

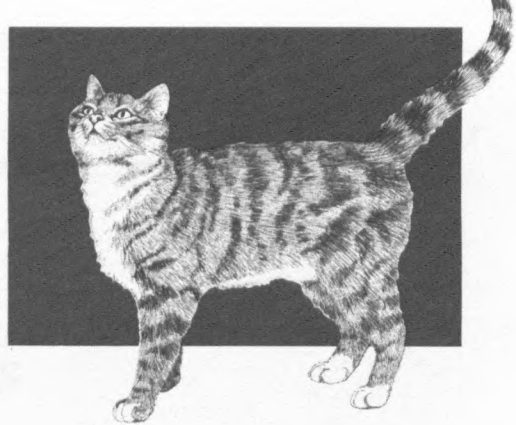
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# Perspectives On Cats

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*A Newsletter for Cat Fanciers  
From The Cornell Feline Health Center*

Winter 1997



## Dr. Fred W. Scott Retires

James R. Richards, D.V.M.

On December 31, 1996, my colleague, mentor, and friend Dr. Fred W. Scott retired as the director of the Cornell Feline Health Center and as professor of virology at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Dr. Scott has achieved many milestones in his career. He has written or co-authored 197 research papers and four textbooks. Hundreds of veterinary students have learned the nuances of infectious diseases while under his tutelage as professor of virology. He also has been the advisor for 15 graduate students in the field of veterinary microbiology, and 5 postdoctoral fellows/research associates. Millions of cats have lived longer and healthier lives as a result of his dedication to studying feline diseases over the past two decades. He has received several prestigious awards in recognition of his advancement of feline medicine, including the Distinguished Scholar in Veterinary Medicine, National Academies of Practice; Carnation Award for

Outstanding Achievement in Feline Medicine (1990); Academy of Feline Medicine Honorary First Fellow (1990); and the American Association of Feline Practitioners Research Award (1975).

Dr. Scott was named the director of the newly founded Cornell Feline Health Center in 1974. He started with no more than an idea—to create a veterinary medical specialty center whose sole purpose was to improve the health and welfare of cats everywhere. Dr. Scott ultimately led the Center to its present position as the most recognized and respected feline specialty center in the world.

My task as the new director is a daunting one. I hope to continue in the tradition of Dr. Scott's leadership, and build on the strong foundation that he laid. If I can infuse the Center with a fraction of his compassion, and guide it with a portion of his insight and skill, then the present and future of the Center are bright indeed. ■



*Dr. Fred Scott (R) with the Center's mascot, Dr. Mew (L).*

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## In the News...

### No-Kill Directory is Released

Lynda J. Foro, president/founder of Doing Things For Animals, Inc. (DTFA), has compiled and published a No-Kill Directory of shelters and other animal facilities in the United States that do not use euthanasia to control pet-overpopulation. People who want to turn in a homeless stray or adopt a pet can consult the Directory for an organization in their area.

To order the Directory (\$15 postpaid) or for more information about DTFA, contact Lynda J. Foro, DTFA, Dept. CM, Box 2165, Sun City, AZ 85372-2165; phone/fax (602) 977-5793. (*Resource: Cats, January 1997*)

### Help Lines Console Grieving Owners

Coping with the loss of a beloved feline companion can be very difficult time in an owner's life. However, help is just a phone call away. The following pet-loss help lines are ready to help pet owners deal with their grief :

Chicago Veterinary Medical Association/Delta Society Pet Loss Help Line (708) 603-3994

University of Florida-Gainesville Pet Loss Hotline (904) 338-2032; weekdays 7-9 pm (EST)

University of California-Davis Pet Loss Help Line (916) 752-4200; weekdays 6:30-9:30 pm (PT)

### Dr. Camuti Memorial Feline Consultation and Diagnostic Service Hours Change

New hours of operation are now in effect for 1-800-KITTY-DR. Cat owners can have their feline health questions answered Mondays and Fridays from 9 am to 12 noon, or 2pm to 4 pm (Eastern Time), excluding holidays. The fee for the service is \$30, and is payable by credit card.

