

Bristol Cats Study Newsletter - Autumn 2021

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, overgrooming, aggressive behaviour, obesity and diabetes mellitus. 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

With the arrival of Autumn here at Bristol Cats Study HQ we turn our thoughts to organising our annual Christmas card mail out. The first stage of this process is to collate your photographs and we look forward to seeing our study participants in their best festive poses! (details of where to send your photos are provided later in this newsletter). As the University moves to a blended working arrangement we are working hard to keep things running as smoothly as possible and would like to thank all of our participants for their patience and understanding.



Welcome Aimee

The Bristol Cats team has recently welcomed a new MSc student. Aimee Taylor will be looking at risk factors for mortality in the study cats. Aimee graduated as a vet from The University of Bristol and worked in first opinion practice for two years. After this she went to Australia, and worked in a clinic that supported a local cat charity. Aimee continued with her feline focus when she was accepted onto the Feline Medicine Residency course at Bristol Vet School earlier this year.



Thank you Kay!

A big thank you to Kay Lee, a veterinary student here at Bristol Vet School, who joined us over the summer to complete an Extra-Mural Study placement. Kay assisted with database expansion, converting files and helping to streamline our veterinary clinical histories process.



Clinical notes for your cat

Data Administrator, Mel Wilson, gathers clinical information about the 'Bristol Cats' from 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 at the end of this newsletter. If you would like more information about what happens to your cat's data we'd be happy to discuss this with you.



Study updates:

Out and about

Earlier this year Anna Garvey attended the BSAVA Congress 2021, a virtual event attended by 3,300 veterinary professionals from across the world. Anna presented a clinical research abstract on her work on the link between stressful events and gastrointestinal disease in the Bristol Cat Study cats. Anna has submitted an article on her research for inclusion in the 'Companion' magazine and is preparing a review paper outlining current knowledge in this area.



Behaviour study

Helena Hale has been looking at potentially problematic behaviours that you reported in your cats when they were six years old and her preliminary findings are shown below.

Owners of 965 of our study cats provided us with information about their cats behaviour and 26% of owners reported that their cat displayed at least one behaviour which they find undesirable. Undesirable behaviours were divided into sub-categories, shown here in order of reported prevalence:

- Inappropriate toileting 18.6%
- Human-directed aggression (including during play) 18.6%
- Agonistic towards other cats 17.7%
- Scratching furniture/carpets 15.1%
- Attention-seeking 7.5%
- 'Other' behaviour 7.2%
- Over-eating / stealing food / vomiting after eating 4.9%
- Hunting behaviour 3.8%
- Pica / suckling / kneading 2.6%
- Jumping on surfaces 2.0%
- Over-grooming / self-mutilation 1.7%



Photo courtesy of Kerri Lee Smith

Overall, 44.5% of undesirable cat behaviours were reportedly problematic to their owners. However, only 16.9% of owners said that they sought help for the undesirable behaviour.

Interestingly, owners who did not report any undesirable cat behaviours were more likely to report that their cat had 'excellent' quality of life compared with those who did report undesirable behaviours. However, overall the majority of owners in the study felt that their cats had 'excellent' (66.9%) or 'good' (29.8%) quality of life.

The next stage of analysis will involve looking at whether the category of undesirable behaviour has any relationship with whether owners seek help with the behaviour or not.

Study results:

Associations between early neutering, obesity, outdoor access, trauma and feline degenerative joint disease

Many of you will remember the feline activity study run by Evelyn Maniaki as a number of you kindly agreed to allow us to monitor your cat's activity. The second part of Evelyn's study involved investigating potential early-life risk factors for degenerative joint disease in 6-year-old cats enrolled on the Bristol Cats study. Data on potential risk factors were obtained from the seven sequential questionnaires that you completed when your cats were aged between 2–4 months and 5 years. Your answers to the mobility-related questions from the study questionnaire at 6 years of age, such as "My cat will only jump up or down from lower heights", were used to calculate each cat's mobility score. If a cat was reported to show changes in mobility in at least one activity, then it was considered to show early signs of joint disease. These 'affected' cats were then compared with cats with a mobility score of zero i.e. cats showing no changes in any of the mobility questions.

- 30% of owners of cats in the study reported changes in their cats' mobility in the 6 year questionnaire.
- Statistical models identified four early-life risk factors associated with the occurrence of these changes, suggesting that obesity, outdoor access and a history of trauma may predispose cats to developing owner-reported mobility changes at 6 years, whereas neutering before 6 months of age appears to decrease that risk.

Influence of living in a multicat household on health and behaviour

Living in a multicat household has been implicated as a risk factor for various feline issues, but evidence is often anecdotal or based on retrospective studies, where historical information is collected at a future date. Claire Roberts used prospective data from the Bristol Cats Study to investigate whether being in a household with other cats influenced the cat's likelihood of certain health conditions and potentially problematic behaviours. Cats from single and multicat homes were compared to see whether this influenced their health or behaviour. Cats were included in the 'multicat household' group if they had remained in either a single cat or multicat household between questionnaires 1 (aged two months old to four months old) and 5 (aged two- and- a- half years old).

Statistical models were used to analyse associations between single cat/multicat households and measures of health and behaviour including overweight/obesity, abscesses/cat bites, negative interactions with owner and urinating outside of the litter box. In an attempt to differentiate between cohabiting cats that get along and those that don't, multicat households were also subcategorised according to whether owners had reported aggressive behaviour between household cats.



Results:

- There was no evidence of an association between whether or not the cat lived with other cats and the likelihood of obesity, abscesses/cat bites or urinating outside of the litter tray.
- The likelihood of negative interactions with the owner (eg, growling or hissing) was influenced by the cats' relationships; cats in non-agonistic multicat households were less likely to be reported to have negative interactions with the owner, compared with single and agonistic multicat households.

These findings suggest that living in a multicat household in itself is not a risk factor for the health and behaviour issues investigated in this study. However, the results suggest that the relationship between cats that live in the same household is important.

**Stay up to date with us on Twitter (@UniofBristolCats),
or Facebook (www.facebook.com/bristolcats.study)
Full details of the research described can be accessed via the study website:
(www.bristol.ac.uk/vetscience/cats)**

Christmas is coming!

Moving house / changed your email address / need to contact us?

If you have changed email address, moved house or have a new contact number it is easy to update these online by visiting the website and following the instructions:

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

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

Call for photos for our Christmas card!

As Christmas is not far off now 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 2021 'Bristol Cats' Christmas card then please email us a photo by **Friday 12th 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.

