

# Recruitment and retention of a kitten cohort



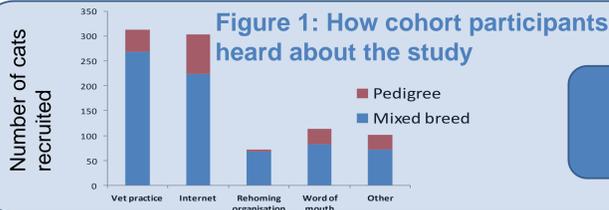
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**Background:** UK pet cats aged 8-16 weeks are being recruited (1<sup>st</sup> June 2010-31<sup>st</sup> December 2012) to a long-term longitudinal study ([www.vetschool.bris.ac.uk/cats](http://www.vetschool.bris.ac.uk/cats)). The aim of the study is to use prospectively collected data to study risk factors for a range of outcomes, including specific diseases, feline unwanted behaviours and obesity. Data are collected using owner-completed questionnaires (approximate ages: 2-4m, 6m, 12m, 18m and then annually). Access to veterinary records and to the homes of some owners is being requested in order that some data can be independently verified. Following 20 months of recruitment, initial analysis of the data was conducted to provide descriptive data on the cohort.

## Recruitment:

- The characteristics (including pedigree status) of cats recruited through different methods were compared with data collected from UK households in 2007 using telephone interviews (Murray and Gruffydd-Jones, 2011).
- Cohort cats were significantly more likely ( $P < 0.001$ ) than the 2007 telephone sample to be pedigree cats (17% vs 8%).
- Further analysis of breed differences revealed that the proportion of pedigree cats varied according to how the owner had heard about the cohort study (6% via rescue centres, 14% via vets and 26% of owners had had been browsing feline-related websites).



17% of cohort are pedigree cats

8% of UK pet cats are pedigree cats (Murray et al., 2011)

Recruited at 2-4 months (Questionnaire 1)



896 cats

## Retention:

- To date, by age 18 months, 2.3% (21/896) of the cohort have either died, gone missing or been rehomed.
- Questionnaire completion rates varied between 77% and 89% at the different time points.
- Follow-up telephone calls to non-responders provided no evidence ( $P > 0.05$ ) for mortality/missing/rehoming rates being associated with questionnaire completion at 12 months and at 18 months, although there was evidence of an association ( $P < 0.05$ ) at 6 months of age. Additional efforts (e.g. Christmas cards) to increase trust and loyalty in owners at an early stage may decrease the under-reporting of adverse events at an early age.



## Left study

Questionnaire 2: 6.5 months of age (n=797)

Cats that have/would have reached 6.5 months of age  
89.1% (710/797) completed questionnaires  
3.0% (24/797) did not complete, but still had cat  
7.0% (56/797) no data available, loss of contact

By age 6.5 months: 1 died, 1 went missing, 5 rehomed

Questionnaire 3: 12.5 months of age (n=183)

Cats that have/would have reached 12.5 months of age  
77.0% (141/183) completed questionnaires  
4.4% (8/183) did not complete, but still had cat  
10.9% (20/183) no data available, loss of contact

By age 12.5 months: 12 died, 4 went missing, 5 rehomed

Questionnaire 4: 18.5 months of age (n=119)

Cats that have/would have reached 18.5 months of age  
82.4% (98/119) completed questionnaires  
4.2% (5/119) did not complete, but still had cat  
10.9% (13/119) no data available, loss of contact

By age 18.5 months: 15 died (including 11 road traffic accidents), 4 went missing, 5 rehomed

## Summary:

- The results of this analysis will be used to:
- direct future recruitment efforts in order that the cohort is representative of the UK pet cat population.
- produce data on incidence rates for common causes of mortality (e.g. road traffic accidents) and cats that are rehomed. Risk factors for these outcomes will be investigated, if sufficient statistical power in the final sample.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Owners of cohort cats are thanked for their participation in the study. Cats Protection fund Jane Murray's post.

**REFERENCES:** Murray, J.K. and Gruffydd-Jones, T.J. (2011) Proportion of pet cats registered with a veterinary practice and factors influencing registration in the UK. *Vet J.* Sep 30 [Epub ahead of print]