other national animal welfare organizations, says Valerie Rachal, who was then a board member and now serves as the spay/neuter clinic director. The visit allowed

the group "to see the reality of Mississippi shelters—that we have wonderful, adoptable, healthy pets that are being euthanized by the thousands," Rachal says.

It also served as the springboard for Southern Pines, a municipal shelter that takes in animals from 12 counties, to send four representatives to The HSUS's annual Animal Care Expo in May 2008. (Two received scholarship money from The HSUS to attend.) After networking with colleagues from around the country and listening to ideas about how to improve animal sheltering services, "you realize you're not on an island alone, and that we can accomplish a whole lot more," says Karen Reidenbach, president of the shelter's board of directors.

On one of their last evenings at Expo, the Southern Pines representatives discussed establishing a spay/neuter clinic. The shelter already gave adopters vouchers for spay/neuter surgeries by local veterinarians, and twice a month it hosted Mississippi Spay and Neuter's Little Fix Rig, a trailer equipped as a mobile surgery unit. The initiatives boosted

regional spay/neuter numbers, Rachal says, but fell short of meeting the community's immense need.

So Southern Pines applied for and received a planning grant and a clinic equipment grant from PetSmart Charities, Rachal says, and also got "a very generous and surprising \$35,000 grant" from The HSUS to fill some remaining gaps. In addition, Southern Pines staff received training at the Asheville, N.C.-based Humane Alliance, which offers training and technical assistance to help open spay/neuter clinics. The Southern Pines clinic opened in July 2009 in a remodeled building about six miles from the shelter.

"We're very proud of it," Rachal says of the 3,500-square-foot freestanding building, which the shelter leases. With office furniture and artwork donated by a local physician, she says the clinic looks nicer than many private doctors' offices. The clinic has a staff of seven (separate from the shelter staff of 12 to 15), including a full-time veterinarian, and utilizes about 10 volunteers.



The clinic's goal is to perform 6,400 spay/neuter surgeries a year, or about 32 per day, Rachal says. In its first eight and a half months, the clinic did about 3,300 surgeries—short of the goal but understandable for a startup operation, she adds.

The shelter takes in about 10,000 animals a year. Intake dropped from 9,400 in 2008 to 8,794 last year—the first time Reidenbach has seen a decrease in her 13 years on the board.

Rachal acknowledges that the spay/neuter clinic is combating a longstanding Southern tradition.

"The culture in the South, and we'll say definitely the culture in Mississippi, is just different," she says. "Generations of folks just never spayed and neutered their pets. It was a foreign thought. ... We are seeing people come to the clinic that are sort of first-generation users of veterinary care, and this spay/neuter experience—for the bulk of our clients—is the first time those pets have ever been to a veterinarian." When someone visits for a spay/neuter surgery, she says, staff often discuss heartworm and flea prevention as well.

Reidenbach adds that some residents have avoided spaying or neutering because they own multiple pets and figured they couldn't afford surgery for all of them—a problem the clinic hopes to address by offering affordable prices. (The clinic's everyday prices range from \$35 for male cats to \$65 for female dogs.)

In addition to opening the spay/neuter clinic, the shelter is searching for its first executive director, which Reidenbach expects to be "a full-time and then some job" that will bolster outreach efforts and increase funding. Southern Pines recently held an HSUS-funded rabies clinic at a local park, which provided 385 free rabies shots and allowed staff to

distribute spay/neuter information and spread the word about the clinic, Rachal says.

The shelter is also now part of PetSmart Charities' Rescue Waggin' program, which transports shelter dogs from overpopulated areas to regions where they are in demand. The program enables Southern Pines to send as many as 50 dogs and puppies a month to Northern states.

But last December, in the middle of the pre-Christmas adoption rush and two weeks after celebrating its first Rescue Waggin' transport, Southern Pines found its resilience tested again: Arson gutted the shelter's office and killed four cats. Three days later, police arrested a shelter employee. "Our staff didn't know that he was a suspect," Reidenbach recalls, "and so when the police pulled up and drove him away in handcuffs, it was a real kick in the gut."

Despite the adversity, shelter business continued. Staff set up a tent in the parking lot, and people continued to surrender animals. Rachal recalls, "You would see a folding table in the parking lot, with two staff members behind the folding table, trying to hold down paperwork that was trying to blow away. I saw our office manager sitting in the back, in the bed of her pickup truck, trying to work on payroll ..." Other staffers worked out of their cars or took work home, Rachal says, but the shelter didn't close for a single day.

After operating for months out of a makeshift office in the small, prefab building that houses cats, staff moved into a new office in March. Cheatham says the staff is "still looking for things that we don't have any more." But just as they came though Katrina, she knows they'll come through this. "It's been very trying, but everything just makes you stronger, and bigger." 



Karen Reidenbach, president of the board of directors for Southern Pines Animal Shelter, sees a silver lining in the hardships the shelter has endured. Hurricane Katrina, for example, helped the shelter forge relationships with national humane organizations.



Southern Pines Animal Shelter transports animals every morning across town to its spay/neuter clinic for surgery. Clinic employee Katie Mapp welcomes a group of pups arriving in the shelter van.

[scoop]

Spay it Ain't So

Study on ovary retention and longevity shouldn't affect shelter spaying practices

BY CARRIE ALLAN



WAYNE SEWARD/FELICKR CREATIVE COMMONS

It's rare for *Animal Sheltering* to report on a study intended to shed light on human health, but when that study has the potential to affect a fundamental practice of the animal welfare field—spay/neuter—all bets are off.

Aging Cell is a scientific journal in the U.K. that focuses on the biology of human aging. In the October 2009 issue, it published "Exploring mechanisms of sex differences in longevity: lifetime ovary exposure and exceptional longevity in dogs." The study was designed to shed more light on the gender differences in human longevity—specifically, why women live longer than men.

Researchers studied a group of 119 very old rottweilers in North America—all pet dogs, all with varying spay histories—and compared them to another group of 186 rottweilers who had typical lifespans. Like women, the researchers write, female dogs were more likely than males to achieve exceptional longevity. "However, removal of ovaries during the first 4 years of life ... erased the female survival advantage over males. In females that retained their ovaries for more than 4 years, likelihood of exceptional longevity increased to more than three times that of males."

In essence, the study indicates that the longer a dog keeps her ovaries, the more likely she is to live to a ripe old age.

The study was limited to one breed of dog, and in a recent interview with *JAVMA News*, lead researcher David Waters noted that people should be cautious about extrapolating the results. "We studied purebred dogs living with responsible owners," he said. "You could say our results aren't pertinent to stray dogs or mongrel dogs." The study also did not account for variables such as diet, exercise, housing differences, regularity of veterinary care, or an apparent familial connection among the participants with exceptional longevity.

It's a troubling little ripple on an ocean of previous studies indicating the health and behavioral benefits of spay/neuter: reduction in uterine infections and breast cancer in females, significant reduction of prostate disease and elimination of testicular cancer in males. While a few studies have connected spaying or neutering to specific health problems, the general consensus among veterinarians has been that sterilization of cats and dogs is healthy for the animals, and that pediatric spay/neuter is nothing to be worried about.

Among shelter veterinarians and others who work in the animal care and control field, the consensus is even greater—for reasons that go beyond individual animal health. "Before widespread spay/neuter, shelters were euthanizing 13 million dogs and cats out of a total pet population of 65 million," says Andrew Rowan, chief scientific officer at The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). "Today, with widespread spay/neuter, shelters are euthanizing 4 million dogs and cats out of a total pet population of 155 to 171 million. The nonsuffering and eutha-

MOUThPIECES)))



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Send suggestions for future Mouthpieces to asm@humanesociety.org.



nasia of those animals has to count for something against the possible life extension for female dogs."

Owners considering whether to spay a beloved pet rottweiler might do well take the research into consideration. But for organizations seeking to save more animals' lives, says John Snyder, vice president of the Companion Animals section of The HSUS, sterilization remains one of the most vital tools.

In a joint statement about the study, The HSUS and the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association noted that they support further research into the issue of female dogs and longevity and into the impact of surgical sterilization on animal health. "However, we are compelled to give weight to the broader issue of the health and well-being of the companion animal population as a *whole*. Reducing the euthanasia of millions of companion animals each year remains our primary consideration. Therefore we will continue to urge pet owners to do their part to prevent animal overpopulation and homelessness by making the lifesaving choice to spay or neuter." **AS**

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We add him to the rows and rows of cats who came in the exact same way. And we wait. And we hope you’ll show up. And every day, more cats come in. Some people think cats can’t wear collars, but studies have shown that’s not true. A breakaway collar with a tag is light, easy, and safe for a cat to wear. So if you love your cat, make your cat stand out from the crowd with the most valuable jewelry there is: A collar and tag.

Help us get your cat home safely.





Picturing an End to Animal Overpopulation

Spay Day pet photo contest raises money for local organizations



Grand Prize Winner

Dagnabit

My person:

Kim, New Orleans, Louisiana

Nickname(s):

Doodlebug, Scoobiedoos

Favorite thing to do:

Go out to watch a fabulous brass band!

Most endearing bad habit:

He sleeps right on top of me!

We've been through it all together! Dag was stolen and made to fight and had his ears cut off. We survived Katrina and his disability. Dag's spirit inspires me to make the most out of every moment, every day.

My charity:

The Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International



1 | 12



Play Slide Show

MORE SPAY DAY BUY A T-SHIRT

We humans have certain elemental needs.

We need to eat, we need to sleep, we need to breathe ... and of course, we need to show off our pets.

And if we can tie that need to the mission to reduce pet overpopulation, all the better.

The annual Spay Day Online Pet Photo Contest, coordinated by The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and its global affiliate, Humane Society International (HSI), supports spay/neuter efforts in the United States and abroad. Entrants post photos and descriptions of their pets online, and designate an eligible animal welfare organization to receive the money raised when viewers spend \$1 apiece to vote for their favorites.

The contest began three years ago and is one feature of Spay Day, The HSUS's annual campaign to call attention to spay/neuter to combat the euthanasia of homeless pets. The 16th annual Spay Day took place Feb. 23.

This year's contest, which ran from Jan. 20 through March 4, attracted more than 32,000 photos and raised \$527,000 for 225 animal welfare groups in 45 states and Puerto Rico, and another 63 groups around the world. Groups qualified for photo contest money in part by holding a Spay Day event in February—anything from a low-cost spay/neuter clinic to handing out literature outside a pet store to the ever-popular “spay-ghetti with no balls” fundraising dinners. All eligible organizations get a cut of the photo contest's

general fund and can raise additional money by having contestants designate them as their charity of choice.

The organizations that promote the contest most heavily to their members and supporters generate the most money, explains Vicki Stevens, U.S. Spay Day coordinator for The HSUS. This year, 68 organizations raised more than \$1,000, and two raised more than \$30,000.

Around the globe, the photo contest is “a truly rarified fundraiser,” notes Kelly Coladarci, an HSI program manager. It allows groups that may not be getting enough support or resources in their communities to raise funds and conduct outreach. Romania Animal Rescue raised more than \$34,000 in this year's contest—the highest amount of any

organization—and plans to use it to perform 1,337 sterilizations in the coming year.

Vermont Companion Animal Neutering Inc. (VT-CAN!), a nonprofit, low-cost spay/neuter clinic in Middlesex, Vt., raised more than \$18,000. Executive director Pamela Krausz says VT-CAN! promoted the contest through e-mail lists and Facebook, tapping into “the power of exponential growth,” where word spreads as friends tell other friends. The clinic also benefited from regular donors who opted to contribute through the contest, Krausz notes.

The earnings will subsidize surgeries for cat owners who can't afford them. (Vermont doesn't have much of a dog overpopulation problem, Krausz says.) The contest is “a great way to raise money for shelters or for clinics, because it's not that hard,” she adds. The HSUS staff handles the logistics, leaving participating organizations free to simply sign up and promote it. “And even if you don't make as much as we did,” Krausz says, “every little bit helps.”

In the Detroit area, P.A.W.S. of Michigan is grateful for the \$849 it received from the photo contest. Started in 2007 as a fostering and rescue group, P.A.W.S. realized it needed to get more involved in spay/neuter because of the region's high euthanasia rate and huge number of feral cats, says president Kris Jordan.

The group's volunteers currently drive carloads of animals to two low-cost clinics in the area. “It's so hard with us driving our own vehicles and trying to schedule appointments at other clinics,” Jordan says, plus each run helps only 15 or 20 animals. She believes the group will be able to make more of a difference once it opens its own clinic later this year or early next year—a goal the “nice big chunk of money” from the contest should help with, Jordan says.

“I know the economy is tough everywhere, but it's particularly bad here with the auto industry, so there's a real need for low-cost services.”

In Lynnwood, Wash., a bedroom community about 25 miles north of Seattle, the Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) raised more than \$3,400 in this year's contest—more than double its total from the previous year, says Kay Joubert, director of companion animal services for the private, nonprofit shelter with its own on-



The Progressive Animal Welfare Society in Lynnwood, Wash., celebrated Spay Day by offering low-cost spay/neuter surgeries to eligible clients for three days in February. Sue Moriyasu was one of the visiting veterinarians who volunteered their services.

site spay/neuter clinic. She attributes the jump to the popularity of social networking and people's intrinsic desire to share images of their animals. Social networking lets people announce that they work for PAWS, volunteer there, serve on the board, or are simply passionate about the

organization's mission. Through the contest, Joubert adds, even nonlocal people are able to support the shelter in a fun, clever way.

PAWS expects an increase in the number of spay/neuter surgeries it will need to perform, because it has agreed to take in additional animals from several nearby communities, and Joubert says the contest money will go toward covering those expenses.

Stevens says the photo contest—the brainchild of Geoff Handy, vice president of media and online communications for The HSUS—has succeeded as an enjoyable way for pet owners to take part in Spay Day. And Spay Day reminds groups that do spay/neuter all the time that they're not alone.

“Spay Day is every day, but one time a year they feel a part of something bigger,” she says. “It's global, and it makes them feel connected.”

The 2011 Spay Day photo contest kicks off in mid-January. **AS**

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Trial by Fire

George the cat survived a terrible ordeal, thanks to the skill and compassion of an Ohio shelter's staff

Over the years, the animal welfare movement has seen its share of legends: *Pets given as gifts get surrendered, so don't adopt animals at Christmas. Don't place animals prior to Halloween, because they could end up as victims of animal sacrifice by local devil worshippers.*

As the field has evolved, though, many shelter managers have realized that some of these stories are just that: stories, anecdotal at best and fictional at worst, driving an unjustified paranoia that might be preventing some animals from finding homes.

Many shelters have reconsidered their practices accordingly, deciding that holiday placements are just fine if they allow a shelter dog to fill the role of "the puppy under the Christmas tree." Still others have found that Halloween promotions help black cats find good homes on the last day of October.

It's a good trend overall. But every now and then a story comes along that serves to remind the field that there are reasons such stories got started: Sadly, not all of them are mythical.

George can attest to that.

George is a friendly, gray-and-white cat who's currently serving as a mascot at the Toledo Area Humane Society, located in Maumee, Ohio. He arrived at the shelter the Monday after last Halloween, when humane agent Gene Boros responded to a call about a burned cat.