### This is it!

#### Last Issue of *Perspectives on Cats*

We have made significant changes in our membership program this year. *Perspectives on Cats*, published quarterly for the past 16 years, ceases to exist after this issue. Instead, you will receive a monthly eight-page newsletter, *CatWatch*, that will feature four-color illustrations to accompany the articles. The first issue of *CatWatch* was mailed to our members in mid-March. ■

## Perspectives On Cats

A Newsletter for Cat Fanciers  
From The Cornell Feline Health Center

The ultimate purpose of the Cornell Feline Health Center is to improve the health of cats everywhere by developing methods to prevent or cure feline diseases, and by providing continuing education to veterinarians and cat owners. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Director: James R. Richards, D.V.M.

Editor: June E. Tuttle

Secretaries: Gwen Frost

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# Household Hazards

June E. Tuttle

As pet owners, we often become complacent about the potential poisons that exist in our homes (see table 1). We think that the indoor environment is safe; however, many hazards abound. Even though cats are noted for their discriminating tastes, there are several harmful products they can be attracted to and inadvertently ingest.

## Household Plants

Although cats are carnivores, it is not unusual for them to eat grasses occasionally. Therefore, it is not surprising that indoor cats may eat house plants. Plant eating can have serious consequences because some plants are poisonous. House plants that cats like to nibble on and that are toxic include philodendron, dieffenbachia, amarylis, and English ivy.

Excessive salivation, vomiting, and diarrhea are typical reactions to toxic substances in plants (oxalate crystals, alkaloids, glycosides). If you suspect plant poisoning, contact your veterinarian. Fortunately, most cases of plant poisoning are not fatal, unless the cat has a severe allergic reaction that results in breathing problems.

The best treatment for plant poisoning is prevention. Avoid having plants that are toxic to cats in your house, or if you do have harmful plants make sure they are out of your cat's reach.

## Household Chemicals

Of all the potential toxic hazards in the house, the ingestion of household cleansers is the lowest risk. Usually the amounts ingested are insignificant and usually result from a cat walking over a recently cleaned surface that still has cleaner on it. The low levels of toxins usually can be adequately and safely eliminated by the liver or kidneys of a healthy cat.

However, if the cat is older or in poor health what normally would be insignificant can become a health problem.

Phenol is found in many disinfectants and if ingested can damage the cat's liver. Also, cats can be very sensitive to inhaled fumes of some cleaning products, causing respiratory distress. If fumes are strong, be sure to provide adequate ventilation, not only for your cat's health but also for your health.

Lead poisoning occurs more frequently in cats during the summer and autumn months due to increased exposure to lead, especially ingesting lead-paint chips during remodeling an old house or furniture refinishing. Kittens are very susceptible to lead poisoning, absorbing up to 90 percent of the lead ingested because they are less efficient at detoxifying and excreting lead. Also their growing body tissues are more vulnerable to storing lead. Typical signs of lead poisoning include vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, constipation, and neurologic abnormalities (incoordination, aggression, head pressing, convulsions). Treatment is based on reducing the absorption of lead from the digestive system, removing lead stored in body tissues, and providing supportive care.

## Antifreeze

Antifreeze with ethylene glycol is lethal to cats. Ethylene glycol is metabolized in the liver and forms poisons that damage the kidneys when the kidneys filter the blood. The end result is kidney failure. The first sign of poisoning is vomiting followed by depression. If a cat is treated within 8 to 10 hours of poisoning, the chance of survival improves.

A less toxic antifreeze that contains propylene glycol is available to car owners; however, it is not

**Table I. Common Household Poisons**

Acetaminophen	Drain cleaners	Mothballs
Antifreeze	Fabric dyes	Nail polish/remover
Aspirin	Fertilizers	Paint
Bleach	Fungicides	Paint remover
Boric acid	Furniture polish	Pesticides
Carbon monoxide	Gasoline	Phenol
Carburetor cleaner	Herbicides	Rat poison
Cleaning fluid	Kerosene	Rubbing alcohol
Deodorants	Laxatives	Snail or slug baits
Diet pills	Lead	Tar
Disinfectants	Mineral spirits	Turpentine

without risk. When ingested it can destroy red blood cells, thus causing anemia.

If you are storing leftover antifreeze, be sure to wash off the outside of the container to remove any remaining residue that could be ingested by your cat.

### **Herbicides, Pesticides, Fertilizers**

Many herbicides contain the chemical 2-4D or closely related chemicals. If ingested at full strength these chemicals can cause severe damage to the lungs and liver. Diluted they are less toxic, but still can cause contact dermatitis.

