

Bristol Cats Study Newsletter - Autumn 2020

The 'Bristol Cats' study is a pioneering study of cat health, welfare and behaviour run by vets, behaviourists and epidemiologists at the University of Bristol. The aim is to improve knowledge of common diseases and behaviour problems of cats, for example (but not exclusively), unwanted elimination, obesity, chronic kidney disease and hyperthyroidism. Findings from the study may be used by veterinary practitioners, cat breeders, owners and the cat community to improve the health and welfare of cats in the future.

Study news

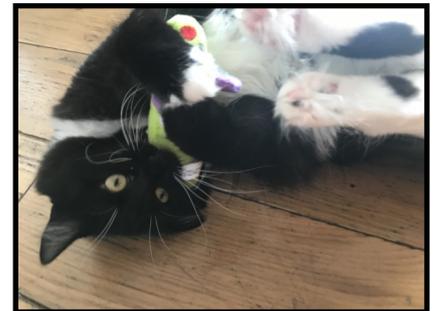
The Bristol Cats team continue to work remotely and our cats are enjoying helping out too!



Ghost busy answering emails



Rufus sleeping on the job



Bella effectively networking

New telephone number

If you need to contact by phone please note that our number has changed.

From 1st October you can reach us on: 0117 394 0850.

Congratulations Evelyn!

Congratulations to Evelyn who has officially passed her Masters! Evelyn was investigating 'The impact of feline degenerative joint disease on mobility and quality of life in cats' and some of our lovely 'Bristol Cats' will have taken part in her Feline Activity Study!



There is still time to win a copy of 'The Trainable Cat'

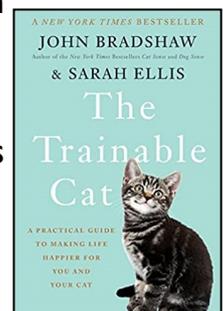
Our Data Administrator, Mel Wilson, gathers clinical information about the 'Bristol Cats' from the veterinary practices of owners who kindly provided consent for us to access their veterinary records. We use this valuable information to investigate medical aspects of feline health, identifying risk factors for common feline diseases and increasing our understanding of how these conditions develop over time. If you have not yet given consent for the study to access your cat's veterinary records, but would be willing to do so, then please complete our consent form by clicking here: [Consent Form](#).

Alternatively, please get in touch using the telephone or email details below.

All owners who have given consent to obtain their cat's veterinary records will be entered in to a prize draw to win a signed copy of the book,

'**The Trainable Cat**', kindly donated by Dr John Bradshaw.

The draw will take place on 1st November 2020.



Out & About

In August, Bristol Cat Study researchers attended the International Society for Feline Medicine International Feline Congress 2020, a virtual event attended by 26,000 veterinary professionals. Anna Garvey presented a poster on her work on the link between stressful events and gastrointestinal disease in cats and Evelyn Maniaki presented a poster on her research investigating activity monitoring and quality of life in cats with degenerative joint disease.



New research projects:

Veterinary Nursing student looking at the behaviour of Bristol Cats

In July Temeira Riley began her undergraduate dissertation project using the Bristol Cats data. Temeira is a student on the Veterinary Nursing and Bioveterinary Science programme and she plans to look at problematic behaviours in the 'Bristol cats'. Here's what inspired Temeira to investigate this topic.



"The UK is well known to be a nation of animal lovers. According to a recent YouGov questionnaire, 24% of adults in the UK own a cat, and there are 10.9 million pet cats in the UK. However, some cats can show unusual or unwanted behaviour. The behaviour of an owner's cat is understandably very important to them and with cats' behavioural problems including aggression and inappropriate soiling, this can understandably leave some owners upset, annoyed or confused. In extreme cases, cats might even be relinquished to a rehoming charity due to their behaviour. Therefore, it is especially important for both owners and vet nurses to understand what could cause these behavioural problems, and when they are most likely to arise".

Did you know that the microbes in your cat's gut can play an important role in their health?