George had been an indoor/outdoor mouser at an auto repair shop, and his owner called after discovering horrible injuries to the cat's face and front paws. He knew that he couldn't afford to pay for veterinary care, so he relinquished the cat to Boros, who brought him to the shelter.

Boros says the burns were probably the worst he's ever seen, "especially on a small animal like a cat. Most of his ears were burned off, his whole face was charred up, his eyes were basically burned closed. His nostrils were burned severely. You could hear him breathing very heavily and know that he would have to have some extreme care pretty soon."

It was clear to Boros that the injuries weren't accidental. Whether it was the crazed Satanists of shelter legend or just disturbed local teens playing a horrible prank, somebody had done this to the cat on purpose.

"We got it put on the local news here, trying to get people to call in if they saw or heard anything, but we never got any leads or calls. But definitely my first reaction was that it was something that was done to him by a human," he says.

The cat had already seen the worst of human behavior. Boros and the rest of the shelter staff set out to show him the best. When Boros brought the cat in, Debbie Johnson, the shelter's head veterinarian, found she had a kitty with the will to live.

"We see a lot of things here in the shelter, examples of cruelty, but I was shocked and immediately went to sedate him—I assumed he must be in severe pain—and I reached in the carrier ... and he head-butted me," says Johnson. "And I thought, 'For pete's sake, I guess we're gonna try and treat him!'"

It wasn't clear whether the cat would survive, though. The veterinary staff wasn't even sure if the cat had eyes, because he was burned so badly, his face a mask of charred skin.

"But we said, 'Let's give him 24-48 hours, and see if we can manage his pain and keep him comfortable, and if we can, great, and if we can't, we'll have to make a decision to euthanize him,'" Johnson says.

They had to pry the damaged tissue open to see if his eyes were intact—they were—and then they trimmed off his outer



Humane agent Gene Boros of the Toledo Area Humane Society has formed a special bond with George, a badly burned cat who Boros brought to the shelter in November 2009 after responding to a call about possible animal cruelty.

ear flaps (called pinnae). The staff kept the cat under heavy sedation so that he wouldn't suffer as his burned skin started to scab and then contract.

George has slowly healed from his wounds. He looks much better now, but it's still obvious this was a badly injured cat.

His burns have left their mark, and his wide-open eyes give him a bit of a perpetually surprised appearance. He blinks by closing his lower eyelids.

"He has upper lids, but the scar tissue has contracted so much that he really can't move them. I'd like to talk to some veterinary soft-tissue surgeons to see if we can improve upon that, but we want to wait until all the tissue is finished healing before we go back in," Johnson says.

While George's exterior has been changed by his terrible burns, his personality remains the same.

"The thing about George is, he is one of the sweetest cats I've ever met and was right from the beginning. Even after undergoing this horrific injury, his interest was in being with people and being social," says John Dinon, the shelter's executive director. "Now he actually lives in the office; in fact, he's here right now, sitting 10 feet from me. He has a steady stream of friends and visitors and well-wishers who come and see him all the time."

It's likely that George will continue to live at the shelter. The staff and volunteers have become attached to him—and people in the community have heard his story and want to visit.

Dinon says George may also have a job opportunity at the shelter, potentially visiting people in hospitals and nursing homes, or comforting children who are going through a rough time, showing them how it's possible to heal after a terrible experience.

Meanwhile, he's being pampered by everyone he meets.

"He loves Arby's roast beef—that's one of his favorites," Dinon says. "He is not wanting for anything. He gets plenty of companionship, human and animal. He's a local celebrity with lots of fans, and everybody at the humane society loves him, so he's got a good life." 



George has received months of treatment from Debbie Johnson, head veterinarian at the Toledo Area Humane Society, to recover from his severe burns. He may have additional surgery to allow him to blink his eyelids more easily.

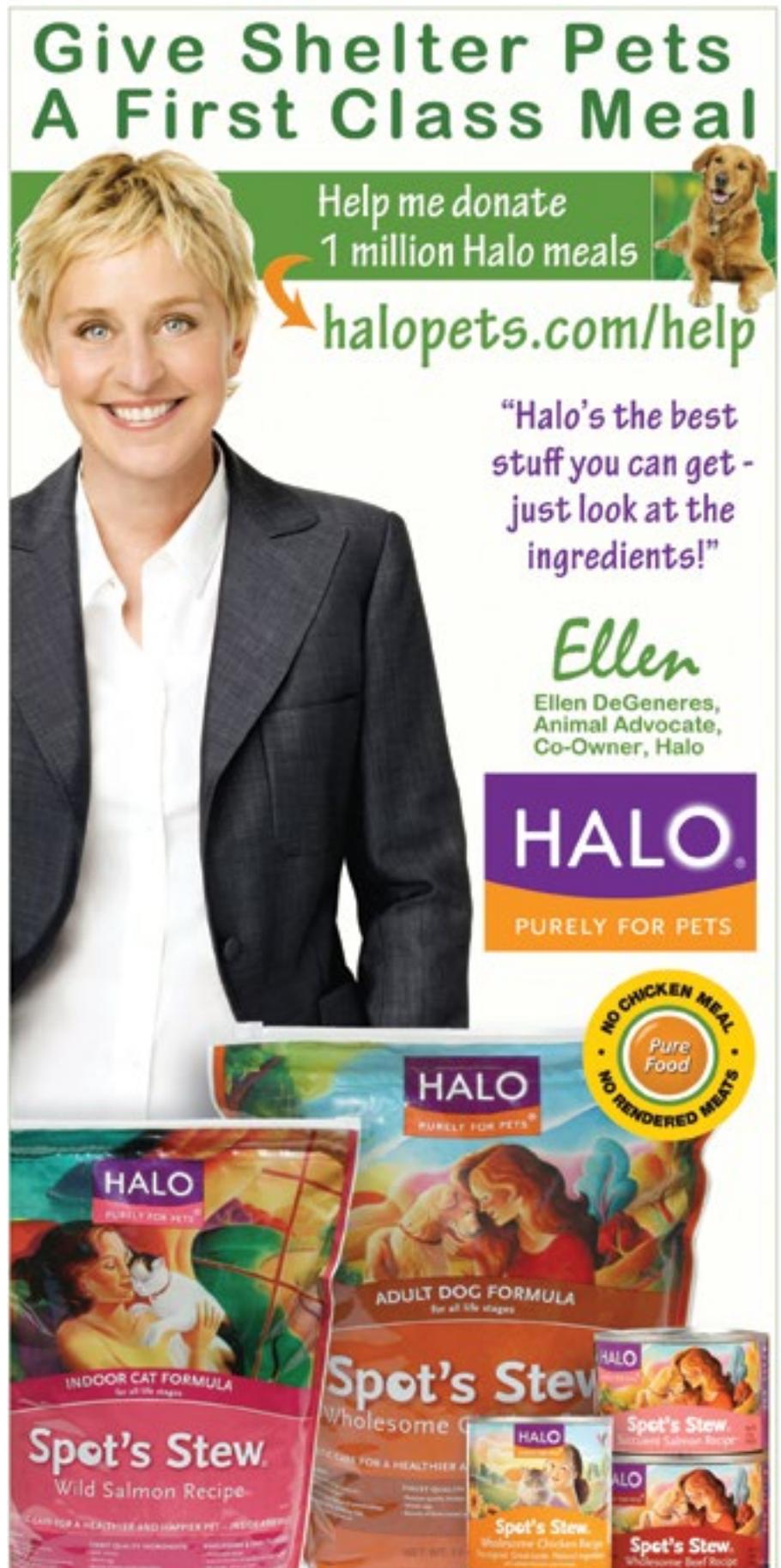
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Preventing future litters. In March, PETA announced an advertising deal had been struck with **Nadya Suleman**, known in tabloids everywhere as the “octomom.” Suleman came to national attention in 2009 when the single mother of six gave birth to octuplets conceived through in vitro fertilization. The organization will pay \$5,000 and provide a year’s worth of veggie hamburgers and hot dogs to the financially struggling mother of 14 in exchange for displaying a spay/neuter advertisement in her yard. The sign features a photograph of a cat nursing a litter of kittens and the message “Don’t let your dog or cat become an ‘octomom.’ Always spay or neuter.” PETA is no stranger to controversy, but this stunt has drawn a firestorm of criticism, even from many who may support the group’s overall mission. While most comments on **The PETA Files** Web page endorse the move as a brilliant way to get the spay/neuter message out, many posters on other news websites decry it as tasteless, low, insulting, cruel, and dehumanizing, if not for the mother then for her children. Is the spay/neuter message lost in the bickering?



■ **Real Housepets of Los Angeles County.** With reality shows all the rage, the **Found Animals Foundation**, a Los Angeles-based animal welfare organization, has teamed up with the **Southeast Area Animal Control Authority** in Downey, Calif., to produce **The PawdCast**, a daily half-hour show streamed live from the shelter’s adoption annex/webcast studio dubbed The ModPawd. Debuting in March, The PawdCast features pets available for adoption along with global animal news, pet care info, and an **Ask The Expert** segment, a live chat room in which view-

ers can get real-time answers to pet-related questions. And ailurophiles can get their kitty fix on **The Pawd 24/7**, a live webcam that keeps its unblinking eye focused on the cats and kittens who hang out in the ModPawd while they wait for homes. The PawdCast broadcasts weekdays from 4-4:30 Pacific Standard Time at **foundanimals.org**.

■ **Bad news for bad guys. Jacksonville, Fla.,** is getting tough on animal crime. The **Florida Times Union** profiled the city’s **Animal Care and Protective Services’** new cruelty investigation team, which launched in January with three animal control officers who focus entirely on enforcing the county’s animal cruelty laws. Within two months of start-up, the team racked up five felony and eight misdemeanor arrests, the first criminal charges in several years, according to **division chief Scott Trebatoski**. (In the past, he says, people were charged with civil violations and fined.) Trebatoski gives props to the **Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office** for jumping right in to support the officers in obtaining warrants, making arrests, and bringing cases in front of judges. Trebatoski hopes the criminals will be slapped with significant penalties. “The message now being sent to the community is we don’t tolerate this behavior, and you’ll be arrested for it,” he says. “The next message [will be] not only will we arrest you, but you’re going to spend time in jail for doing this.”

■ **Lots of candle wax on the cake. Queenie the kitten** was the very first animal rescued by the **Dumb Friends League** in Denver; if she were around today, she’d be 100 years old in people years. The League opened its doors in 1910 and has since helped more than two million animals. To commemorate its milestone anniversary, the League kicked off a yearlong schedule of events with a birthday party in March attended by 125 staff, volunteers, and special friends. **“Pup cakes”** and tuna-flavored treats were served to the shelter’s dogs and cats awaiting



adoption. The League has an outstanding reputation for excellent care and innovative programs, most notably its animal behavior department, which served as the model for The HSUS’ Pets for Life program.

■ **Blessing in disguise.** Animal lovers were furious when the Philadelphia Eagles signed convicted dogfighter and abuser **Michael Vick** in August 2009, but his presence in the City of Brotherly Love has had unforeseen benefits for pit bulls. The Eagles founded **Treating Animals With Kindness (TAWK)** in October 2009 as a “community outreach initiative that focuses on public education and awareness to reduce the abuse of animals, promote responsible adoption, encourage spay and neuter and put an end to dog fighting.” In recognition of Spay Day and National Spay/Neuter Month in February, the Eagles’ program donated \$20,000 to **Faithful Friends**, an animal shelter in Wilmington, Del., to assist with its spay/neuter initiatives. The funds support **Pit Stop**, an outreach and education program offering free spay/neuter, vaccinations, microchipping, training, and supplies to pit bull owners, and **Operation CatSnip**, which provides assistance for spaying and neutering cats. Anger at Vick has helped area pit bulls in another way: Philadelphia’s **Pennsylvania SPCA** announced that its **Second Chance campaign**, launched in August 2009 as a response to Vick’s signing, exceeded its \$100,000 fundraising goal, bringing in a total of \$116,234 to support sheltering and adoption services for pit bulls.

■ **One big payday.** It took the **ASPCA** less than a week to find 50 shelters eager to do battle with each other in a friendly competition that will save thousands more lives and score the winner a boatload of moola. With its **Save More Lives \$100,000 Challenge**, the organization is asking shelters to achieve positive outcomes for at least 300 more animals during August, September, and October 2010 than they did in the same time period in 2009. The shelter with the largest increase will be awarded a \$100,000 grant, with a \$25,000 grant given





to the contestant that involves the greatest number of community members in the effort. Positive outcomes include adoption, transferring animals to partner groups, and returning lost pets to owners. Shortly after it started accepting applications in early April, the ASPCA announced that the response was overwhelming, and the first-come, first-served Challenge had reached its limit of 50 contestants. **ASPCA president and CEO Ed Sayres** points out that "in the United States, 60 percent of households have a cat or dog, yet 80 percent of these households did not adopt their pet from a shelter." The \$100,000 Challenge aims to galvanize shelters from Maui to Pittsburgh into increasing adoptions through creative, effective promotions.

■ **Pet industry recession-proof?** As the recession deepened in 2009, pets often paid the price as their owners suffered job losses and home foreclosures. Animal shelters across the country stepped in to help with free pet food and subsidized veterinary care, but still saw sharp increases in surrenders. But some are still spending big bucks on their pets. While



many retail businesses have suffered downturns during the recession, the **American**

Pet Products Association (APPA) reported in February that spending on companion animals continues to climb—up 5.4 percent in 2009 compared to 2008, jumping from \$43.2 billion to \$45.5 billion. Veterinary care led health-care-related pet spending categories with an 8.5 percent increase, fueled by advances in veterinary medicine that enable pets to live longer. More people worked longer hours in 2009, the APPA reports, spurring a greater need for enterprises such as doggie daycare and pet sitting and walking. Other service-based businesses are booming as well, including pooper-scoopers, animal trainers, and even massage therapists. More pet industry statistics and trends are available at americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp. 



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Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty

What's the most heartwarming experience you've ever had in the animal welfare field?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break—and as we expected, you had a ton. Thanks for sharing your stories! We hope they'll brighten up everyone's day. And to see the responses we couldn't fit into print, go to animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.



My most heartwarming animal welfare experience was the effort to help an angelic pit bull, Isis. As pits often do, Isis arrived as a stray. We soon realized she was a gem. Her amber eyes, warm personality, and freckled ears made her unique, but what really stood out was the heart shape on her nose. Something else stood out during her spay surgery: Both hips had dysplasia. Her breed profile would be a death sentence in many places, but her hips would count as strikes two and three—if it weren't for people's generosity. We accepted donations for a sponsorship to provide treatment and within days raised \$1,500 to help her. Though I fell in love with her, she was adopted after her procedure by a family who recently adopted another special-needs pit bull mix. I couldn't have wished for a better beginning to her new life!

—Tristan Schmid, director of communications and marketing
Humane Society of Indianapolis
Indianapolis, Indiana

We got an 8-year-old Lab from a puppy mill. She had just had a litter four months prior to us getting her. She had such hip problems she could hardly walk. We were being very picky on who could adopt Libby. We received a call from a lady interested in Libby from Canada. She drove all the way down (about 10 hours) and the minute she saw her, she started to cry. She cried all through the adoption process. Libby has her forever bed.

