

Book Reviews

Practical Feline Behaviour: Understanding Cat Behaviour and Improving Welfare

T Atkinson (2018). Published by CABI, Nosworthy Way, Wallingford, Oxon OX10 8DE, UK. 286 pages Paperback (ISBN: 9781780647838). Price £45.00.

When approached to review this book I was slightly apprehensive because I am not an accredited expert in animal behaviour yet have spent a large part of my working life around cats housed in colony situations, as well as having had cats as pets at home. So, the question I had was how well do I understand cat behaviour? The book is actually useful for anyone with an interest in feline behaviour, although targeted as a specific reference book for veterinary nurses and technicians (although I would have included veterinary surgeons in this too). The style of the book is certainly very readable, striking a good balance between providing sufficient factual and technical information for the expert with an appropriate level of clarification and explanation for the individual who may not have a strong scientific background. Throughout, the author has supported her facts and statements with an extensive series of references at the end of each chapter. What I particularly like is that there is a strong evidence base for the points made, and where there is an apparent lack of evidence for a specific idea or concept, the author calls this out and does not speculate further.

The foreword is written by John Bradshaw who reflects on how many books have been written about dog behaviour, training and disorders and questions why there are so few books about cats. Within the book there are quite a few comparisons made to dog behaviour, perhaps reflecting the fact that much more work has been published on dog behaviour and implying that the target audience may be more familiar with behaviour in this species. The author has been very clear in drawing out the differences between dog and cat where this is relevant.

The book is divided into two parts, the first focused on the principles and understanding of feline behaviour and the second on practical feline behaviour, with specific sections for breeders, cat owners, veterinary professionals and other cat carers, such as shelters, catteries and pet sitters. The book ends with an extensive series of appendices addressing a wide range of topics from environmental enrichment and play to advice on training, neutering, and dealing with a grieving cat. The book makes good use of sub-headings, so I found it very easy to find the information I needed by consulting the contents page. This makes the book a practical reference when a quick consultation is required.

The book starts with a history of the origins of the domestic cat and how it relates to wild cats. Interestingly, the author provides a brief discussion on the modern trends in cat breeding, especially selective breeding that results in the Munchkin, the Scottish Fold and the brachycephalic Persian which show major deviations from normal physical shape and health status. With this comes significant welfare implications which I think the public at large are largely unaware

of. In the dog world it is now widely recognised that extreme breeding results in dogs that suffer a litany of health problems, but this has not stopped the fashion trend towards owning these dogs, fuelled partly by celebrity endorsement, film companies, and advertising media using them as props. My fear is that this becomes the next craze in cats. The author also notes that there is a trend to cross-breed with wild cats, resulting in the Bengal, Chausie, Savannah and Safari cats, but that there is not yet sufficient knowledge about their behaviour to provide adequate advice.

Understanding cat behaviour in the first instance is critical to understanding what is normal, what is not and what can be done to prevent unwanted behaviours; the author makes many references to unwanted behaviours originating from a state of stress, when a cat is unable to cope with its environment. The author presents this first section in a very detailed and informative manner from interpreting feline communication, describing social, feeding and predatory behaviour, and on to reproductive behaviour, birth and kitten development. All of these sections are accompanied by complementary coloured photographs that aptly illustrate the behaviour being discussed. There is a section on health and behaviour which should be of interest to veterinary professionals. Identifying pain in cats can be difficult, especially for the inexperienced owner and where the cat in question may be elderly. Too often it is assumed that the cat sleeps more and does not move around much because it is 'getting old' but often the cat is suffering from joint disease; it is the associated pain that underlies this lack of mobility. A failure to recognise and treat the disease and pain early on can result in a slow gradual decline in quality of life to the point where the only option is euthanasia. This emphasises the need for veterinarians to encourage owners to attend for their cat's annual vaccinations and health check, with special emphasis on providing geriatric clinics whereby, apart from physical assessment, the veterinary professional can also discuss behavioural changes in the cat. Often, modifying the cat's environment and ensuring that the resources the cat needs are within easy access, may make it less stressful for the cat and this is a discussion the veterinary professional can have with the owner.

The final chapter in this section is about learning, training and behaviour. The author provides an authoritative description of Learning Theory, which underpins the basic principles of training cats. I liked the extensive use of practical examples that demonstrate the principles in action. This is a complex area and for the inexperienced it is very easy to implement the wrong training technique for a given situation. Having observed many people attempt to apply clicker training to dogs, I recognise the author's comments about timing to be exact to avoid marking, and unintentionally reinforcing, the wrong behaviour.

