Welcome to the eighth edition of Behavior News, the newsletter designed to keep veterinary staff and other animal handlers up to date on current behavior recommendations for companion animals. In this issue we continue our series on low-stress handling and have a few discussions regarding managing common behavior issues in dogs and cats.

For additional resources on animal behavior at The Ohio State University, please visit: vet.osu.edu/Behavior and vet.osu.edu/CommunityPractice.

New Additions

We are pleased to announce that the search for an animal welfare specialist in the Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine is complete. Dr. Katy Proudfoot joined the College of Veterinary Medicine’s Department of Preventive Medicine on October 1, 2013. Her position will allow for an expansion in both teaching and research of behavior and welfare in the college, as well as provide a direct connection between the college and the agricultural community. Dr. Proudfoot received her master’s degree in Animal Science from the University of British Columbia in 2008 and went on to successfully defend and complete her PhD in Applied Animal Biology this past September. Her research interests include behavioral indicators of lameness and disease in dairy cows, managing cows at calving, and the influence of social stress on disease risk. Please welcome Dr. Proudfoot to the Ohio State community.

The Behavioral Medicine Clinic welcomed its first ever resident, Dr. Shana Gilbert-Gregory, this past July. Dr. Gilbert-Gregory received her bachelor’s degree in Biochemistry and a Master’s in Biotechnology from the University of Pennsylvania in 2004 and her Veterinary degree, as well as a Master’s in Science in 2012. Dr. Gilbert-Gregory has extensive experience working with shelter and rescue animals in the Philadelphia and New York City areas. She works directly with clients and their pets on training and management practices at each appointment and guides owners closely through follow-up beyond the appointment. Please welcome Dr. Gilbert-Gregory to the Ohio State community.
Coming soon...

Keep your eyes peeled for the new book written solely by members of the American College of Veterinary Behavior, including the Ohio State’s own, Dr. Meghan Herron. The top dog behaviorists in the country - the researchers, scientists, and veterinarians - have teamed up with a renowned media personality to create the most cutting-edge, scientifically accurate, definitive book on why our dogs do what they do and how we can prevent or solve common canine behavior problems. More than 90 percent of dog owners consider their pets to be members of their family. But often, despite our best intentions, we are letting our dogs down by not giving them the guidance and direction they need. Unwanted behavior is the number-one reason dogs are relinquished to shelters and rescue groups.

The key to training dogs effectively is first to understand why our dogs do what they do. And no one can address this more authoritatively than the diplomates of the American College of Veterinary Behavior. Their work - the culmination of years of rigorous training - takes them deep into the minds of dogs in an effort to decode how they think, how they communicate, and how they learn.

In Decoding Your Dog, these experts analyze problem behaviors, decipher the latest studies, and correct common misconceptions and outmoded theories. The book includes:

- Effective, veterinary-approved, positive training methods
- Expert advice on socialization, housetraining, diet, and exercise
- Remedies for behavior problems such as OCD and aggression

With Decoding Your Dog, the experts’ experts deliver a must-have dog behavior guide that ultimately challenges the way we think about our dogs.

Pre-order yours today at: hmhbooks.com/trade.html?isbn13=9780547738918

Congratulations are in order!

The Ohio State University Student Chapter of the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior has won the 2013 AVSAB Student Chapter Service Award. This award honors the student chapter that demonstrated the highest number of club meetings, educational activities, and individual involvement. Way to go Ohio State Behavior Club!

Congratulations to senior student Taylor Kirby-Madden in achieving the first place award for Student Excellence in Applied Animal Behavior Research. Taylor presented her research on the “Effects of Environmental Enrichment on the Behavior of Shelter Dogs” at the Animal Behavior Symposium this past July in Chicago.
The concept of “Alpha” or “top” dog is a term that has been falsely applied to the human-dog relationship. The term “alpha” came from the idea that wolves have an “alpha” wolf or so-called “head honcho” that calls the shots for the rest of the pack. The true meaning was to designate a breeding pair of wolves who maintained control over life-sustaining resources and reproductive rights in regards to a specific related pack of wolves. This idea was then transposed to inter-dog relationships, and further, to human-dog relationships.

Recent studies of “packs” of unrelated dogs show that they do not form stable linear hierarchies as was originally suggested. Free-roaming dogs do not hunt or rear young cooperatively and, therefore, do not even fit the definition of a true “pack.” There is not a struggle to get to the top of the hierarchy, despite the popularity of this concept. A better explanation is that dogs are social species and do, indeed, live in groups when given the opportunity. They will defend their familiar territory against intruders (unless, of course, there is room for an additional member for breeding purposes) and major fights between social group members are infrequent. Sources of contention between familiar dogs include valuable resources, such as mates, food, and key shelter or resting areas.

It is evolutionarily normal for dogs to defend such resources and some are more effective than others at protecting such resources. When resources are abundant, the need for aggressive altercations is low. When resources are scarce and survival is at stake, aggression levels may rise. Intelligent dogs will learn what level of aggression is necessary to protect valuable resources without putting themselves at risk of injury (hence the term resource holding potential). Dogs will learn from experience when aggressiveness is effective and tend only to be prompted to use it when resources are scarce. Some dogs have a genetic predisposition to resource guard more than others. In a free roaming environment, these dogs won’t last long as they are likely to be injured more severely and waste precious energy on fighting.