—Janet Baker, volunteer/foster coordinator
Grant County Animal Outreach
Moses Lake, Washington

She came into our shelter, approximately 13 years old, wearing thick lenses, crying her heart out. In her arms she held a Chihuahua mix, his leg broken. Between her sobs I heard her story: The dog got out, broke his leg and now her father would not pay for the operation, so she had to leave him behind. I told her that we will help her dog, we will set his leg, and she can visit him every day. This happened five years ago. The little girl comes now frequently to our shelter and lectures all her little friends about animal welfare.

—Lilian Schnog, president ad honorem
Asociación Humanitaria Para la Protección
Animal de Costa Rica (AHPPA)
Heredia, Costa Rica

Last year I went to Madison, Wis., with The Humane Society of the United States to help with a puppy mill seizure. While there, I met many people from other shelters across the country, but also people from all walks of life. Teachers, nurses, lawyers, housekeepers, all using their vacation time to help care for the seized animals. This group of people, who had never met, banded together, working 10-12 hours a day cleaning and walking the animals; they made an incredible impact on not only the animals' lives, but also on mine. BIG LOVE to our Madison Team!

—Chris Arnott
community outreach coordinator
Lowell Humane Society
Lowell, Massachusetts

A lost, recently groomed dog was brought into our local humane society by a Good Samaritan. Volunteer Michelle Dugan called all local groomers to see if she could locate one who might recognize the small dog. The "Good Samaritan," realizing that there was so much effort being made to find the owner, finally admitted to having picked the dog up in New York City (an hour south of here). She had tried to make it her pet, but, finding the dog a little snippy with her young son, she then brought the dog to the shelter and made up the story about the circumstances of where and when he was found. The frantic owners were searching for him in Queens, N.Y., online, and someone found their posting, and a joyful reunion was made.

—Kathie Heiber, volunteer D.V.M.
Putnam Humane Society
Mahopac, New York

Although our shelter is a no-kill, we all become depressed at some of the sad cases of "damaged souls" who come through our doors. Jenny was one such dog, an extremely frightened girl who'd traveled a tough road and couldn't shake the baggage and learn to trust. I worked with her for nearly three years but had little progress in our shelter setting. She desperately needed a home, but her fear of people kept her from even approaching the front of her cage, so no one ever really considered her for adoption although she was sweet and docile, never aggressive. Then a wonderful, animal-loving saint of a woman saw Jenny's picture and story on our website and found the room in her heart and home. With extreme patience and love, she's brought Jenny out of her shell and into a wonderful life filled with love and security. Jenny's blessing warms my heart and keeps me going on tough days.

—Pam D'Addia, volunteer coordinator
Tri-County Humane Society
Boca Raton, Florida

When Katrina hit New Orleans, I, as an animal rescuer and director of a wildlife shelter, felt compelled to go and help rescue animals. I worked the first day at the shelter in Gonzales and then spent the next four days in New Orleans, getting animals out of the houses. My teammate and I rescued two little dogs out of a flooded house where they had been locked up for almost five weeks. A year later, I went back to New Orleans and went back to the house. There was a Federal Emergency Management Agency trailer next to the house, and I knocked on the door. I heard the two little dogs, and a woman answered the door. I said, "Hello, my name is Andrea. I rescued your dogs after Katrina." She grabbed me and hugged me, and we talked for at least an hour. She also took me around the neighborhood to introduce me to her neighbors. She found her dogs through Petfinder.com. She had lost everything in her house, but she was so grateful that we were able to rescue her dogs.

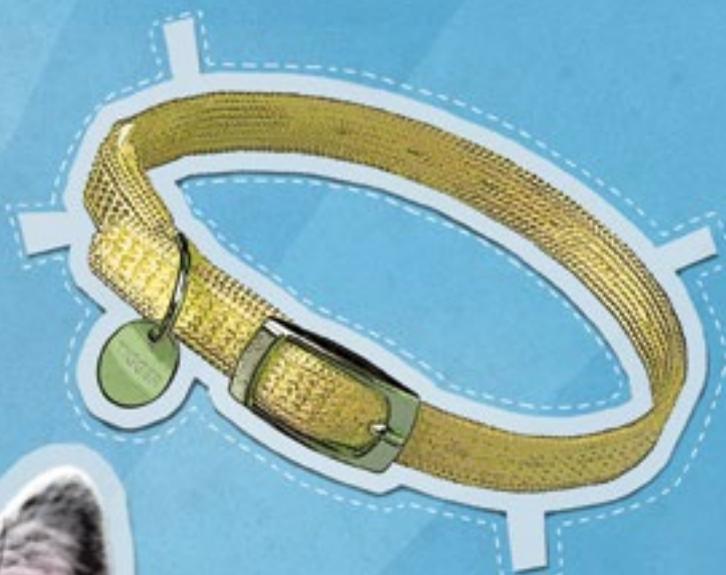
—Andrea MacDonald, volunteer
Mixed Breeds in Need
Huntington, New York

I brought an older dog named Merlyn home from our shelter after it was determined he was dying from cancer. He'd had a very rough life (he was found living in an abandoned mine). The vet felt he only had a few days, and he was in very poor shape. I did not want his last days to be alone in the shelter. After I got him home, he started getting better and eventually went into full remission. After three months of TLC, he had no signs of illness. He was adopted and lived happily and well-loved for a year until the cancer returned. He died the morning of my wedding. At the time of his death (I found out when I went home), a hummingbird flew up to the wedding bouquet and hovered there for several long minutes. I know it was Merlyn saying goodbye and blessing my wedding. It made the day even more special and truly warmed my heart.

—Kelly Goodin, executive director
Second Chance Humane Society
Ridgway, Colorado

Animal Sheltering congratulates Andrea MacDonald, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Her organization, Mixed Breeds in Need in Huntington, N.Y., will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. Congratulations!

Check out the latest Coffee Break question and submit your responses (150 words or less) at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering*/HSUS, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win **a free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See animalsheltering.org for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.



PLACE
COLLAR &
TAG HERE

COLLARS AND SENSE

Stray and lost cats fill shelters (but a movement to identify kitties could stem the tide)

BY ARNA COHEN

Echoing in the classifieds and online postings of desperate people in search of their loved ones is a sad refrain of remorse:

Lost: Small shorthair tortoiseshell cat... no collar.

Found: Siamese, very friendly, wants to be indoors badly... no collar.

Lost: Ragdoll, looks like long-haired Siamese, blue eyes... no collar.

Found: Female tortoiseshell, hungry, crying, very sweet... no collar.

The endless recitation of regrettable omissions and last-ditch hopes reveals the one thing that most often foils the reunion of a stray cat and his family—the absence of a simple collar and ID tag that could serve as his ticket home.

The oversight may seem minor in the case of a single cat and a single owner. But the cumulative results are overwhelming—especially for shelters. “[In 2008], we took in 2,604 strays. Of those, only 44 were reclaimed,” says Jaime

Johnson, front office supervisor at the Sacramento SPCA in California. “... None had collars.”

Compare that with the shelter’s much higher reunion rate for stray dogs—almost 580 out of about 1,700—and the situation for cats looks particularly bleak. And that’s just one shelter in one state. At a time when the homeless cat population is at crisis levels nationwide, only 2 to 5 percent of the millions entering shelters each year are reunited with their families. For dogs, the figure can be eight times as high.

The statistics mirror the disparities between the presence of visible identification on dogs versus cats: One recent study found that only 14 percent of lost cats were wearing any ID, compared with 43 percent of dogs.

“If every pet cat in the country had a collar and tag, the number of cats euthanized in shelters in the United States would drop dramatically,” says John Snyder, vice president for The Humane Society of the United States’

Companion Animals section. As former director of a Florida animal services agency, Snyder has firsthand knowledge of the problem. At his facility, it was so rare to take in a stray cat with ID that when the occasional one showed up, “it was like Christmas,” he says. “We celebrated. We called up the owner and thanked them for putting a tag on.”

The reasons for the anonymous-cat phenomenon vary. Some people assume their animals will be safe without tags if they’re kept indoors. Others are reluctant to fit collars on

Reluctance to enforce a kitty dress code is often based on the notion that cats will become entangled or perform an ungainly strip tease to shed their constricting attire. But shelter veterans say these concerns are overblown, especially in light of how many more lost animals are euthanized because their families cannot be found.

independent-minded felines whose first instinct is to try writhing out of them.

But the practice of letting cats wander around naked-necked is more deeply rooted in cultural attitudes that have historically left these animals out in the cold. Though some communities have comprehensive cat ID programs and encourage safe confinement, cats still straddle a nebulous area in the public mind-set. Treated like communal property, they are too easy to lose and too hard to find, darting among the shadows of a society that argues heatedly over their place among humans.

While millions of dollars are spent each year trying to help those left behind, too often the efforts represent band-aid solutions to a problem that cat owners could have helped prevent in the first place.

Even worse, some shelters that receive public funding for the rescue and care of dogs receive none for cats. In areas of Massachusetts, for instance, “hold periods for stray cats are nonexistent,” meaning that the animals can be euthanized the day they come in, says Leslie Harris, executive director of the Dakin Pioneer Valley Humane Society. “In most towns, officers are forbidden to help cats by town fathers [a regional equivalent to county commissioners] who don’t want to spend money on cats.”

From a pragmatic standpoint, it’s easy to see why stray dogs have received more attention; large animals traveling in packs are more threatening than solitary creatures quietly roaming on the fringes. But the underlying message—that cats can fend for themselves—is largely responsible for the dichotomy in their status, as the most popular pet but also the most discarded.

It Can Happen to Any Cat

Too often, cat cohabitants recognize the need for collars and tags only after it’s too late, initially assuming their indoor-only pets will follow the implicit rules of the human household. “When I do a report with someone about a lost pet, I’d say more than 90 percent of cat owners say they don’t make them wear collars, either because they’re never outside or they’re afraid it will get caught on something,” says Melissa Gray, lost and found coordinator at the SPCA Tampa Bay in Largo, Fla.

Many people cling to an “it won’t happen to me” mentality, says Harris. But wanderlust is a powerful draw, and few people live in a Kitty Fort Knox. “Accidents happen,” she says, detailing the many ways a cat can elude his owners: “Think about a fire, a service person who leaves a door open, a child leaving a door open, a cat clawing its way through a screen.”

When Jason Brown’s black cat, Meow Meow, went on a weeklong adventure, Brown became painfully aware of the importance of a collar and tag. “We went to the shelter several times,” he recalls. “There were so many black cats, it was unbelievable. We had a really hard time trying to find her.”

The family got lucky: Meow Meow came back on her own. But they’ve since left nothing to chance and converted their cats to permanent collar wearers—a move that more recently reunited them with 1-year-old Marshmallow, their adopted door darter. Within a day of making a run for it, Marshmallow was safely back home with Brown, after staff at the SPCA Tampa Bay spotted her tag and contacted him immediately.

Reluctance to enforce a kitty dress code is often based on the notion that cats will become entangled or perform an ungainly strip tease to shed their constricting attire. But shelter veterans say these concerns are overblown, especially in light of how many more lost animals are euthanized because their families cannot be found.

“I’ve been doing this for 20 years,” says Harris. “I have seen a lot of cats die in shelters because there are not enough homes for them, and [because] no one could find their cat. I’ve never seen a cat hung in a tree, ever.”

Though tales of collar-caused deaths are rare, ill-fitted neckwear can get caught in cats’ mouths or on their paws or legs—a frightening prospect but one that can usually be resolved by choosing a breakaway or elastic stretch collar and fitting it correctly. In a soon-to-be-published study

partially funded by The HSUS and led by veterinarian Linda Lord, only about 3 percent of 538 cats caught their collars in their mouths or on an object or a forelimb—all without any adverse effects. Almost 73 percent wore collars successfully for six months.

The researchers randomly distributed three types of collars—buckle, elastic stretch, and breakaway—and also microchipped the cats. If a cat removed the collar, the owner could put it back on; owners who chose not to do so could withdraw from the study.

Most influential to the results were owners' perceptions of how well the cat would tolerate the collar, says Lord, an assistant professor of veterinary preventive medicine at Ohio State University. Those who perceived their cats would do better ended up having a better experience. "Maybe that's because those owners knew their cats better, or the owners' expectations were different," Lord says.

The more times a cat got his collar off, the more likely an owner was to abandon the project; perseverance in ensuring the right fit was important to long-term success. "When



Fitting Sessions: Tips for Adopters on Cat Collaring

In the world of cat collar fashion, there seems to be a style to suit every cat (and owner), from understated elegance to over-the-top rhinestones. But when choosing a collar for your feline, focus on fit, comfort, and safety. Keep these tips in mind:

- "Breakaway" collars have plastic fasteners designed to open automatically when the collar is pulled; such collars may come off more easily but will help ensure a safe release if the cat becomes caught on something. An alternative is an elastic stretch collar or a collar with an elastic insert.
- Look for collars that adjust by sliding, which offer a better fit than those that use a traditional buckle-and-hole closure. When outfitting your cat, you should be able to comfortably slip two fingers (side by side, not one on top of the other) between the collar and the cat's skin. A proper fit keeps the collar from sliding off at the mere swipe of a paw and also prevents it from snagging on something.
- When acclimating your cat to a collar, distract him with a tasty treat, a favorite game, a catnip toy, or something else he likes. Try rubbing the collar on the cat's body. "Cats feel safer when everything smells like them," says HSUS cat programs manager Nancy Peterson. "I would suggest putting the collar on when your cat is sleeping. If your cat fusses, only remove the collar when he isn't taking issue with it. In other words, don't reward anti-collar behavior."
- Be sure to check the collar frequently to ensure it still fits properly, particularly during the first couple of days. "If a cat is going to have a problem, our experience is that it will happen then," says veterinarian Linda Lord, the lead author of a recent study on cat collars. It may help to get cats used to their new accoutrements gradually, at first keeping the collars on only while you're home to supervise, says Betsy McFarland, senior director of The HSUS's Companion Animals section. For her first cat, "Once he was used to it and stopped messing with it, I left it on all the time," McFarland says. "All three of my cats now do great with their collars, using the same method."
- If jingling tags drive you or your cat crazy, stick them together with Velcro or double-sided tape. Or use engraved nameplates that slide onto or attach to the collar. For maximum kitty comfort, avoid large dog tags and opt instead for something cat-sized.
- File this one under "duh," but some shelter staff report that the few kitties who do arrive with collars often do not have tags. A pretty pink collar may look nice, but without the ID tag, it's useless as a tool to get your cat home.
- For extra insurance, Lacey Kingston of Wilmington, N.C., writes "I am lost" on her cats' collars with an indelible marker. "It isn't unusual to see a cat wandering the neighborhood," she says, "so who would realize yours wasn't supposed to be there?"

people first put a collar on a cat, they have to know how to place it and how tight to make it," says Lord. "Most people make it too loose."