On 1st July we welcomed a new PhD student to the Bristol Cat Study research group to undertake a project looking at the microbiome in cats. Charlie is working with Tristan Cogan and Emily Blackwell at University of Bristol and Industrial supervisor Dr Micky Whittle at WALTHAM Petcare Science Institute. Charlie graduated from University of Bristol in 2019 with a degree in Veterinary nursing and Bioveterinary Science, before enrolling on the PhD studentship. Charlie told us:



"After undertaking an in-depth study into microbiomes and their effect on health in dogs for my undergraduate dissertation, it became increasingly obvious that the information available regarding bacterial populations in cats is alarmingly scarce. For that reason, I became interested in analysing and investigating the microbiomes of the pet cat population here in the UK, in the hopes of beginning to understand what microbes might be probiotic, and which ones might be disease causing. On top of that, it has been well documented, and is a keen area of interest for many microbiologists, that our gut microflora has a huge impact on our health and wellbeing. I hope that, with the help of Bristol Cats Study, I can gather enough data to start developing a unique cat probiotic, to ensure our pets are getting the care and quality of life they so deserve."

Risk factors for allergic skin disease

Allergic skin disease is highly prevalent in cats and is challenging to treat. In human and canine patients, there is evidence to suggest that stress can impact negatively, leading to worsening or relapse of allergic conditions. Whilst it has been suggested that stress can provoke or exacerbate allergic episodes in cats, this has received little scientific scrutiny, and as a vet nurse in the dermatology team, Nicola Swales decided to investigate this further.



Methods

An online questionnaire was disseminated to owners of cats with skin disease, presented to referral veterinary clinics and first opinion practices. Flea allergy was ruled out by a veterinary surgeon following appropriate ectoparasite treatment.

Results

Nicola found that cats with skin disease were 2.5x more likely to be female. Cats that lived with other cats were less likely to suffer from allergic skin disease than cats living in single cat households, unless there were owner-reported behavioural signs of inter-cat conflict, in which case they were 2.3 times more likely to have skin disease.

Cats that showed signs of stress when exposed to loud noises or visitors, or cats that had been moved to a new house or suffered an illness or injury in the past 12 months were not any more likely to have skin disease.

Conclusions

Cats that showed signs of conflict around other cats in the household and who may have been chronically stressed, were more likely to suffer from skin disease than those who did not. This suggests that long term stress may be a contributing factor to allergic skin disease unrelated to ectoparasites. Female cats were also overrepresented in the skin disease group compared to male cats.

Clinical relevance

Efforts should be made to recognise and try to resolve conflict between cats in a household as this is likely to help to reduce chronic stress. Stress management techniques may prove to be useful in treatment regimens for allergic cats, alongside drugs, topical therapy and parasite control.



**Stay up to date with us on Twitter (@UniofBristolCats),
Facebook (www.facebook.com/bristolcats.study) or on our website,
(www.bristol.ac.uk/vetscience/cats).**

Christmas is coming!!

Have you moved house? To ensure that your Christmas card reaches you, please let us know your new address by visiting:

<https://smvsfa.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/info>

You can also let us know about any other changes using this link.

Alternatively you can get in touch using our contact details below:

Telephone: **0117 394 0850**

Email: cat-study@bristol.ac.uk

Freepost: RSHR-AGRJ-UABZ Bristol Cats, Dr Emily Blackwell

University of Bristol Langford House BRISTOL BS40 5DU

Call for photos for our Christmas Card!

With only ten weeks until Christmas we are asking for photos of your lovely cats to adorn our Christmas card. If you would like a photo of your cat(s) to feature on our 2020 'Bristol Cats' Christmas Card then please email us **ONE** photo by **Friday 1st November** to cat-study@bristol.ac.uk.

We try to feature as many cats as possible, but space is limited! Please try to send us clear photos of a high resolution as this will increase the chance of your cat featuring on the card.



Thank you for your help — the Bristol Cat owners and cats are helping to make a difference to our knowledge of factors affecting feline welfare.

We would also like to thank **WALTHAM[®]** Petcare Science Institute and Cats Protection for funding the study.