'Why train cats?' is a question posed by the author and I too have reflected on this from a welfare perspective. Owners of cats often take the view that their cat is a law unto itself and they admire the independence that many cats portray. However, there are consequences for the cat when they

display unwanted behaviours, including relinquishment to shelters. In some countries very few cats leave a shelter, and many become a euthanasia statistic. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) in Australia reported that in 2016–2017, 53,912 cats entered their shelters nationally. Twenty-seven percent were euthanased and of these 2,273 cats were euthanased for behavioural issues (RSPCA 2017). Scratching is one such unwanted behaviour and the author describes strategies for helping a cat learn where it is appropriate to scratch and where it is not. Of course, an alternative to training is to declaw the cat, a practice outlawed in many countries but sadly widely practiced in others. There is ample evidence to indicate that declawing cats can result in significant welfare consequences for cats, not just at the time of surgery but later too. Since 2003, the American Animal Hospital Association has been strongly opposed to the declawing of cats and supports veterinarians' efforts to educate cat owners and provide them with effective alternatives (AAHA 2015). The American Veterinary Medical Association does not discourage the procedure, although this position is currently under review (AVMA 2019).

The second part of the book provides extensive practical advice. The chapter for prospective cat owners describes everything that a prospective owner should know, but the issue is that very few people will have read this book before they obtain a kitten or rescue an adult cat. This is where the role of the veterinary profession or other professionals, eg those working in shelters or breeders, is important in ensuring that prospective owners are equipped with this knowledge before they take delivery of their new pet. Inevitably, the key aim is to prevent the establishment of behaviours in cats that will compromise their welfare, but where inappropriate behaviours are starting to be displayed it is important to address these quickly and effectively. This book provides excellent advice in both prevention and treatment strategies and should become a standard text for anyone working with cats. For the cat owner, understanding what underpins their pet's personality will go a long way towards ensuring a strong human-animal bond that should enrich the lives of both the owner and the cat. As for me, well I realise that much of the behaviour I have observed in cats throughout my career has now been rationalised and having had the opportunity to review this book I have added to my knowledge.

References

- AAHA: Declawing** 2015 <https://www.aaha.org/professional/resources/declawing.aspx>
- AVMA: Declawing of domestic cats** 2019 <https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Declawing-of-Domestic-Cats.aspx>
- RSPCA** 2017 *Australia National Statistics 2016–2017*. <https://www.rspca.org.au/sites/default/files/RSPCA%20Australia%20Annual%20Statistics%20final%202016-2017.pdf>

John Rawlings,
Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition, Melton Mowbray, UK

Domestic Animal Behaviour for Veterinarians and Animal Scientists, Sixth Edition

KA Houpt (2018). Published by Wiley Blackwell, The Atrium, Chichester PO19 8SQ, UK. 448 pages Hardback (ISBN: 978-1-119-23280-3). Price £66.50.

This is the sixth edition of a text that has inspired generations of academics and practitioners (myself included), since the first edition was published in 1982. It is written by an equally inspirational individual, who continues to share so much of her experience with both young and experienced researchers; a career that spans first-hand experience of the famous Bar Harbor work of Scott and Fuller (1965) on the social behaviour of dogs, through an illustrious career as a pioneering female scientist ascending the ranks at Cornell University, to being a founding diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists.

The text follows a reassuringly similar structure to previous editions, divided on this occasion into nine sections: Communication; Aggression and social structure; Biological rhythms and sleep and stereotypic behavior; Sexual behavior; Maternal behavior; Development of behavior; Learning; Ingestive behaviour: food and water intake; Behavioral genetics, over 275 pages, with a further 123 pages of references. A quick look at my third edition indicates that at around 2,600 references this edition has over 1,000 more than my twenty-year-old earlier one. This reflects the growth of research in the field and while I think that it is inevitable that such a well-cited, single author text can only grow by editing previous versions of the text, I did find the occasional editing error. For example, on page 258 in the discussion of impulsivity in dogs it says: "Impulsivity is a trait that may be linked to aggressiveness. Border Collies were more impulsive and aggressive than Labradors, if they were field rather than show strains, indicating different selective pressures on the dogs depending on their purpose (ref 661 [Fadel *et al* 2016]). Nevertheless, pit bulls, Akitas, and Jack Russell terriers ranked high in inter-dog aggression among the owners surveyed." However, the second statement, actually refers to an earlier and quite different study by Duffy *et al* (2008) that is in the next sentence. The way this was written it could lead to some misunderstanding and misattribution of research findings (I must admit I only spotted this as I am an author of the first study and didn't think it sounded right!). This is a minor point, and I believe small issues like this are more than outweighed by the wealth of references in the text (which, by being included as numerical superscripts, will make the text easier to read for many). Indeed, issues like this may help to ensure students go back to original sources if using the text as a point of reference, which is no bad thing. What is important is that they have the references to go to.

It is clear that this remains an authoritative text for anyone with a serious interest in quickly appreciating many aspects of animal behaviour. Indeed, even for