Clear Visibility

Based on study results that found functioning microchips in nearly all the cats at the end of the six months, Lord and her fellow researchers also recommend the chips as backup identification.

A prolific researcher of pet identification issues, Lord also found strong evidence of the effectiveness of microchips in a separate study. The records of 53 shelters in 23 states revealed that reunion rates were 20 times higher for cats with microchips—and 2 1/2 times higher for dogs with microchips—than the rates of return for all strays entering the shelters. But although microchips can increase the odds of reunions, they are hardly a guarantee. Of the 1,221 stray cats taken in by the SPCA Tampa Bay from January through November last year, 58 had microchips, yet only 25 of those chips led to reunions.

Subject to human whims and errors, the system can break down at several points. Many shelters now have universal scanners that can read microchips of different frequencies, but the serial numbers on the chips are often still untraceable—either because they have never been registered in the first place or because pet owners fail to update their contact information with microchip registries when they move.

For these reasons, an old-fashioned ID tag is the most visible way to convey that a cat is owned, especially in areas where animal control services are limited or nonexistent. If someone walking down the street spots a cat and decides the animal needs help, a tag provides an obvious starting point for locating the owner. Microchips would not be of much use because, as Harris puts it, "the neighbors don't have scanners."

Even in communities with animal control services, some people are reluctant to take a stray to the shelter, concerned that he may become another statistic. When Karen Parsons of Griffith, Ind., found a small black cat wearing a rhinestone collar without a tag, she put out food but hesitated to report her missing because she was unsure of the policies of her local shelter. Her own cats would not have responded well to a late-night intruder, so she opted to leave the cat outside and see if she returned.

When the cat showed up again and Parsons noticed she was declawed, she feared for the cat's safety and called animal control. An hour after an officer picked up the animal, Parsons received good news: Someone had filed a lost re-

port three weeks earlier. "The girl was crying hysterically—she went to the shelter, and it was her kitty," says Parsons, adding that if the cat had been wearing a tag, "I would call immediately."

Model Behavior

Many shelters work hard to reunite and adopt out as many animals as they can, keeping lost and found reports and attempting to match up cats and dogs without any forms of ID. But agencies with few resources and limited space are unable to do so indefinitely as a never-ending number of new strays and relinquished pets stream through their doors. The presence of a collar and tag can buy extra time.

At the SPCA Tampa Bay, the holding period for a cat with no signs of ownership is five days, after which she may be adopted or euthanized, says Gray. Cats with collars are held for nine days, allowing shelter staff to keep searching for a potential owner.

At the Dakin Pioneer Valley Humane Society, Harris has a novel approach to calls she receives about found cats who appear to be owned but are probably just gallivanting around the neighborhood. "We tell people to put a collar on," she says. "We give them Jiffy tags and they write, 'I found your cat. Call me.'"

The message is intended to alert the owner that a visible ID tag will prevent further misunderstandings. "We can be the safest place for an animal," Harris says, "but we want to be a last resort."

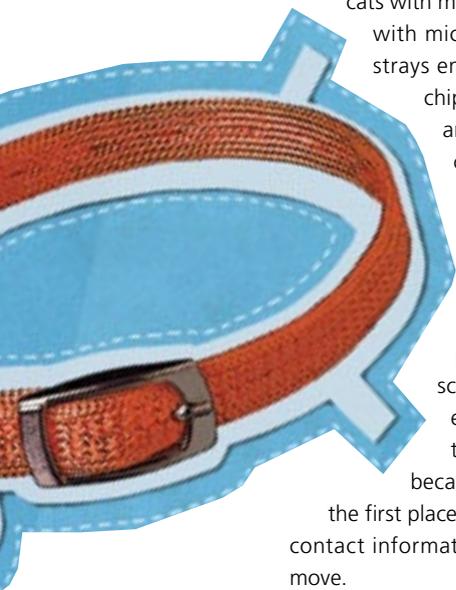
Teaching members of the public that a collar and tag are a cat's ticket home can start in the shelter. While many shelter staff are frustrated by the lack of identification on cats who come into their facilities, many shelters still do not put visible identification on cats they are housing.

That can be a subtle signal to potential adopters that a collarless state is natural to a cat, reinforcing the very message shelters don't want to send.

At the Dumb Friends League in Denver, "we started putting collars on cats in the shelter more than 10 years ago," says Michelle Ray, the shelter's public relations manager. "We felt that showing people cats with collars on in the shelter setting informs their expectations for what cats should look like in their homes and out in the world."

The show-and-tell approach extends throughout the organization's advertising materials and to any pictures of cats on its website.

"There was a time when dogs frequently roamed our cities and towns without collars, rabies or ID tags, or supervision of any kind," points out Emily Stone, the shelter's public affairs manager. "Thanks to the vigilance of folks in the animal care and control field, and the prevalence of ID and leash laws for dogs, those types of scenes are much rarer in most areas of the country today. We want the same thing for cats." **AS**





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NORTH
241
←

291



SOUTH

781



All Roads Lead to Home

In Mississippi, a transport program administered by veterinary students is saving lives

BY MEGAN CAULFIELD AND KRISTA GAZZOLA, D.V.M.s

It was loud on the drive, and by the time our little caravan reached New York, it smelled bad, too—pungent, stale-vomit bad. The puppies were carsick, and most of them had relieved themselves in their crates, even though we'd stopped every few hours to walk them and scrub down their cages as best we could. We had put a few crates in the front seat of Megan's Blazer, and inside it, an adorable Lab pup named Buttercup had recently had a bowel movement, and every time Megan would glance over at the dog, she would wag her tail and splatter a little poop on the dashboard and onto Megan. It was very gross.

With all the stops for potty breaks, a trip that usually takes 17 hours took us about 28. We were tired, so wearily tired. But by the time we crossed the Tappan Zee Bridge over the Hudson River, we only had 30 miles left to go after a long, 1,200-mile drive from Starkville, Miss., and 26 puppies were counting on us to ignore the smell, the yipping, and our own exhaustion.

The things we do for love!

That first trip, it was just the two of us, students at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Mississippi State University (MSU-CVM), convoying north in two SUVs loaded with crates, loaded with puppies.

It had all happened so fast: We'd been wanting to start a transport program, but hadn't gotten it off the ground yet. Then, right before summer break, we'd received a call from Meg Sutton, then the staff veterinarian at Columbus-Lowndes Humane Society in Mississippi. She knew of our desire to launch a program, and she knew we were heading home for the summer. She asked if we could find homes for five shepherd-mix puppies. They had been at the shelter for two weeks, and their time was up.

Not knowing exactly what we'd do, we walked into the shelter for the five puppies. We left with 22.

Over the next few days while we packed and took care of the puppies—and even as we made the long drive to our parents' homes in the Northeast—we were constantly emailing and talking with all our Northern contacts. By the time we reached New York, we had the majority of them adopted, and the remaining pups were adopted in the next couple days.

We made mistakes that first run—for example, feeding the dogs on their regular schedule prior to travel, which certainly contributed to the poop factor on the trip! We've since learned to withhold food in the hours before we leave, which cuts down on the pups' tendency to get sick during





After a long drive, the maiden voyage of Homeward Bound—made by Megan Caulfield (left), Krista Gazzola, two SUVs, and 26 dogs including their own pets—comes to an end in New York.

the drive—and we've worked out other kinks, too. And since that first chaotic journey, we've improved our processes, expanded our program, and helped save more than 1,700 dogs.

When we started this program—now called Homeward Bound—we were veterinary students at MSU-CVM. By the time you read this, we'll be full-fledged veterinarians. But the program we helped create will outlive our time at school. We're hoping it will continue saving lives for years.

The Evolution of a Mission

How did a handful of veterinary students—with the help of Phil Bushby, our faculty adviser—turn this first, crazy trip into an official part of the Humane Ethics and Animal Welfare Program at Mississippi State?

Homeward Bound began with one simple idea: Take adoptable puppies and young adult dogs from overcrowded shelters in the South, and transport them to limited-admission shelters in the Northeast, where there is a high demand for adoptable dogs. Pretty straightforward, right? But something of this magnitude had never been done before at a veterinary institution. We wanted our program to be run by veterinary students, and there was no model to follow, no protocol to customize, and certainly no one with experience in this area to call and ask for advice. And due to the extreme numbers of healthy animals being euthanized, we felt there was also no time to wait until all the

fine details of such an effort could be calculated, predicted, and planned out. In areas like Mississippi, the pet overpopulation problem is so extreme, the euthanasia numbers so high, that we felt it was worth risking some trial and error to help our local shelters get away from the business-as-usual model of euthanasia as a form of population control. So we set to work creating the first successful transport program developed, maintained, and operated by students at a veterinary school.

How does it all work? In any health-related field, certain principles remain constant—the importance of disease prevention, the perpetuation of health and well-being for individual animals, and the ability to provide complete and ethical medical care to assure the continuation of a life free from suffering. Homeward Bound strives to uphold these standards by providing shelter animals with comprehensive veterinary care, foster care, and the chance to make the trip to the Northeast to find a new home. Homeward Bound also aims to educate shelter managers and veterinary students in the areas of disease prevention and control, companion animal overpopulation, and the importance of effective shelter medicine techniques.

Homeward Bound ultimately acts as a liaison between shelters in the counties around Starkville—where our veterinary college is located—and no-kill shelters and rescue groups in the Northeast. The Southern shelters that participate have to adhere to the medical requirements of the



program and must demonstrate the ability to maintain disease-prevention measures at their shelter.

Medical requirements encompass proper intake protocols for animals accepted into the general population at the shelter, as well as the ability to provide the veterinary care needed in the weeks before the transport. A proper intake protocol means that the facility has the ability to protect the health of the general population of animals already present. This means that all animals should be vaccinated for Bordetella and parvo/distemper upon intake, examined thoroughly, and isolated for an observational pe-

riod before being introduced into the general population. When an animal from a participating shelter is enrolled in the Homeward Bound program, the shelter is required to have the ability to perform a fecal, deworm with the appropriate anthelmintic, complete the animal's vaccination series, have access to a veterinarian who can spay/neuter accepted animals, and provide foster care for a minimum of 14 days before the scheduled transport. The shelter has to have proper disease-prevention measures in place at its facility, with staff who are properly trained to help decrease disease spread.

Role-Playing: Who Does What?

An effective transport program requires a variety of people working together. Homeward Bound has found the following core roles to be crucial.

The adoption coordinator assembles a PowerPoint presentation that consists of animals from multiple Southern shelters and rescues. The presentation includes pictures, physical descriptions, histories, and personalities of each of the dogs. Five weeks prior to transport, the presentation is sent to the Northern shelters and rescues, and they begin claiming animals. The adoption coordinator is responsible for all contact with Southern and Northern shelters/rescues and maintains a master list of all animals to be transported.

The transport coordinator schedules the date of the transport and ensures the availability of Northern/Southern drivers and vehicles. The coordinator assembles a team to load the transport and a team to clean the cages and vans once the transport returns. She also e-mails all shelters and rescues, notifying them of the estimated time of arrival, and sends updates if the transport is off schedule.

The foster coordinator recruits fellow pet lovers to shelter, feed, and love each animal for two weeks. We used all public resources such as newspapers, TV, radio stations, veterinarians, and local shelters to build up all of our foster homes. The foster coordinator organizes a foster drop-off day, and makes sure that all foster dogs have flea and heartworm medications and other necessary medical attention. While the animals are in foster care, the coordinators keep a close eye on their behavior and health.

The medical care coordinator is responsible for the animals' health needs. All of our animals are

spayed/neutered, vaccinated with age-appropriate vaccines (rabies, DA2PPV and Bordetella), checked for intestinal parasites and appropriately dewormed, heartworm tested, and had all other medical needs addressed. Any medical problems that the dogs develop while in foster care are directed to this coordinator, who arranges medical care.

The medical records coordinator organizes all medical records and notifies the medical care coordinator of any missing elements. Once the animal has been in foster care for a week, the coordinator requests a personality description and updated pictures from the foster home that are added to the medical record and forwarded to the Northern shelter/rescue that is taking in the animal. The medical records are sent electronically to the Northern shelters/rescues prior to the animals' arrival. All health certificates and rabies certificates (if applicable) are provided in paper form.

The accountant is responsible for maintaining the bank account, issuing all payments necessary, and emailing invoices after a transport to all Southern and Northern shelters/rescues. Our costs include medical supplies and procedures, payment for transport drivers, vehicles, gas, and a small adoption fee that we donate back to the Southern shelters once their animals have been transported. The majority of the cost goes to transport and medical procedures for the abandoned animals.

Resources: If you're considering a transfer program, check out the recommendations for best practices from the National Federation of Humane Societies.
humanefederation.org/TransferBestPractice.cfm



Are we there yet? Four pups who made the first trip north with the Homeward Bound program survey their new terrain.



Homeward Bounders Amy White, Megan Caulfield, and Krista Gazzola (left to right) snuggle up to some of the dogs headed to shelters up north.



Laden with paperwork detailing their names, health certifications, and final destinations, some Mississippi pooches prepare to hit the road.

This means that Homeward Bound volunteers—all vet students at Mississippi State—perform an inspection of every participating shelter, ensuring that cleaning practices are in place and being implemented daily, that there is an isolation/quarantine area present, and that there are enough staff to clean all areas of the shelter in a way that prevents cross-contamination. Homeward Bound also requires that shelter workers be able to identify potential infectious diseases such as parvovirus or distemper virus, and are prepared to handle those situations appropriately. If these standards are met, a shelter can participate in the program.

Staff at participating shelters take pictures of adoptable animals, and e-mail those pictures and brief descriptions to the students who act as shelter coordinators for Homeward Bound. Those students in turn e-mail the listings of available animals to cooperating shelters and rescue groups in the Northeast. Those shelters let Homeward Bound know which animals they've chosen to receive on the upcoming transport. Once an animal has been chosen, the shelter in the South is notified, and that animal is scheduled to begin the process of preparing for transport.

Keeping Them Healthy

At this point, it becomes the Mississippi shelter's responsibility to make sure that the puppies and young dogs leaving the shelter are spayed or neutered, vaccinated with age-appropriate vaccines, have received fecal examinations, been dewormed with the appropriate anthelmintic for the appropriate amount of time, and are free from any contagious or life-threatening diseases such as parvo, distemper, and even more "benign" ailments such as kennel cough, sarcoptic mange, demodectic mange, and ringworm.

It is also the shelter's responsibility to test dogs who are 6 months or older for the presence of heartworm. If an animal is found to be positive, that animal can still enter the program and will either be treated at the shelter or treated through Homeward Bound once in foster care.

Foster homes are critical to the success of the program. All Homeward Bound animals are required to be in foster care for a minimum of 14 days prior to transport. The backbone of the whole program rests on the shelter's ability to remove a puppy or dog from the shelter environment and have the animal stay in a home environment before traveling to the Northeast.

Foster care provides a multitude of things, but most importantly acts as a socialization tool for the animal and also prevents the re-exposure of communicable diseases that an animal would continually face in a shelter setting. Foster parents who participate in the program are usually veterinary students, professors, veterinary technicians, graduate students, and faculty members at the school. The foster parents are responsible for caring for the animal in the weeks leading up to the trip, as well as notifying Homeward Bound of any problems

that may arise while the animal is in their care. Foster homes also provide Homeward Bound with vital information on the behavioral characteristics of individual animals and allow the program to send the animal to the respective shelter with a fairly in-depth description of the pups' personality traits.

