

Clinical Handbook of **Feline Behavior Medicine**

Edited by
Elizabeth Stelow



WILEY Blackwell

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While this volume has been a labor of love, it has also been a bit of a distraction from my other commitments. I would not have had the time, emotional fortitude, and humor to see this commitment through without the unending support of my husband, Joe DiNunzio. I would have been equally stymied without the benign neglect of our teenage twins, Ainsley and Rowan. Had they not been happily out there living their own best lives, I would never have found the time to complete this volume. To all three of you, I am forever grateful and dedicate this book to you.

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Preface

When the publishers proposed a book on feline behavior, I knew I wanted to develop something that the veterinary general practitioner, veterinary technician, and veterinary student would find clinically useful. My initial research included a meeting with a friend and general practice veterinarian, Dr. Aine Coil. I asked - and she told me - what challenges she faces with feline behavior and what resources would be most helpful.

Based on that conversation, the framework of the book was born: A book that serves both as a quick reference during a patient appointment and a “deep dive” resource for when the clinician, technician, or student has time to read and prepare for a case ahead of time.

There are a number of “background” chapters that can inform clinical cases but are not quick-reference oriented. These include normal social behavior, preventing problem behaviors, play, cat relationships in the home, and cats in the clinic.

Most of the clinical chapters have a section on what's normal and what's not, formatted in a way that can be easily consumed during a patient appointment. Some have flow charts for quick decision making. Others have forms for the clients to complete to further discussions.

Ultimately, the volume serves to aid the veterinary practitioner as they guide their medicine and their clients toward better welfare for their feline patients.



Dublin (gray) and Chantal (black and white) enjoying a cuddle on the sofa.

Acknowledgments

This volume would not have come to be without the faith of the publishers, my colleagues, and a cadre of gifted and insightful contributing authors.

I thank all of this book's editors at Wiley. They have been enthusiastic, supportive, and extremely patient. I don't recommend trying to pull together a book during a global pandemic and a breast cancer diagnosis. But, if you must do so, you want this Wiley team on your side.

I thank my friend and colleague, Dr. Aine Coil, for sharing what the general practitioner needs to know about feline behavior.

I thank my colleagues and friends at the UC Davis Behavior Service for their key role in shaping the skeleton of the book and reviewing the proposal. Without Dr. Sun Kim and our technician Michelle Borchardt, there is no telling the structure the book would have taken. Drs. Bain, Buffington, Delgado, Grigg, and van Haaften were extremely supportive and insightful.

I cannot even begin to express sufficient gratitude to the contributing authors for this book. Throughout the stops and starts, they have been dedicated, flexible, and so very giving of their writing talents and knowledge. I thank each and every one of them for contributing. The world of feline care is considerably richer for their involvement in it.

About the Companion Website

This book is accompanied by a companion website:

www.wiley.com/go/stelow/behavior

QR Code:



This website includes patient history forms, client handouts, how-to videos, and other support materials for preventing, diagnosing, and treating behavior problems in cats.

1 Introduction to Feline Veterinary Behavior

Elizabeth Stelow

Background

There is little doubt that a veterinarian can be one of the most influential participants in the life of an owned cat. Clinicians assist with preventative, emergent, and chronic medical care and should provide the majority of counseling the owners receive regarding the prevention and treatment of problem behaviors. An owner's knowledge about the needs of their cat cannot be underestimated in its impact on the cat's overall welfare: The owner who understands cat behavior and has a stronger bond reports fewer problem behaviors, while the owner that does not understand their cat is more likely to respond to unwanted behaviors with punishment, leading to worsened welfare.¹

It is estimated that up to 40% of owned cats in the United States have exhibited problem behaviors of some kind.^{2, 3}

Feline behavior problems can lead to injury of owners and other pets, erosion of the human-animal bond, and the owner's unwillingness to keep the cat.⁴ In fact, behavior problem is the number two reason given for a cat being relinquished to a shelter; the number one is dropping off entire litters to be placed in homes.⁵

But, many owners don't come to veterinarians with behavior problems. In a 2002 study by Dr. Laurie Bergman, only 26% of owners with urine marking cats had presented

this problem to their veterinarians. Why? It may be because owners

1. think veterinarians are interested in only medical issues
2. believe veterinarians aren't competent or trained in addressing behavior problems
3. aren't always asked about behavior proactively during a routine or "medical" visit.

Unfortunately, these owners are somewhat justified in their beliefs. In 2001, McMillan found that only 25% of veterinarians make behavior questions a standard part of their history taking.⁶ And, in one study, only 2/3 of the 70 veterinarians surveyed could correctly distinguish between urine marking and toileting based on a case presented to them.⁷ In yet another study, six veterinarians willingly had their vaccine consultations recorded. The viewers of those recordings noted that only 10 of the 58 behavior problems mentioned by owners to their veterinarians were addressed.⁸

In fact, veterinarians should be on the front line of preventing or addressing behavior problems; but they often aren't. There appear to be two key reasons from the standpoint of the veterinarian.

First, it is possible that veterinarians don't see the value in exploring and treating problem behaviors. One 2004 study reported that, when veterinarians in small-animal practice ranked the skills needed by new graduates from veterinary schools, "behavior" averaged 16th in importance.⁹ We tend to put effort into what we value.

Second, it may be that clinicians see the value, but don't feel comfortable asking about behavior because they're not

certain they can help. In one study, half of the clinicians surveyed in small-animal practice said they lacked the training in behavior to provide consultations with owners, despite behavior issues being raised by owners weekly.^{10, 11} In the study with the six veterinarians video recorded during their appointments, five of the six reported feeling unable to meet their clients' expectations regarding behavior problems, mainly due to inadequate training on the subject.¹²

This is not a new concern. In 1999, Gary Patronek raised the issue of the disconnect between the level of behavioral advice required by clients and the level offered by veterinarians.¹³

The challenge is that this lack of intervention on behalf of feline patients has measurable effects, as seen in the statistics about relinquishment and human-animal bond maintenance noted above. Further, the curious owner will find information in websites, books, or from friends that may not be current, appropriate, or safe; and they may not have the ability to see the potential harm.

Another hazard of lack of veterinary behavior guidance is that not all clients are aware that their behavior with kittens can prevent - or lead to - problem behaviors in the future. These behaviors can include "nuisance" behaviors like scratching items or climbing on people (See [Figures 1.1, 1.2](#)) but can also include aggression toward people or other cats. Client information can help, as long as the veterinarian knows what to tell the client and the client trusts the veterinarian to understand.¹⁴



Figure 1.1 It is crucial that veterinary professionals be able to assist their clients with feline behavioral issues before the human-animal bond is irrevocably damaged. Craig Adderley/Pexels.



Figure 1.2 Clients should be led to prevent future behavior problems in cats through their interactions with kittens in the home. hansiline/pixabay.

Certainly, if clinicians are to be of assistance to clients in dealing with their cats' behavior problems, they will need to want to do it and be prepared to do it. One role of this book is to provide the interested clinician a resource to feel more prepared.

If we are to encourage owners to turn to us, we must be proactive in asking about their cat's behaviors and have a plan for diagnosing and treating the problems we uncover. The purpose of this introduction, then, is to provide the practitioner with useful tools for gathering behavior information and common treatment options. Individual clinical chapters (5-12) will provide detailed information on

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