Pyrethrins (organic compounds derived from *Chrysanthemums*) are usually considered safe pesticides. However, pyrethroids lacking the alpha cyano group (permethrin, resmethrin) can cause incoordination, excitability, and convulsions. Products containing the alpha cyano group (fenvalerate, deltamethrin, cypermethrin) can cause excessive salivation and body tremors. Organophosphate and carbamate pesticides can cause similar signs. Treatment is different for these poisonings. Therefore, it is important for the owner to know what pesticide was used if a reaction occurs.

Commercial fertilizers contain nitrate or nitrite compounds. If ingested these compounds irritate and

chemically burn the mucous membranes of the digestive tract, resulting in vomiting and diarrhea. Nitrite compounds are a double hazard because once ingested they are capable of converting hemoglobin into methemoglobin. Methemoglobin prevents the bonding of oxygen in the red blood cells. The lack of oxygen to body cells causes labored breathing, lethargy, and weakness.

Urea is another common ingredient in fertilizers that when ingested is metabolized by the body into ammonia. Ammonia stimulates the nervous system and can cause convulsions.

### **Rodent Poisons**

Most of the rodenticides contain anticoagulant chemicals rather than the more hazardous compounds of strychnine or fluoroacetate. These baits are highly attractive to rodents with a low potential for direct ingestion by cats. However, cats can become poisoned by ingesting poisoned rodents that they catch.

Typical signs of anticoagulant poisoning include weakness, pale mucous membranes (e.g., gums), labored breathing, nose bleeds, and blood in vomitus and feces. Anemia develops from internal bleeding caused by the anticoagulant. Treatment requires vita-

(continued on page 8)

## Honor Roll

We gratefully acknowledge the following who have contributed \$100 or more during the past three months to support the Center's work. We also extend a thank you to those individuals who also contributed to our programs, but who are not listed on the Honor Roll. (Contributions to the Cornell Feline Health Center are tax deductible.) The next Honor Roll will be published in the Annual Report in October.

We especially want to extend a special thank you to the Chesapeake Cat Club for their substantial support of our programs for the past four years. The club generously donated \$68,500 from its annual cat show proceeds. After 30 years of service to cat fanciers, the Chesapeake Cat Club was disbanded in November 1996.

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(continued on next page)

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In memory of Morgan, Samantha, and Delilah



## *Household Hazards* (continued from page 4)

min K therapy, and in severe cases blood transfusions.

### **Food Hazards**

Food poisoning is uncommon in cats. Of the four common types of bacteria [*Clostridium botulinum* (botulism), *Staphylococcus*, *Clostridium perfringens*, and *Salmonella*] that can contaminate food, *Salmonella* poses the greatest threat to cats. *Salmonella* is commonly found in meats (particularly poultry) and eggs, but is easily destroyed by high temperatures when cooked properly.

Food wrappers and packaging can be particularly appealing to a cat if there are any food particles remaining on the packaging. The packaging may be ingested with the food, and thereby causing intestinal obstruction. Intestinal obstruction can lead to death if surgery is not performed to remove the obstruction. Another health risk for cats are poultry bones which easily splinter and can become lodged in the digestive tract causing obstruction. If the bone punctures the intestinal wall a serious and fatal problem called peritonitis can occur.

Because cats like milk, many owners think they are treating their cats by providing a bowl of milk. However, most cats are lactose intolerant and cannot properly digest milk protein. Diarrhea is a hallmark sign of lactose intolerance in cats. The problem is readily resolved when milk is removed from the diet.

Chocolate is a forbidden food for cats. It contains the chemical theobromine, which when ingested can cause vomiting, lethargy, muscle tremors, seizures and coma.

### **Reducing the Risk**

Prevention will reduce the potential risk of poisoning. You can ensure a safer environment for your cat by properly storing household chemicals; keeping toxic plants out of your cat's reach; not feeding harmful foods to your cat; and properly disposing of garbage. Remember to carefully read and follow directions for any chemicals you use in the house, and immediately clean up any spills. If you suspect that your cat is poisoned or has an intestinal obstruction, call your veterinarian. ■



Cornell Feline Health Center  
Cornell University  
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Ithaca, New York 14853

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