

## Bristol Cats Study Newsletter - Spring 2019

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.

### Welcome Mike!

Our new data manager, Mike Tier, joined us in October. We asked Mike to tell us a little bit about himself and how he's helping us;



“The data generated during the first 8 years of the study is currently stored in a number of different formats on various platforms and on differing media. The sheer volume of data being harvested would, in its current formats, require an ever increasing level of support in terms of the size of the team. As a result more robust solutions for storage, manipulation and interrogation are now required. It is my job to identify, design, build, test and support a single database and appropriate tools to make this data easily available to all who require access.

I live in Sussex with my wife and our domestic shorthair twins, Seymour and Duncan (both rescue cats). When I applied for this job I felt it was only appropriate that I share a picture of my boys with the team. Needless to say, the cats are now keen to remind me that they were a major influence on the selection process...I probably have to agree with them. I am thoroughly enjoying my position, the work it entails and working with such a great team.”



**A big thank you** to all the owners who have given us permission to access their cats' clinical history from their vet practice. This additional information is incredibly useful to us and our research. As we are in the process of contacting vets to access this information, you may receive a call from your practice to confirm your consent.

If you haven't yet given us permission to do so, and would like to, then please let us know by emailing [cat-study@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:cat-study@bristol.ac.uk).

## Study updates:

**Emma Gibson** (final year University of Bristol vet student) attended the British Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress in April to receive the Clinical Abstract Student Award for the presentation that she gave last year on her work with the Bristol Cats study (**“Comparison of diseases and problematic behaviours in cats confined indoors or allowed outdoor access”**). Congratulations Emma!



**Anna Garvey** (BSAVA Petsavers MSc student) recently presented a poster at the annual Society of Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine conference in Utrecht, summarising her work to date. We would like to thank the University of Bristol Alumni Foundation for awarding Anna a travel grant. If you would like a PDF copy of Anna's poster then please email her at [anna.garvey@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:anna.garvey@bristol.ac.uk).



Anna has been devising a way of testing the personality of a cat and will be performing behavioral tests that haven't been used in cats before. This is an exciting study that may help veterinarians and owners improve quality of life for millions of cats. Anna will be looking at our Bristol Cats' medical history to look for cats that meet her criteria, then visiting them for a fun and interesting one-off visit. If you would like to be considered for the study then please make sure your vet has sent us an up-to-date medical history for your cat.

In March, the Bristol Cats Study hosted a **unique roundtable discussion** event involving some of the finest minds in feline behaviour and welfare science.

Emily Blackwell and Anna Garvey hosted the event at the University of Bristol and welcomed many notable feline scientists such as Dr Tony Buffington and Dr John Bradshaw. The discussion was focused around the challenges that we face in trying to detect chronic stress in a species designed to hide their distress. The day was a great success and elicited some thought-provoking discussion.



We would like to thank CEVA Animal Health for sponsoring this event.



**Stay up to date with us on twitter (@UniofBristolCats),  
Facebook ([www.facebook.com/bristolcats.study](http://www.facebook.com/bristolcats.study)) or on our website,**

## Study results:

### **Comparison of diseases and problematic behaviours in cats confined indoors or allowed outdoor access**

#### **Summary**

Approximately 9% of cats are thought to live exclusively indoors in the UK and keeping cats indoors is particularly common for pedigree cats. The purpose of this research was to investigate whether being an indoor cat influenced the risk of certain problematic behaviours and health issues. For the purpose of this study an indoor cat was defined as one that was allowed 'inside only/allowed outside into an enclosed run or restrained on a lead' and an outdoor cat was defined as having unrestrained access to the outdoors for some or all of the time. Univariable and multivariable logistic regression models were used to analyse the associations between measures of health (obesity and hairballs) and behaviour (negative interactions with owners, chewing on fabric/other materials and retained kitten behaviour) with indoor/outdoor cat status at age 2.5 years.

#### **Results:**

Of the 1,318 'Bristol Cats' eligible for the study, 28.3% of cats were never allowed outdoors, whilst 71.7% had some outdoor access. Compared to cats that had outdoor access, cats that lived exclusively indoors had greater odds of being overweight/obese, were more likely to be reported to chew on fabric or other materials and had an increased risk of owner reported hairballs. No significant association was found between an indoor-only lifestyle and retained kitten behaviour or negative interactions towards owners.

### **Have you moved house?**

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](mailto:cat-study@bristol.ac.uk)

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

University of Bristol, Langford House, BRISTOL BS40 5DU

**Evelyn Maniaki** (Zoetis feline scholar at the University of Bristol) gave a presentation in April on the current understanding of diagnosing and managing joint disease of cats to vets and vet nurses at the British Small Animal Veterinary Association.

Evelyn is still recruiting for her Feline Activity Study, so please get in touch if you live within 1-2 hours' drive of Bristol or Bournemouth, and have an indoor cat over 6 years of age.

Taking part involves completing two short questionnaires (~15 minutes total) and a 30-60 minute home visit from Evelyn to meet your cat and conduct a gentle examination of their joints. Your cat will also need to wear a light activity monitor on their collar for 12 days (if your cat doesn't already wear a collar then this will be provided along with step by step instructions of how to slowly introduce the cat to it.)



The study is also open to cats that aren't part of the Bristol Cat Study, so please spread the word to your cat owning friends.

You can enrol for the study here; <https://smvsfa.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/feline-activity-study-q-nbc>

Thank you to those of you who have already agreed to be involved in Evelyn's feline activity study. Here are a few of your cats proudly wearing their activity monitors!



**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**