As the transport date approaches, Homeward Bound animals are required to be present at a "medical day" that takes place one week before the scheduled date of departure. At this time, all medical records have been reviewed, and animals are scheduled to have the required vaccinations, a brief physical examination, and a fecal test. Any animals with either positive fecals or other medical issues are treated; if the issue can be resolved within a week, the animal is still scheduled for transport. If the medical issue is contagious—such as sarcoptic mange or ringworm—then the animal is held in foster care until the next possible transport.

Miles to Go

Finally, the big day arrives. Beginning at 7 a.m., all puppies and dogs are dropped off for transport at a central location. This usually means that 60-90 pups on average are brought together, given any final vaccinations or medical treatments, and then placed in crates labeled with their state and shelter of destination. Every pup travels with a complete medical history form, including a detailed description from their foster parents of any training that has been done and details about their personality. They also travel with health certificates and rabies certificates if they are old enough to receive the vaccine.

On top of all that paperwork, Homeward Bound is required to have U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) forms listing all the animals on the transport who will be crossing state lines. A certified USDA veterinarian is required to be at the departure site the morning of departure in order to examine every animal and to sign the USDA travel forms stating that the animals are free from obvious communicable disease and ready for travel.

Then the dogs are loaded into Homeward Bound's transport trailers and begin the final stretch of their long journey.

As the program has developed, the Mississippi end of Homeward Bound no longer makes the whole trip to the Northeast. Drivers from the New Hampshire end of the program meet the Mississippi drivers in Winchester, Va., load the pups into their own transport vans and continue on to deliver healthy dogs and puppies to shelters in New Jersey, Connecticut, New York, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

A program such as Homeward Bound is not designed to act as a sole solution. Rather, Homeward Bound has been developed as a response to an already overwhelming problem of overpopulation of companion animals. The ultimate solution to the problem is through public education and awareness of the importance of spaying and neutering companion animals. Homeward Bound is part of the Humane Ethics and Animal Welfare Program at MSU-CVM, which is

designed to be all-encompassing, helping both shelters and the community with spay/neuter through the MSU-CVM Mobile Veterinary Clinic. The program is also involved in educating children about the importance of companion animal care and the responsibility of spaying and neutering.

In the meantime, Homeward Bound is helping to provide a second chance for those animals who have already been affected by the crisis. In doing so, we're also helping to raise awareness, increase education about spaying and neutering, and generate concern about the problem of pet overpopulation.

In an ideal world, the solution would be simple: People would take care of their pets and commit to caring for them for life. They would spay and neuter to ensure that more unwanted animals weren't born.

But especially in the South and other rural areas, the problem is complicated: Low spay/neuter rates, a large number of animals allowed to roam, and areas of extreme poverty and low education levels all affect the animal population. Due to the huge number of unwanted companion animals, most shelters do not have a choice whether or not to employ euthanasia. If they did not do so, the presence of disease would be so great that the animals in these facilities would be extremely unhealthy, and more than likely die from natural causes. Without population control, public health risks would be insurmountable, rendering the work environment of a shelter unacceptable.

We know we cannot transport our way out of the problem, but in the face of all this suffering, we feel that Homeward Bound can act as an alternative option to euthanasia for those animals who are highly adoptable. Our overall goal is to act as the voice for those who are affected by this problem and to help those who cannot help themselves. Much is being done in the South to address the root causes of the pet surplus, and we would like to see those efforts come to fruition. In the meantime, though, we're working to save those we can.

The Homeward Bound Project hopes to act as a model for other veterinary schools and private rescue organizations. As we work to reduce the numbers of animals who are born, we still want to help those who are already here: They, too, deserve a chance for better lives. 





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Vetting Your Vets

Finding an animal doctor for your shelter means asking all the right questions—of the potential hire, and your own organization

BY JIM BAKER



Having a vet on staff can help a shelter save more lives and adopt out more healthy animals. At the Washington Animal Rescue League, veterinarian Jan Rosen and her staff examine a dog seized from a hoarding case.

When it came to recruiting and hiring a new shelter veterinarian, Stephanie McDonald lucked out: She didn't even have to go looking. Like a stray kitten, a young veterinarian—Anthea Smith—showed up on the doorstep of McDonald's organization, the Edmonton Humane Society in Alberta, Canada, and expressed an interest in getting some experience in shelter medicine.

"She had graduated from school and was just trying to figure out if she wanted to go into a clinic, or if she wanted to go to a humane society," McDonald says. "Her school had encouraged students to participate and give some support to shelters

there, and so she thought it was interesting and that she would like to come to us and just try it out."

McDonald didn't offer Smith a job—not right away, at least. Instead, the shelter had her come in as a volunteer, working with its senior vet to get accustomed to the culture and see what the work entailed. It was an approach that worked, McDonald says.

"We've got her as a full-time veterinarian now, and the nice thing is she got to really learn about shelter medicine through our veterinarian of nearly 20 years, and then she really started understanding the principles effectively."

McDonald's seemingly effortless experience bringing a new veterinarian on board should probably be regarded as an outlier. (As the small-print disclaimers for diet products frequently say, "Results not typical.")

You can certainly hope that a qualified candidate who's a good fit for your organization will appear unbidden at your front door. You can hope to win the lottery, too—but you shouldn't plan on either. Hiring a veterinarian is a process that begins long before you send an offer letter—a process that ideally follows a thorough evaluation of your shelter, its needs and capabilities, and the tasks you need a vet to perform. Only then

can you figure out what kind of candidate will be the best match for your organization's work and philosophy.

Philosophical agreement is one of the key elements in finding and hiring a veterinarian for your shelter. A candidate must recognize the financial restrictions shelters face, understanding the difference between the kind of approach that works in private practice and what's necessary in a place that must address "herd health."

Shelters are a unique environment—different from working in a clinic, a public health agency, in research, or a university setting. Is the candidate a good fit? It takes a special kind of person to handle the work, and that's who shelters should set their sights on, according to Kate Hurley, a veterinarian who serves as director of the Shelter Medicine Program at University of California-Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

"You want someone who's moving toward this for positive reasons—there are things they can see about working for a shelter that would give them joy. Because we all

know that there are challenges, and there needs to be something that keeps you coming back," she says. "Ultimately, you should look for someone who's got some spark and who understands your mission and wants to be part of it."

Looking Inward

Hiring a vet begins with asking questions about your own organization, long before you start grilling a potential hire during the job interview. It's important for shelters to define their expectations of a new veterinarian, and to take a candid look at their operations and facilities to determine if they're able to support such a role.

Eric Anderson, animal services manager at San Luis Obispo County Animal Services in California and himself a veterinarian, suggests that your evaluation of your agency should include the following questions: What do you want to get out of having a veterinarian join your staff? Is your goal to simply improve the medical care for your animals? Or are you looking for someone to

come in and provide direction for your shelter to grow, improve, and move toward a more progressive level?

Until you've set those parameters, and assessed what you want to achieve by having a veterinarian on board, you won't be successful bringing one on, Anderson says.

"Be very clear on what you're looking for, what role the veterinarian's going to play in your management structure," says Hurley. "Do you want them to be part of the management team? Do you want them to be part of the whole decision-making process about how animals go through the shelter? Or do you want them to be focused on spay/neuter, or the medical care of animals? Do you want them to have a role in behavior evaluations?"

One issue that Anderson's seen is the expectation that a veterinarian will come in and immediately begin management of care in a shelter, when there's not support staff or diagnostic ability to perform blood work or X-rays—tests that are often needed before deciding upon a course of treatment.

Not Enough to Go Around Shelters need to identify their strengths and provide perks to lure top talent

Looking to hire a shelter veterinarian? Get in line. It's a tough market, and competition among shelters is especially steep.

"We could put every veterinarian in the United States in one big football stadium, so it's not like there's that many of them, and so there's a lot of competition to hire them," says James Weedon, a veterinarian who serves as CEO of the Spay-Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP), which operates in Houston and San Antonio.

Shelters need to work to compete for talent. That means they'll have to identify the perks that make shelter positions attractive, according to Julie Levy, associate professor of small animal internal medicine at the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine.

Levy offers these suggestions:

- The majority of new veterinarians are women, and many have postponed starting families until completing veterinary school. Offering part-time or shared positions and flexible hours without emergency duty can be a lifesaver for mothers.
- Nothing can drain a new hire's enthusiasm faster than depriving her of the opportunity to practice high-quality medicine and surgery. A skilled support team is essential to assure that the veterinarian's time is used efficiently.
- Salaries must be competitive. New graduates have typically postponed employment for many years to complete their training, so they are way behind their peers in starting pension plans, acquiring a reliable vehicle, or purchasing a home.
- School debt is astronomical among new graduates, averaging \$100,000 per student and often much more. Monthly loan payments can prevent new veterinarians from embarking on the lifestyle they've dreamed of for many years, leading them to seek out higher-paying jobs. Some shelters offer to make student loan payments as long as the veterinarian works for them—a powerful incentive to stay with the organization.
- Shelter positions can offer new challenges for mid-career practitioners, who are often ready for a break from seeing clients and having emergency-call duties. A well-designed externship program for veterinary students is a great way to make a good impression and create a bond with a future veterinarian who might be recruited after graduation.

Nor should a newly hired veterinarian be expected to do every task herself. Shelters need to consider this ahead of time; if there's only enough room in their budgets for a full-time veterinarian and no vet technicians, it might make more sense to seek out a part-time veterinarian and two techs to provide support.

"You don't want your veterinarian to be down on all fours, wrestling with an animal to take a skin scraping," Hurley says. "That's not a good use of your veterinarian's time and education, and it's not a good use of your money."

Shelters also need to take a look at their facilities in order to determine what's realistically possible. In Anderson's case, his shelter was built decades ago and has no true medical facility, and that's created limitations. He and a veterinary technician simply lack the room to pursue all the treatment options they'd like to.

"I think you need to recognize that for [veterinarians] to be able to fully do their job, they need certain facilities, equipment, supplies, and workspaces, as well as the support staff that are going to assist them," he says.

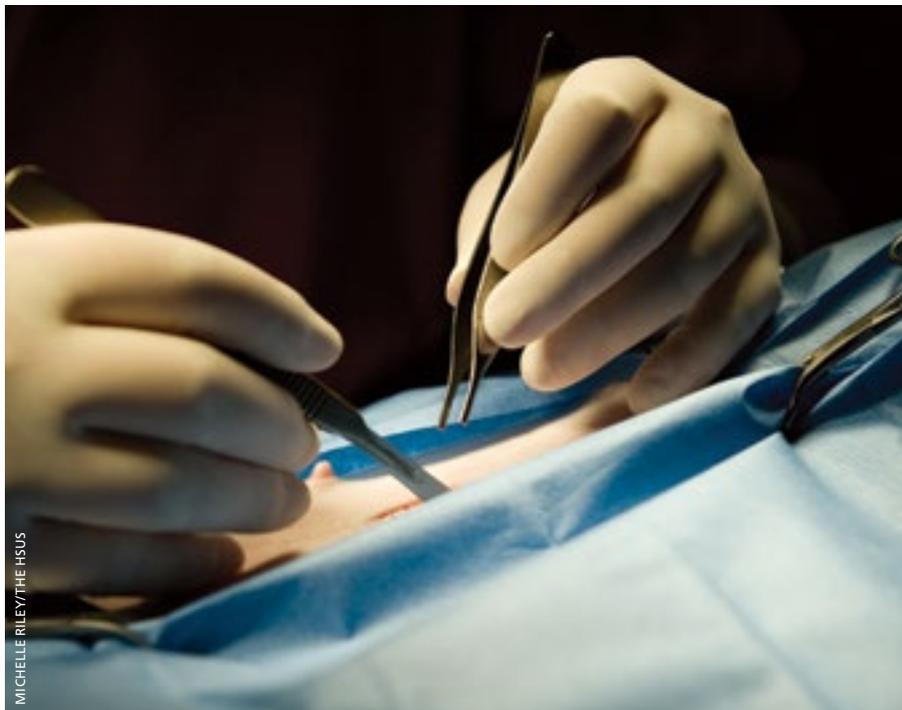
Who Does What— and Who's in Charge?

A common mistake shelters make is hiring a veterinarian without first creating a job description. This can lead to problems down the road, such as conflicts about who in your organization has the final say on medical decisions.

"An accurate job description is critical," says Jeanette O'Quin, president of the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, which has more than 700 members and 20 student chapters in the United States and Canada. "You can hire a great shelter veterinarian, but if the job is not what they expected, you may soon be hiring again."

A job description should include the work hours, qualifications, and job duties. It's also helpful to include the relative frequency of certain tasks, says O'Quin. For example, spay/neuter surgery may be part of the job, but is it something the veterinarian will be doing daily, weekly, or twice a year? A job outline will make it clear that a veterinarian should be able to meet your expectations in the prescribed time and with the available staff.

It's also important, O'Quin says, to include a description of the organization itself, explaining formal lines of authority, com-



A clear job description for a shelter veterinarian should ideally include the frequency of tasks she'll be performing. If the vet will be spending 80 percent of her time on spay/neuter surgeries, it's best to make that clear.

munication, and responsibility. Lack of clarity about who will make decisions regarding medical care and protocols can create frustration and cause veterinarians to leave their jobs at shelters. Shelters should have written policies and protocols in place, and these should be communicated to job candidates.

"That's an essential part of exploring the match during the interview process," says Julie Levy, associate professor of small animal internal medicine at the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine.

Sheltering is "a nontraditional area of practice, so there's not a well-defined role at this time for veterinarians in shelters, and there could easily be a misunderstanding about who's in charge and who's responsible for the health and welfare of the animals," Levy says.

"It's really a challenge for a veterinarian to make medical decisions on what to treat and how to treat when one day, you'll treat this condition, and another day, you don't," O'Quin says. "All of those things need to be spelled out. If everybody knows what the plan is going in, and there's good communication throughout, then that's going to be really beneficial."



Veterinarians coming to shelters from private practice need to understand that, while they will be caring for individual animals, medical care in shelters must take "herd health" into consideration and may involve some tough decisions due to limited resources.



In the hiring process, shelters need to be clear about what role the new veterinarian is going to play in the shelter's management structure and where the responsibility for major medical decisions will lie.



A shelter veterinarian will need support staff, so that she can focus on the work she's been trained for.

Coping with Culture Shock

Having such issues explained in advance can prevent culture shock for vets coming from private clinics into the chaotic and often financially restricted world of shelter medicine.

"If you have vets that are applying coming from a clinic situation, they have to understand that most shelters have greater limitations, in terms of the ability to do a lot of diagnostics and extensive treatments and

those kinds of things," says Kim Staton, an animal welfare consultant who has worked for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and other organizations.

It can be a big adjustment, and it's a topic that should be explored during an interview. Shelters should share their philosophy, describe their role in the community, make candidates aware of the challenges they'll face, and provide them with a mission statement.

