

Bristol Cats Study Newsletter - Autumn 2017

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 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.

Win a signed copy of 'The Trainable Cat' by John Bradshaw and Sarah Ellis! Generously donated and signed by John Bradshaw

"From the on-screen experts for BBC2's Cat Watch, and based on their ground-breaking research - this is the ultimate guide to making your cat a happier, more sociable animal. The Trainable Cat will help you to help your cat negotiate the complexities of everyday life: to enjoy living with humans - including new babies and lively toddlers - and other pets; to answer to their name; settle into a new home; and to overcome the anxiety of a visit to the vet. You can train your cat to do what is in its own best interests - even when its instincts tell it otherwise."



In order to look at our Bristol Cats health in more details we have asked for your permission to obtain the medical history for your cat from your vet. Everyone who has given consent for us to access their cat's vet records will automatically be entered into the draw, which will take place on 30th November 2017. If you haven't already done so, but would like to give consent and be entered into the draw please contact us at cat-study@bristol.ac.uk and we will send you a form to sign. Good luck!

A new post in the Bristol Cats study team...

We will shortly be advertising a post for a data manager, starting in 2018, who will be responsible for data mining of the veterinary records, and also sorting and tidying the questionnaire data that we collect, so that we can analyse it more easily! A big thank you to Cats Protection for funding this new post.



As our 'Bristol Cats' turn seven, we are particularly interested in following behavioural and physiological changes in the cats as they proceed into the later years of their lives. Ageing cats can develop behavioural changes, and among the most problematic of age-related feline disorders is cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS), a progressively debilitating condition whose signs resemble those in humans with Alzheimer's disease and senile dementia. The Bristol Cats team have been working with Professor Danielle Gunn-Moore, RCVS Specialist in Feline Medicine at University of Edinburgh, who has helped us to develop questions on cognitive decline in older cats for our questionnaires.



Completed studies:

“The Bristol Cats Study—cohort profile”

This study has now been published in the International Journal of Epidemiology. A summary of some of the information included in the paper is included below. If owners would like a PDF copy of the paper then please email us at: cat-study@bristol.ac.uk.



Profile in a nutshell:

- * The Bristol Cats Study is the first study of a birth cohort of kittens in the world.
- * An incredible 2203 pet kittens (aged 8-16 weeks) living in the UK were recruited via their owners to the study between June 2010 and December 2013.
- * In May 2016, 1701 cats and 1356 owners were still registered on the BCS, representing 77.2% of the original cohort of 2203 cats.
- * We are collaborating with researchers from other institutions within and outside the UK

The success of the ‘Bristol Cats’ study is dependent on you and your cats’ participation.

We are so grateful to all of our study owners, and really hope that you will continue to complete questionnaires for as long as the study continues! We hope to keep collecting data on our ‘Bristol Cats’ so that we can look at health and behavioural issues, as the cats age, such as cognitive dysfunction, chronic kidney disease (CKD) and hyperthyroidism, all of which are among the most prevalent health conditions diagnosed in cats over the age of 10 years . Each and every questionnaire is invaluable to us, as data from every year of the cats’ lives can help us to identify risk factors for these diseases. Identification of any environmental risk factors that can be monitored or avoided could lead to better management of feline health by owners, and therefore improved health and welfare for cats.



**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).**

Study updates:

INSPIRE—Influence of being housed exclusively indoors on health and behaviour in owned pet cats

The aim of the INSPIRE Scheme is to encourage an interest in research amongst veterinary students and highlight how research can enhance their everyday lives as qualified veterinarians. In 2017 Bristol Cats submitted a successful funding application to the scheme and this Summer Bristol Vet School student, Emma Gibson has been looking at cats' outdoor access within the Bristol Cats study.



Keeping cats indoors is common practice, particularly for pedigree cats, with approximately 10% of cats in the UK living entirely indoors. This practice is sometimes controversial though and according to The American Association of Feline Practitioner (AAFP), indoor cats are at risk of psychological stress, due to the inability to display 'normal' behaviours. To investigate this further, Emma is analysing information collected in the first 5 Bristol Cat Study questionnaires, using univariable and multivariable logistic regression to identify any associations between cats' outdoor access and a range of health and behavioural signs, including obesity, negative behaviour towards the owner and inappropriate elimination.



Early life risk factors in Cats presenting to vet practices for gastrointestinal signs

In people, certain exposure events early in life have been shown to affect susceptibility to gastrointestinal problems such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Events such as presence of worms, use of antibiotics, non-specific gastrointestinal signs, breast feeding and use of antibiotics can have an effect on subsequent development of IBD in humans, therefore we would like to use the data for the Bristol Cats study to identify whether feeding practices or early life exposure to worms or gastrointestinal infection affects the subsequent need for these cats to visit the veterinarian for persistent gastrointestinal signs. Identifying such factors may help increase our understanding of this disease and also may help with prevention.



Collaborating with VetCompass™

VetCompass is a project based at the Royal Veterinary College in London (RVC) that collects anonymized clinical data from participating UK vet practices in order to investigate and improve companion animal health.



When interpreting the results of research conducted on a particular population (in our case, the 'Bristol Cats'), it is important to be cautious about generalizing these results to the general population, as the study sample may be different in some way from the wider population. In order to investigate any potential biases in the Bristol Cats study cats, we plan to collaborate with the 'VetCompass' team at RVC in order to compare our Bristol Cats with their cohort of cats and determine how representative our 'Bristol Cats' really are.

Any significant differences between the cats in these two studies will be useful to highlight areas where care should be taken when reporting study results, as they may not be applicable to the entire UK pet cat population.

You can find out more about VetCompass at <http://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass>

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:

Tel/text: 07827 981412

Email: cat-study@bristol.ac.uk

Freepost RSHR-AGRJ-UABZ

Bristol Cats, Dr Emily Blackwell

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Call for photos for our Christmas Card!

If you would like a photo of your cat(s) to feature on our 2017 'Bristol Cats' Christmas Card then please email us **ONE** photo by **Monday 30th October** to cat-study@bristol.ac.uk. We try to feature as many cats as possible, but space is limited! Please send in clear photos of a high resolution to increase the chance of your cat featuring on the card.



Thank you, and we look forward to seeing all of your photos!

Would you be willing to complete your annual questionnaire online?

As part of the University's commitment to producing a greener, more sustainable future, we are working to reduce the amount of paper waste generated by the Bristol Cats study. We currently send about 20% of our questionnaires via post and would like to reduce this number where possible.

If you currently receive a paper version of your questionnaire, and you would be willing to complete this online, then please let us know using the following link:

<https://smvsfa.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bristol-cats-questionnaire-preference>

Or email us at cat-study@bristol.ac.uk



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 Cats Protection for their funding towards the study, and WALTHAM® for funding Jess Williams's post