"Doctors are trained to be healers," says Jan McHugh-Smith, CEO/president of the Humane Society of the Pike's Peak Region, in Colorado Springs, Colo. But not all shelters will be able to heal all the things that are easily treatable in private practice, and McHugh-Smith says it's smart to talk about the realities of your particular organization. An honest conversation can help you assess whether the candidate understands the challenge of limited resources, and whether he will be able to make tough decisions when necessary.

Job interviews, of course, can only reveal so much about a person. There's really no substitute for spending time with candidates, getting to know them a little better, and watching how they relate to your staff and the shelter environment—as McDonald did with the new veterinarian who's now a key part of her staff.

"There's a lot to be said for tryout periods, where maybe a veterinarian would be hired on a per-diem basis for a week or two

Resources

Our magazine's website, animalsheltering.org allows free job postings, and the magazine's Shelter Medicine column provides regular content for shelter veterinarians.

"Hiring a Shelter Veterinarian," by Kate Hurley, director of the Shelter Medicine Program at the University of California-Davis School of Veterinary Medicine (sheltermedicine.com/portal/infosheets.shtml).

"Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Spay/Neuter Veterinarians," by James R. Weedon, CEO of the Spay-Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP) (sheltermedicine.com/documents/strategiesforhirings-nvets.pdf).

ASPCA Professional's webpage on shelter veterinary medicine (aspapro.org/shelter-veterinary-medicine.php).

The Association for Shelter Veterinarians has a link to job opportunities, where visitors can view available positions, or post ads for new ones (shelternvet.org).

to see if it's something that appeals to them," Levy says.

"Of course, it's hard to really learn everything about a job in a short time, but it certainly is very, very different from seeing owned patients one at a time. Shadowing is good, talking to staff at all levels to get a sense for what they are expecting of a veterinarian and also to learn what the morale of the shelter is."

Some shelters have externship programs for veterinary students to provide them with an opportunity to learn about shelter medicine. Such programs also give shelters a way to build relationships with students, who may decide to return after graduation—this time in search of a permanent position.

Hurley suggests that job seekers go on a ride-along with an animal control officer, watch the kennels being cleaned, spend half a day in the front office, and view the adoption process. "The shelter is a whole organism ... let the doctor get a feeling for that whole organism," she says. 

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BOB ESPOSITO

“Talking turkey” is not just an expression. *The Inner World of Farm Animals* points out that turkeys have well-developed vocabularies and can recognize each other by their voices.

A New York City bus may seem like an odd place to start thinking about farm animals, but that’s where Amy Hatkoff was when she spied a sign depicting their suffering. It prompted an “aha moment,” she says, steering her to write about animal welfare for the first time.

Across the country in California, a similar idea hatched as Diane Leigh watched her friend Marilee Geyer’s chickens frolic in a yard, strutting and scratching and clucking and cooing. Leigh commented that people would be amazed to see the animals in such a happy state.

From those epiphanies have emerged two books that show the beauty of farm animals, highlighting their intellectual and emotional complexities and subtly making a case against the inhumane practices of factory farms.

Hatkoff’s *The Inner World of Farm Animals: Their Amazing Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Capacities*, published last year, shares a similar format with *Ninety-Five: Meeting America’s Farmed Animals in Stories and Photographs*, edited by Geyer, Leigh, and Windi Wojdak and published this May. Both feature striking photos of pigs, sheep, cows, chickens, roosters, and other animals

in natural settings, accompanied by stories of their rescues.

The authors chose to forgo graphic depictions of the horrors of factory farming in favor of focusing on how lovable and unique the animals are when they’re allowed to be themselves. This format has the effect of implicitly questioning the agribusiness system that denies the creatures’ individuality.

Hatkoff—who is also a lecturer and documentary filmmaker specializing in child welfare issues—says she was startled during her research by the growing body of scientific evidence indicating that farm animals

[q&a]

have “complex thoughts, deep emotions, and social skills and rituals not unlike our own.” Leigh and Geyer, the authors of two previous books published by their nonprofit, No Voice Unheard, hope *Ninety-Five* helps personalize the staggering number of animals killed for food each year in factory farms.

“It’s hard to picture 10 billion animals a year being farmed in this country,” says Leigh. “And I think there’s a very special power in putting individual names and faces to those numbers. The animals in *Ninety-Five* are ambassadors for those 10 billion every year.”

In these excerpted interviews, Hatkoff, Geyer, and Leigh discuss their books with *Animal Sheltering* associate editor James Hettinger.

Animal Sheltering: What do you hope to accomplish with your books?

Amy Hatkoff: My hope and dream is to make people think and to really touch people—to let the animals do the talking and to let people see the animals face to face. What I hoped to accomplish was to both move people [and] really to shift awareness. I found the research phenomenal—that chickens could count and use geometric principles, and pigs could play video games on the computer. And I thought that those facts spoke very loudly and would work along with the images and the moving quotes from people who have been advocating for animals throughout history.

Diane Leigh: We have a passion for issues about farmed animals, for all the reasons that you would expect: because the suffering is so immense, and there are so many billions of animals that go through the farming system in this country. When we looked around, we realized there are a lot of wonderful, very recent books released that are very full, factual treatises on farming and animal agriculture in this country, and we wanted to do something really different that really focused on the animals themselves—that basically gave people a fun-to-look-at, inviting way of actually meeting these animals, and [showed] them for the intellectually complex and interesting and charming creatures that they are. The vast majority of people in this country—the vast majority—never get to meet farmed animals, and never get to realize these things about them.



Amy Hatkoff's *The Inner World of Farm Animals* highlights research showing farm animals' emotional and intellectual capacities, such as the ability of sheep to distinguish between passing traffic and the car that delivers their food.

People tend to think of their pets as being clever and having emotions, but they don't think of farm animals that way. Why do you think that is?

Hatkoff: Largely I think it's probably conditioning, because there have been times throughout history where pigs have been pets, and they've been valued. I did a little research into the history of how our ideas about animals have been shaped. There was this thought that they couldn't think, that they had no feeling, and different philosophers have argued [that] at different times. And I think religious views have shaped it, but I think it's really cultural. In India, the cow is sacred, but here farm animals are to be farmed. And I don't think that we generally go out of the box. That was the hope of the book—to interrupt that thinking, to interrupt what's been handed down to us, and to make us think, because it's so easy not to think about them.

Marilee Geyer: I think it's a deliberate tactic on the part of the agriculture industry. If you portray these animals as being dumb and unfeeling—the myth that turkeys will look up into the sky when it's raining and drown is absurd—but if you perpetuate these myths, you can convince people that their feelings don't matter [or that] they don't have feelings. And it makes it that much easier to do what the agriculture industry does to them. But when I tell people that my hens, who were rescued from an egg farm, jump up on my lap when I'm sitting outdoors in a chair and look me in the eye—seemingly saying, “Hey, what's going on?”—people are quite frankly shocked to hear that, because they would never consider such a thing, because of what our culture teaches us about these animals.

I would guess that, as you talk about animals falling in love and so on, you run the risk of people thinking that you're anthropomorphizing?

Geyer: Oh, sure. It's funny. You observe these animals, and to me there's no question about some of their behavior. You can certainly tell when a pig or a cow is happy and content, and when they're fearful, and when they're scared, and when they're in pain. Isn't that the important point? I can tell by looking at my dog when he's happy or anxious, and it's not a leap to extend that to other animals.

Do you think we're at a point where the public is starting to become more attuned to these issues?

Hatkoff: I feel there's a tipping point in awareness. It's like going green now. It's be-

coming very hip and cool to be very careful about what we're eating. So I think the field has blown wide open.

Geyer: The response to Jonathan Safran Foer's book *Eating Animals*—I think that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago or even five years ago.

Leigh: I've been an animal advocate all my lifetime, and I never really expected to see the kind of progress that we've seen in my lifetime. People, more than ever, want to know where their food comes from, and they're showing a mainstream concern [about] the animals that end up on their plate, about how they're treated. What we want to do is show them who those animals are. [AS](#)

The Audacity of Porcine Hope

Romance among farm animals is not so different from the human variety. Sometimes it flourishes, sometimes it doesn't.

Lucas the pig of Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary in Colorado, whose story is recounted in *Ninety-Five*, has learned the perils of unrequited love and displayed the dogged determination of someone who's got it bad. Once slated for slaughter, Lucas jumped off a truck that was taking him to his final fattening place at a pig farm. Now, at the sanctuary, he's free to explore—to chase a horse or

to bathe in the drinking water fountain.

Or ... to fall in love.

The object of his affection, the independent-minded sow Petunia, doesn't return his attentions. She ignores him as best she can and sometimes resorts to shoving him away.

Still, Lucas persists.

"I'm actually very charmed by Lucas the pig," says *Ninety-Five* co-editor Diane Leigh, who witnessed some of Lucas's daily unsuccessful attempts to make Petunia fall in love with him. "He's one of my favorites. He's just ... so irrepressible and so hopeful all the time."

Though he's been spurned, he's got reasons for optimism. At hog farms, pigs like Lucas are quickly removed from their mothers (who are impregnated again as soon as possible), then moved to filthy, crowded, windowless "grower houses" where they stay until being slaughtered at the age of 6 months, notes *Ninety-Five* co-editor Marilee Geyer. At the sanctuary, in contrast, he's "free to feel and express his whole being and all of his emotions and attachments and loves."



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A Love to Crow About

There is a story of two creatures completing each other: Libby the hen was largely silent when she arrived at Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary. But Louie the rooster spoke up enough for the two of them. When Libby was accidentally locked in a barn while it was being cleaned, a distressed Louie turned frantic. He communicated his friend's predicament by pacing outside the barn door, crowing his alarm, flapping his wings, stomping his feet, and tapping the ground with his beak.

"They separated themselves on their own from a flock of hundreds of other birds that are cared for at that sanctuary, and just clearly adored each other," says *Ninety-Five* co-editor Diane Leigh. "We saw Louie scratch for food and call her over to get it when he found it."

When Libby was unable to climb up to join her companion in his treasured roosting spot in the rafters, Louie even decided to forgo

comfort and settle in next to her on the ground. Roles were eventually reversed when Louie grew ill and was secluded for treatment.

It was Libby's turn to wait and search for her partner; she eventually found him in a locked rehab room, according to the account by *Ninety-Five* contributor Joanna Lucas.

Louie died last fall, followed a month later by Libby. "She was blue in her last days without her love, and that couldn't be helped, but she was never alone," Lucas wrote in an e-mail. "She, like Louie, lived and died surrounded by love, thanks to [Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary]."



Justice ... and Compassion

Justice's story reads like a fairy tale. Now a "cover cow" who graces the jacket of the book *Ninety-Five*, he was headed for slaughter when he escaped from a truck and ran. A wildlife officer subdued him with a shot from a tranquilizer gun, serendipitously saving him: The new drugs in Justice's system made him unfit for human consumption.

Justice arrived at Peaceful Prairie Sanctuary as a scared steer who, according to his caretaker, had "banged himself up terribly" on the trailer ride heading to the slaughterhouse, breaking his left horn. But Sherman, another steer at the sanctuary, saw Justice's agitated state and started licking him through the fence to calm him down. That act of kindness appears to have made an impression on

Justice, who's now made it his mission to ease the fears of all the scared newcomers. He'll stand by them—all night if he has to, as in the case of a terrified sheep named Rowdy who stopped crying after his new friend came to his side.

"And he does it consistently; he does it across species," says *Ninety-Five* co-editor Diane Leigh, who visited Justice and wrote the chapter devoted to him in the book. "Everyone who goes to that sanctuary talks about Justice. He has such an aura around him, in the same way if you met a really profound person, you would get that same kind of thing. His lesson of just utter kindness and wanting to relieve other creatures' suffering and fear—it was very moving."

Kittens: Coming Now to a Shelter Near You

Strategies for coping with kitten season

BY BRENDA GRIFFIN, D.V.M.



Each year in the depths of winter, Mother Nature's biological clock silently starts ticking, gradually bringing the birds, the bees, the flowers, the trees ... and the kittens. Talk about too much of a good thing!

Seasonal breeders, cats are sexually inactive and do not mate when the days are short. In the Northern hemisphere, breeding season begins a few weeks after the winter solstice—Dec. 21, the shortest day of the year. As the days get longer, female cats (also known as queens) typically “come into heat” at regular intervals. This is the time when they attract mates and are receptive to breeding. Most queens cycle into “heat” for a few days approximately every two weeks until they become pregnant, are spayed, or the season ends in the fall.

That leaves some long months for what shelters and rescues have come to know as “kitten season.” During the spring and sum-

mer months, large numbers of pregnant cats, nursing mothers, and kittens often overwhelm facilities across the United States. From a health perspective, the care of so many felines requires special considerations. Shelters must take extra care to protect young kittens, especially those younger than 4-5 months, from exposure to germs; and must provide them with a series of timely vaccinations, as well as high-quality nutrition and proper deworming in order to keep them healthy.

Delivering and raising kittens in a shelter setting is stressful for the new family, and the risk of infectious disease exposure and serious illness is high. For these reasons, pregnant queens should be spayed whenever possible. Even for those who are very far along with their pregnancy, spaying can be safely and humanely performed. Fortunately, cats do not commonly experience signs of maternal loss following late-term spaying and quickly

adjust to the less-stressful, healthy lifestyle of a spayed cat.

In some cases, though, kitten births may be unavoidable. In these cases, skilled foster care—emphasis on *skilled*, as neonates present challenges and require a great deal of time and care—is best for both pregnant moms and new kittens. Newborn kittens are born blind, nearly deaf, and completely dependent. Although they grow rapidly, specialized care is required for the first several weeks of life until they are old enough to be successfully weaned.

Signs of Heat and Pregnancy

The behavioral signs of a cat in heat are usually obvious: a queen will rub and roll excessively and may crouch and posture with her back swayed and rump in the air while treading in place with her hind limbs. These behavioral signs are the only obvious signs—and

[shelter medicine]



The shelter is a stressful and high-risk environment for preweaning-age kittens. Whenever possible, underage litters should be placed in foster homes with knowledgeable caregivers in order to maximize their odds of maintaining good health.

this may confuse people used to the physical changes seen in dogs, where a swollen vulva and the presence of bloody discharge often make heat detection easy. But in cats, the vulva undergoes only subtle physical changes, and discharge is minimal and—because of the fastidious grooming habits of queens—rarely observed.

Female cats are seasonal breeders who typically become sexually active by 5-9 months of age. They only mate during spring, so if left unspayed, many young queens will become pregnant during their first springtime, often as early as 6 months of age. The gestation period averages nine weeks, with three to five kittens being the typical litter size. Most kittens are born in midspring to late summer. A female may mate with numerous tomcats during a single heat, thus litters can have multiple fathers. This often explains why there is such diversity in the coat colors and patterns of kittens within the same litter.

Owing to the effects of hormones, queens become increasingly docile during the initial six weeks of pregnancy. Their nipples become pinker and more erect—and by the last three weeks of pregnancy, physical changes become obvious and include enlargement of the abdomen and mammary glands. By the time a cat appears obviously pregnant,

she is usually less than two weeks away from giving birth. Don't mistake overweight spayed cats for pregnant cats; the former can usually be distinguished by their overall distribution of fat and small mammary glands, as well as the presence of a spay scar.

Pregnant Cat Care and Delivery of Kittens

Foster caregivers must have some knowledge of the birth process. Expectant mothers need a low-stress environment and should get free access to a high-quality kitten food during the last three weeks of pregnancy.

Delivery of kittens usually takes place at night, and most mothers prefer privacy and seclusion. Human interference—such as handling or too much observation—can complicate delivery by stressing the mother, resulting in delayed delivery or neglect of the newborns. (Rarely, a cat will seek human companionship during the birthing process. If this occurs, she should be allowed to proceed with the delivery in the company of her chosen human companions in order to avoid stress from forced separation.)

Caregivers should provide moms-to-be with a quiet, dark, dry area suitable for nesting. In the week prior to giving birth, many queens increase their grooming, and some



This female cat is lactating, as evidenced by her enlarged mammary glands and the absence of hair around the nipples. She could make an excellent foster mother for a litter of orphan kittens.

will become irritable. Two to three days prior to delivery, the mammary glands may become engorged with milk. A decrease in body temperature usually precedes delivery.

Cats go through three stages of labor. The first is characterized by nesting behavior and may last one to 24 hours. The queen appears restless, may pace, posture as to defecate, vocalize, groom excessively, refuse food, or dig with her front paws. Uterine contractions and cervical dilation occur during this time.

The second stage is delivery of the kittens. Abdominal press and uterine contractions occur and last from a few seconds to one and a half hours. During this time, queens may appear uncomfortable and frequently squat, scratch, circle, or rearrange their bedding. Kittens emerge into the vulva and are quickly delivered. Anterior and posterior (breech) presentations are normal. Queens often lick excessively during this stage, ingesting expelled uterine fluids, stimulating the kittens to breathe, and directing them toward the nipples to nurse.

The final stage of labor is the expulsion of the placenta; which the queen usually eats, probably for nutritional and hygienic reasons.

Most litters are delivered within two hours, with 15-30 minute intervals between

kittens, but intervals may range from seconds to hours. Occasionally, a delay of 12-48 hours may occur between kittens. This is usually due to some disturbance, which may cause the queen to delay delivery and/or attempt to move her kittens. Alternatively, the queen may elect to rest between deliveries. This should not be confused with dystocia (difficulty giving birth), which is rare in cats outside of certain breeds such as the Manx. In contrast, signs of dystocia include non-productive active labor, straining, or signs of illness including fever, depression, or foul-smelling vaginal discharge. When these signs are present, the cat needs immediate veterinary attention.

Care of the New Family

The new mother and her family require warmth, peace, and solitude, especially during the first few days. Caregivers should maintain a calm, clean, and secure atmosphere, taking particular care to prevent exposure to infectious disease. The kittens should be allowed to nurse at all times; and the mother should have free access to a

high-quality kitten food and plenty of fresh water, since both her energy and fluid needs will increase while she is nursing. The kittens should be gently examined each day to ensure that they remain free of any outward signs of problems.

In order to maintain good health, shelters should avoid holding litters of kittens—both those born in the shelter and groups of pre-weaned kittens surrendered by citizens—whenever possible. Healthy weaned kittens should be made available for adoption immediately following intake examination, but housing kittens who are younger than 6-8 weeks should be avoided; even in shelters with aggressive vaccination procedures and environmental management, the kittens invariably become seriously ill from infectious disease.

Kittens born in the shelter should be placed in foster care within 48 hours. With notice from individuals who plan to relinquish mothers and litters, arrangements for foster care can be made in advance so that kittens aren't surrendered prior to completion of weaning.

In cases where a citizen surrenders a litter of kittens, but claims not to be the owner, many shelters think they must hold the animals for the usual required stray holding period. This is not necessarily the case. When kittens are born on a citizen's property, they often legally belong to that citizen as the property owner; thus holding laws frequently don't apply to litters of young animals. The purpose of holding laws is to allow owners a chance to claim their pets—and in my experience, the chances of an owner showing up to claim a litter of small kittens are slim to none. It is important to carefully check your local ordinances—many shelters will find that holding young kittens is not a legal requirement. If your local ordinances don't exclude young litters from holding period requirements, you should at least consider conducting the hold through your foster care program. All too often I see cases where shelters—attempting to do the correct, legal thing—hold young litters and later have to euthanize all of the animals when they become ill. When recently weaned litters enter the shelter, triage them



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[shelter medicine]

immediately through intake into biosecure adoption areas. Holding time dramatically increases the risk of disease—especially respiratory infections—that could compromise the kittens' health.

Orphaned Kittens

When orphaned kittens enter the shelter and are too young to eat solid food or gruel on their own, immediate intervention is necessary. In addition to a human foster care provider, a feline foster care provider is highly recommended! A foster mother cat can provide for many of the kittens' needs, including proper nutrition, warmth, regular elimination, hygiene, security, and socialization. Fortunately, most mother cats will readily foster another queen's kittens.

Selecting a lactating queen whose own kittens are of similar size or are recently weaned prevents competition between younger kittens and older, bigger ones. It is also prudent to select a queen recently arrived at the shelter, or one who is already in foster care, as she may be less likely to be

harboring a respiratory infection from shelter exposure.

Whenever possible, both foster mothers and orphan kittens should be screened for feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus prior to their introduction. The introduction between the mother and kittens should take place in a nonstressful setting: a quiet, warm nest away from humans and other animals. Some queens thrive as foster mothers and can safely raise consecutive litters in a single season, provided they maintain good body condition and attitude.

Raising the Newborns

The best way to monitor the health of newborn kittens is to weigh them daily to chart their weight gain. (A gram scale, such as those made for use in the kitchen, is ideal.) The normal birth weight of kittens is approximately 100 grams; they should gain 10-15 grams per day as neonates. A daily gain of less than seven grams is inadequate and should alert caregivers that supplemental feeding is necessary and/or health problems may be present. Kittens should be monitored closely to ensure that they nurse vigorously and remain warm. This is crucial during the delicate first few weeks of life.

If a foster mother is unavailable, kittens may be hand-raised. Hand-raising is time-consuming and sometimes difficult. Kittens should be kept together in a warm nesting box (80-90 degrees Fahrenheit) with soft, absorbent bedding. Bedding should be changed at least daily to maintain proper sanitation; caregivers should always wash their hands before handling orphans. Because neonates are reliant upon their mother for warmth, orphans can become chilled and develop hypothermia, which will threaten their health. To ensure adequate warmth, you can use warmed rice bags or water bottles—however, these should always be covered with towels or blankets, and carefully monitored to prevent thermal injury. Kittens should also be able to crawl away from the heat source if they become too warm. The use of electric heating pads has been associated with serious burns, and should be avoided.

Because commercial milk replacement formulas for human infants and puppies do

not supply the high levels of fat and protein kittens require, use kitten-specific formulas. Warmed milk replacer (98-99 degrees) should be fed via bottle or, if kittens fail to suckle, a stomach tube. The manufacturers' instructions for preparation, feeding, and storage should be carefully followed. (Powdered formulas are especially useful and convenient because they can be mixed in small amounts and are stable under refrigeration for longer periods than liquid products.)

A variety of nursers are available at pet-supply stores and are appropriate for strong kittens with good suckling reflexes. The opening in the nipple should be a small hole or slit that will allow milk to drip very slowly, without squeezing the bottle when it is inverted. The bottle should be held to allow the kitten to suckle while in an upright sternal position with the head held at a natural angle. Don't squeeze the bottle—this can result in aspiration, or milk may bubble out of the nose. For kittens with a poor suckling reflex, tube-feeding is the method of choice. It also offers the advantage of being faster than bottle-feeding, and for this reason, it may be preferred even when kittens are willing to suckle. Tube-feeding is a relatively simple procedure, and with hands-on training by a veterinarian or skilled kitten foster parent, most caregivers can learn to carry it out.

After feeding, palpate the stomach to be sure that it feels full, but not excessively distended or taut. Overfilling the stomach poses a risk for aspiration, and overfeeding can result in diarrhea. For this reason, it is generally better to underfeed kittens in the first day or two and to modify the amount fed by monitoring daily weight gains. In the first two weeks of life, kittens need to be fed every two to four hours around the clock, after which the frequency can usually be decreased to every four to six hours. All supplies used for feeding (bottles, tubes, syringes, and containers) must be carefully sanitized between feedings. After each feeding, the anogenital area of each kitten should be gently stroked with a soft cotton ball or tissue moistened with warm water to stimulate urination and defecation. Urine should be light yellow, and feces should be firm and yellow-brown.



Brenda Griffin is an adjunct associate professor of shelter medicine at the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine.

For information on vaccination protocols, go to animalsheltering.org/resource_library/magazine_articles/jul_aug_2006/hurley_vaccination_station.pdf.

The Mother-Kitten Relationship

The mother-kitten relationship is crucial for normal social and emotional development; orphans may fail to develop normal social skills and/or may have abnormal responses to stress when hand-reared. Suckling may occur among orphan littermates, and they may attempt to “nurse” the tails, ears, or genitalia of their littermates, occasionally causing significant trauma. Nonlactating queens or even a neutered tomcat may sometimes accept a litter of kittens, and although hand-feeding is necessary, the kittens will benefit behaviorally and socially. This is especially important for singleton orphans who would otherwise be deprived of both maternal and sibling relationships.

The process of weaning requires that kittens 3-4 weeks old be offered semisolid food in a flat, shallow pan or dish. Gruel can be made from a quality kitten food, and the addition of a small amount of formula will usually make it more enticing. For the first few feedings, kittens typically walk in the gruel more than actually eating it. But within a few days their appetites will usually improve, and

the amount of formula they receive can be reduced accordingly. For kittens without access to nursing mother cats, weaning from bottle-feeding should be complete by 5-6 weeks of age; long-term feeding of formula is not recommended.

For litters with a nursing mother, it can be behaviorally beneficial for kittens to remain with her for a longer period of time. Queens frequently will not fully wean their kittens until 12-14 weeks if left to their own devices. If older kittens are housed with their mother, it is important to provide her a perch so she can periodically rest away from her young if she desires.

In addition to social time with mom and littermates, young kittens need a healthy daily dose of positive attention from human caregivers and reasonable amounts of exposure to the sights and sounds of household activities. At 2-7 weeks, kittens are at the most sensitive stage of their development, and proper socialization must occur during this time. Without such contact and exposure, kittens are likely to become chronically fearful instead of blossoming into well-adjusted,



In the final weeks of pregnancy, the female's abdomen will be obviously enlarged, and her mammary glands will appear well developed.

friendly fur balls who fly out of the shelter and into new homes.

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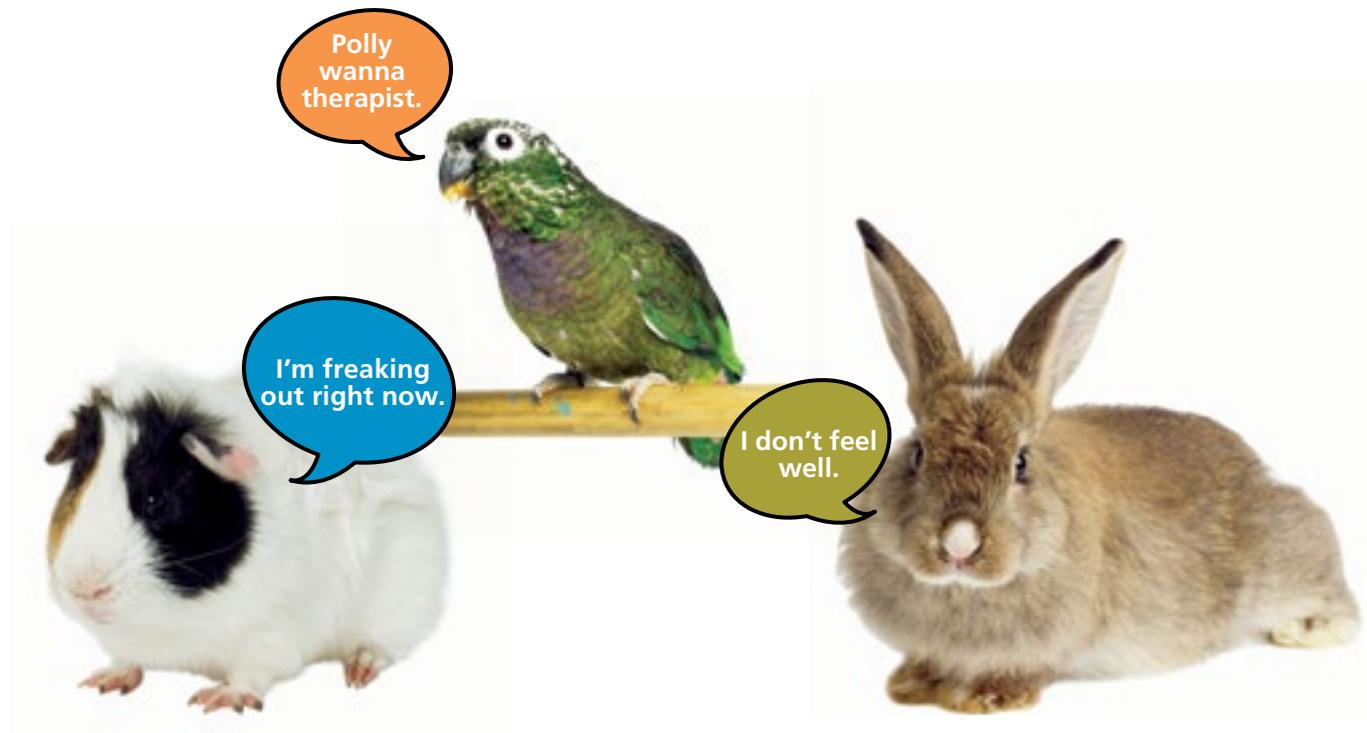
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A Beginner's Guide to Stress Across Species

Recognizing, preventing, and reducing stress in birds and small mammals

BY ADAM GOLDFARB



Stress is everywhere in the animal shelter: It's in the kennels, the lobby, the executive offices. There's no getting away from it. Dogs spin, cats get sick, people quit.

Shelters have come a long way in identifying and preventing stress in dogs and cats—and many have developed good people-care programs, too. But how many shelter workers can recognize stress in a parakeet? Who knows how to keep a ferret from freaking out? Are your rabbits' disapproving glances a cause for concern?

Many shelters break up their intake statistics into three groups: dogs, cats, and "other." But those "other" animals represent a huge variety of species. There are rabbits, guinea pigs, ferrets, chinchillas, hamsters, gerbils, mice, rats, and dozens of species of

birds. While some of these creatures share certain similarities, others are vastly different, and it's essential that all species receive appropriate individualized care. More than anything else, proper, species-specific care can go a long way to prevent stress—which in turn leads to improved health, and to better chances for adoption.

Helping Bewildered Birds

Many species of birds are kept as pets, but cockatiels and parakeets are the most popular—and thus most likely to fly into your shelter.

Birds in a new situation are likely to be on high alert. Keep them in a quiet, secluded area, and be sure to keep them warm, says Eileen McCarthy, president/CEO of the Midwest

Avian Adoption and Rescue Society (MAARS). A room with a temperature in the 70s is appropriate, and in dry climates, a humidifier can be helpful, too. Most of these species hail from tropical climates, and the warm temperature will allow them to conserve energy.

Be sure to factor in their status as prey animals when considering their care, including housing type, housing location in the shelter, and handling. McCarthy recommends that birds not be housed within sight of reptiles, ferrets, or other predators. She also encourages covering parts of a bird cage with towels or blankets to limit the birds' view, and housing multiple birds of the same species together when possible. "Housing with other birds will make them feel more comfortable—safety in numbers," she says.

[behavior department]

In addition to feeling safer, birds generally enjoy the company of their own kind. Never separate a bonded pair who comes into the shelter together (with the exception of pairs who split and fight due to the stress of the new environment). When housing three or more birds in one enclosure, be sure that they all have individual perches, multiple food and water bowls as needed, and ample space to completely stretch their wings.

Though placing birds in the shelter lobby can help get them noticed by potential adopters, the noise and high traffic can really stress birds out. Some birds may be comfortable in the hustle and bustle of a lobby for a few hours each day, but new birds and those who continue to show signs of stress will be happier in a quieter locale.

Working at the front desk and dealing with annoyed clients has given many shelter employees firsthand knowledge of the relationship between stress and aggression! Keep your own experiences in mind when considering the personalities of birds—McCarthy believes that many birds are mistakenly labeled as aggressive biters when they're actually just stressed and scared from being in a new situation. She recommends that shelter workers help their birds get comfortable by utilizing cage systems that allow food and water bowls to slide in and out without giving the birds access to frightening (and nippable) fingers.

As in other animals, stress and illness in birds are closely related. Stress can activate or exacerbate dormant viruses or bacteria, making a previously healthy bird sick. Look for signs such as fluffing up feathers; ocular, nasal, or oral discharge; food stuck to their beak; or a poopy vent. A bird who is stressed or ill may not maintain normal grooming. Behaviors such as thrashing in the cage, intense squawking, not moving, not perching, and lying on the floor of the cage are all signs of trouble.

Solving Rodent Riddles

The rodents who come to your shelter most frequently will probably be hamsters and guinea pigs, though you may also see gerbils, chinchillas, rats, and mice. Most of these guys are the cast-off playthings of bored children, and they may have become accustomed to rough handling, poor diets, and Lego-littered living spaces.



Ideal ferret housing provides a large, multi-level space, with ramps connecting the different levels. The space within the cage should include a litter pan and a hammock or blanket for napping.



Prey animals need a place to hide; it can be stressful for them to be out in the open. For guinea pigs housed in a small cage, you can make a hiding area by using cable ties to attach a cardboard canned pet food tray to the bars.

From the moment that a rodent enters your shelter, keep in mind how small these animals are. Between the disorienting car ride, the jiggly jaunt from the car to your building, and the new smells and sounds of a shelter, it's a crazy experience. "Their whole world is moving," notes Suzanne D'Alonzo, education and training manager for the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria

Outside experts

Staff who are knowledgeable about birds, small animals, and exotics may be hard to come by in the shelter. D'Alonzo recommends training other staff on care and behavior of little critters and birds, so your organization doesn't have to rely on just one person. After all, that one person may be out sick or on vacation on a day that their expertise is needed.

McCarthy encourages shelters to get to know experts in the community, such as exotics' veterinarians, bird clubs, and fanciers. Even though these groups may have some philosophical differences with your shelter, they're often happy to help and can be very useful in unusual or large-scale seizure situations.

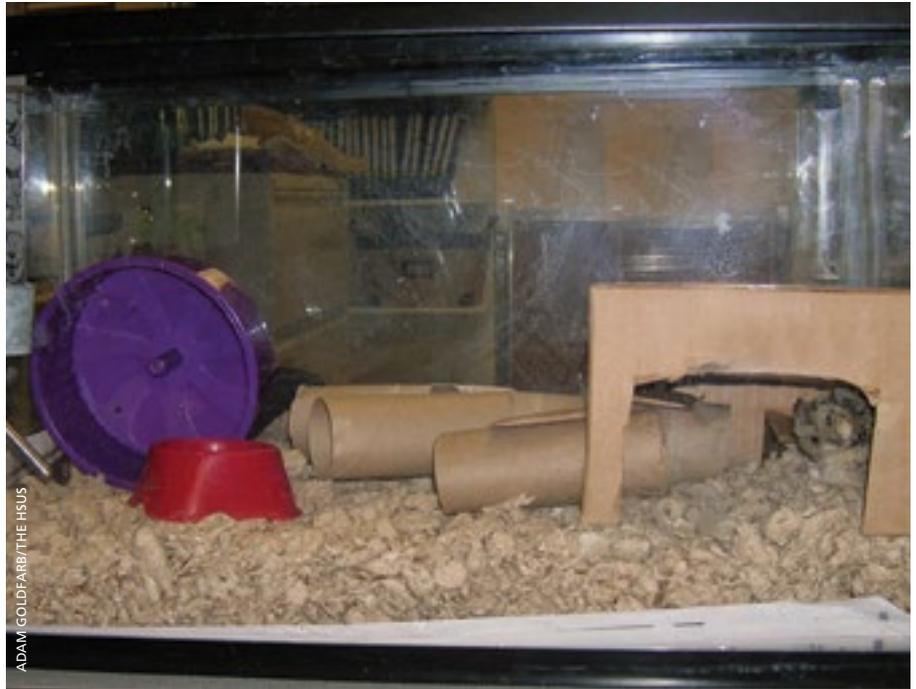
hands to obtain a more neutral odor before trying to pick them up. She also advises luring rodents into your hand with treats—chinchillas, she says, are especially easy to bribe. When you need to handle an animal who's sleeping, gently try to rouse them first and give them time to wake up and get their motors running before picking them up. If you're having trouble catching one of your critters, stop and take a break; extended periods of chasing can be very stressful for these prey animals. Avoid picking up animals by their tails.

Stress can be a little harder to notice in tiny rodents, partly because they are so small—an itty-bitty critter will have itty-bitty body language! It can also be hard to tell the difference between stress-related behaviors and normal prey animal behaviors. In guinea pigs, look for wide eyes (aka “whale eyes”), as well as vocalizations that are louder or higher pitched than their normal squeals. Hamsters and gerbils may flip over as a prefighting or prebiting gesture. Also, running around their enclosure to the point that they're careening into walls is a sign of stress in any little rodent.

Prey animals need a place to hide; it can be stressful for them to be out in the open. A great, cheap, easy-to-make lair is a bottomless cardboard box with a hole cut in one side as a door. For rodents housed in aquariums, pull off one side of the box and place the box up against the glass wall. This way, the animal will feel safe, but potential adopters will still be able to see how cute they are, even when they're hiding. For guinea pigs housed in a small cage, you can make a hiding area by using cable ties to attach a cardboard canned pet food tray to the bars.

Finessing Freaked-Out Ferrets

Ferrets are taxonomically placed in the order *Carnivora* and are in the family *Mustelidae*, making them relatives of skunks, weasels, and otters. They're predators who can be very playful, enjoying complex habitats and toys. Where prey animals are fearful of so much of the world, ferrets “tend to go into life with a sense of adventure and humor,” according to D'Alonzo. Whereas many rodents will be pleased to have a quiet, sleepy space in your shelter, ferrets typically want some action and will get stressed out when bored.



A cheap, easy-to-make lair for mice, hamsters, and rats is a bottomless cardboard box with a hole cut in one side as a door. For rodents housed in aquariums, pull off one side of the box, and place the box up against the glass wall. The animals will feel safe, but potential adopters will still be able to see how cute they are—even when they're hiding.

You can keep ferrets happy and relaxed by providing them with toys, games, and plenty of human interaction. While some shelter dogs can benefit from some quiet, one-on-one downtime, D'Alonzo suggests one-on-one “uptime” for ferrets, giving them a chance to really go wild. An empty adoption room can be a great place to let your ferrets run loose. You can set up some toys, or even just use an old pair of jeans—they love to run through the pant legs. (Make sure other staff members know you're in there, so they don't open the door and release the beast!)

While they are much more social than many rodents, you shouldn't overdo it on the playtime. Ferrets need some space to retreat, as well—within their cages, you can provide them a cubby space that's dark and private, a natural soother for a burrowing animal.

Terrified ferrets will vocalize, though this is a pretty rare sound. If you're not sure about the friendliness of a ferret in your care, D'Alonzo recommends treating them like you'd treat a feral kitten.

Reassuring Rabbits

Rabbits are often mistakenly labeled as rodents, but they're actually lagomorphs, a

group made up of rabbits, hares, and pikas (look them up; they're adorable!). But like guinea pigs and other rodents, rabbits are prey animals and are susceptible to similar stressors.

Stress is such a problem for rabbits that it can actually lead to serious illness or even death, according to Mary Cotter, president of the New York City-based Rabbit Rescue & Rehab and vice president of the international House Rabbit Society. Many stress signs—such as extremely rapid breathing and a tense, alert body posture—are fear-based. Rabbits may also be exhibiting depression when they squeeze themselves face first into a corner of their cages. Keep a close eye on your rabbits' appetites—a rabbit who stops eating can develop gut stasis (a stoppage of the digestive system) and die soon after.

So much rabbit stress in the shelter comes from handling and housing problems, and the two are often related, especially when rabbits are removed from their cages or when their cages are cleaned. Cotter says that cages that have small, front-center opening doors are problematic because they require people to really reach in to pick up a rabbit. Rabbits don't have great vision up close or in front of

[behavior department]

them, and when you approach, all they see is a big blur coming at them.

"You know those bus signs, 'If you can't see my mirror, I can't see you'? Rabbits are like that," said Cotter, who recommends moving slowly to let rabbits see your hands clearly and approaching them from the side.

Cotter also advises switching to a caging system with much bigger doors, such as large dog crates that allow an entire cage-side to swing open. She also recommends removing a rabbit from his cage before cleaning it and placing the rabbit in a neutral space. Rabbits—especially unspayed females—can be very territorial. If you try to clean a cage while a rabbit is still inside, you're inviting yourself to a round of rabbit grunting, boxing, and possibly biting. And considering that many shelter rabbits come from homes where they weren't properly handled, your rabbit may be quite experienced in these behaviors.

Finally, keep in mind that rabbits' big ears enhance their hearing, but also cause

Junk Food

There's no shortage of awful pet food on the market. Many popular brands of food for birds and small animals are designed to appeal to the people buying them: They're fancy, colorful, and chock full of high-calorie, high-fat items that we believe our animals will like. (And they will, because these things are delicious, even if they're not ideally a part of a pet's diet.)

It's OK to initially give animals food like this while they're at the shelter. It's a short-term situation, and you want to make sure these animals keep eating. "It's like a slumber party—it's pizza for dinner, ice cream for breakfast, then you'll be OK at the end of the weekend," says D'Alonzo.

Of course, many little critters may be at the shelter for a longer period of time, and this type of diet shouldn't be permanent. You can transition them off the junk food by gradually mixing in more nutritious items while reducing the fatty, high-calorie stuff until it's only a tiny portion of their diet. Also, don't forget that rabbits, guinea pigs, and chinchillas should always have an unlimited supply of timothy hay, regardless of whatever else they're eating.

sensitivity to loud noises. The most obvious loud noise in an average shelter is dog barking, so it's best to house rabbits in a quieter area, away from dogs. Also, Cotter suggests gentleness when opening and closing cage doors; most rabbits won't appreciate the

metal-on-metal clanging noises that these cage doors make when opened carelessly. **AS**

Adam Goldfarb, a rabbit aficionado himself, is the director of the Pets at Risk program at The Humane Society of the United States.

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Bright is the New Black

Black Beauty Bandana Project aims to get attention for overlooked dogs

BY KATINA ANTONIADES



The phenomenon is so familiar to shelter staffers that it has a name: “black dog syndrome.” That inky Lab mix in kennel 4B waits for weeks or months while his next-door kennel neighbors, a red hound and a husky mix, find homes relatively quickly.

Black dogs seem to have the deck stacked against them: They’re common in many shelters, their coats make them more difficult to photograph well, some people find their appearance frightening, and many adopters seem to prefer more colorful canines.

Marti Houge, founder of One Starfish Rehoming Connections in Columbus, Wisc.—a group that assists potential adopters in connecting with rescue groups and adopts out a small number of dogs—didn’t

learn about the problem until she got involved in rescue work. “I’ve always had a liking for black dogs, and I assumed that everyone else thought they were especially beautiful,” she says.

As a professional animal photographer, Houge recognizes the obstacles shelters and rescue groups face in taking appealing, effective adoption photos of darker dogs. “If they don’t have the right lighting or use a flash inside, [the dogs’] eyeballs look just like light bulbs, and there’s no detail in the body and nothing to make it stand out. ... They look like black blobs,” she says.

After seeing a few photos online of adoptable black dogs wearing bandanas, Houge realized the difference a touch



A turquoise bandana adds some color to Bill, a dog in the care of the Charleston Dog Shelter in Arkansas.

of color can make and decided to start a project to distribute free, eye-catching bandanas to shelters across the country. Not exactly a skilled seamstress herself—she says she can’t even sew on a button—Houge recruited a couple of her group’s previous adopters to help.

Houge’s effort, which she dubbed the Black Beauty Bandana Project, has now been in operation for a couple of years. She scans Petfinder.com for shelters and rescue groups that seem like they’d get a boost from the program; she has distributed bandanas to about 25 organizations so far. Many send back notes of thanks and photos of adoptable pooches sporting the colorful pieces of cloth.

One of those organizations is the Warrick Humane Society in Newburgh, Ind. Manager Andrea Taborn says the bandanas have helped the shelter’s black dogs get noticed and find homes sooner than usual. “Typically, they just blend in and are overlooked,” she says.

Houge says she hopes to simply give black dogs equal chances for new homes. “I know a bandana on each dog isn’t going to get them all adopted, and I don’t want them adopted at the expense of other dogs,” she says. “I want people to look into their eyes, and see the beauty that I see there.” AS

Houge is seeking volunteers in any state to make bandanas and help with distribution logistics; contact her at frostwoods@powerweb.net.

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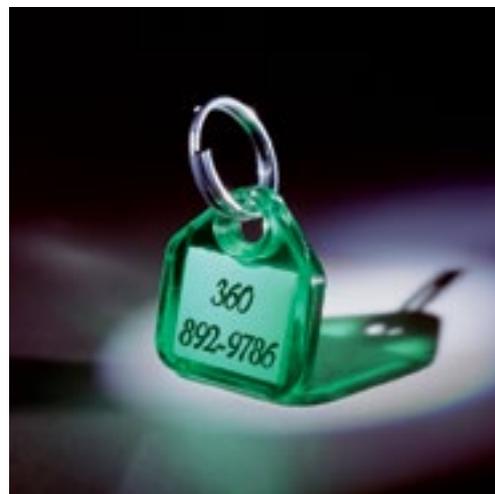
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