In a home environment, resources are typically abundant and most dogs take no issue with owners taking away food items, or disturbing them when in a valued resting place. There are some dogs, though, who have a proclivity to over-protect such resources and may use aggression towards people as a means of keeping a hold of what they perceive to be valuable. Obviously dogs who are malnourished or who have a history of starvation are likely to defend the food available to them. If they learn that aggression is an effective means of holding on to such items, they are likely to use that behavior again and the behavior tends to get worse with each incident. Some dogs may also perceive seemingly benign interactions with people - such as bending over, reaching for, petting, and staring - as threatening and, therefore, use aggression to defend themselves. This is likely due to genetic

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Perspective on aggressive dogs: Why not alpha? - continued

disposition for anxiety or a lack of appropriate early socialization to human body language. Remember that we are asking them to live in an artificial environment and we have bred them perhaps without the most stable of psyches in mind.

There is an inherent miscommunication between human and dog body language in that humans tend to communicate with forward, frontal language, while dogs tend to approach each other from the side with an avoidance of direct eye contact. Most dogs learn at a young age to habituate to such direct, frontal body language from people, but others do not.

Here lies the major issue. Dogs that feel threatened by someone taking their valued resources away or approaching them with what they feel are threatening gestures, are likely to defend themselves. Then we humans assume this defense is some sort of insubordination or an attempt to be “alpha.” In reality, these dogs tend to be quite insecure and are often fearful in many situations. ALPHA just has nothing to do with it. If we can teach them when they are young to trust human body language and interactions as safe and predictable, the chances of their feeling threatened is eliminated and their motivation to offer aggression is greatly reduced.

You can see, then, why forceful or even covert means of dominating such a dog can lead to a worsening of behavior, increase in aggression, or in some cases, complete emotional shut down. Dogs are not trying to lead, they are not trying to dominate or be an alpha to their human companions. They don’t see people as other dogs, but rather social companions of a different species. We don’t have the same pheromones, we don’t mate with them, so why on Earth would we assume they want to see us as an “alpha” dog? If we are not consistent or predictable with our interactions and do not teach our dogs to trust that what we ask of them is in their best interest, they are not likely to comply with our requests. In some cases, they may be prompted to use aggression if they perceive we are a threat to their safety or the resources that they perceive as essential to their survival.
Low-Stress Handling Tips

Tips for helping cats be more comfortable with the carrier and car travel
(adapted from the AAFP Feline Friendly Handling Guidelines)

1. Keep the carrier in a familiar area of the home so that it becomes a familiar piece of furniture.
2. Toss treats, toys, and/or catnip into the carrier daily to condition a positive emotional response with entering the carrier.
3. Teach the cat to enter the carrier on a verbal cue, using treats or clicker training.
4. Place familiar, soft bedding inside the carrier.
5. At least 30 minutes prior to having the cat enter the carrier, spray the bedding with feline facial pheromones.
6. If needed, remove the top of the carrier to allow the cat easy access to the carrier and replace it once the cat is inside.
7. Practice closing the door and lifting the carrier, as well as getting it in and out of the car.
8. During car travel, secure the carrier by placing it on the floor or by using a seat belt.
9. Place a towel over the carrier to prevent visual arousal during travel and upon entrance to the veterinary clinic.
10. Provide palatable food treats to the cat continuously after the carrier door has been closed to maintain a positive association with being inside of the carrier from the point of picking up the carrier to take it to the car, up until the time of the exam. If the travel or wait time is prolonged, a small treat can be provided every one to two minutes.
Helping Your Pet through Noise Phobias
By Rachel Hollenbach, Behavior Club Treasurer

Does the roll of thunder or bang of fireworks send your dog searching for cover? Does your cat meow endlessly at the clanking garbage truck or wailing fire truck sirens? If this is the case, your pet is probably feeling frightened or anxious, and there are ways you can help. The goal is to change your pet’s mindset from the feeling of being in a fearful situation to feeling safe and relaxed. This can often be accomplished with patience and some simple training tools.

First, determine your pet’s triggers and try to anticipate them before your pet becomes afraid. For example, if your dog is afraid of thunderstorms, pay attention to the weather forecast. When you know a storm is approaching, you can begin attending to your dog’s needs to help keep him in a calm state. If you wait until the middle of the storm, your pet’s senses will already be heightened, and your job will be much tougher. When the triggering event is approaching, remain calm yourself, and your pet may follow your lead. Try to bring out their favorite toys and engage them in play. In addition, bring out your pet’s favorite treat. These need to be highly prized rewards such as shredded chicken and a special toy. These will put your pet into a happy mindset, which may help reduce their fear levels over time.

Another helpful tool is the ThunderShirt. This product applies gentle pressure to swaddle your pet, helping them feel safe and calm. Introduce the ThunderShirt to your pet gradually, allowing them to become comfortable with it. First, set it in the room with treats near and on it. Once your pet is OK with this step, put the ThunderShirt on him and give more treats. Make sure the first few times he wears it is not during a triggering event. Otherwise, your pet may associate the two together and become fearful when you put the ThunderShirt on. When introduced correctly, your pet will feel relaxed while wearing the ThunderShirt, and this will help reduce your pet’s anxiety to his or her triggering events. The ThunderShirt is available for all sizes of dogs from the cuddly Chihuahua to the big Bullmastiff and even for your feline companion. It now comes in a blue, pink, or green (limited edition) polo in addition to the traditional heather grey. It can even be embroidered with your pet’s name for a stylish and personalized look.

Whether your pet is a cat, a small dog, or a large dog, it is never fun to see them be fearful. There are several tools you can use to help them remain calm and feel safe through their triggering events. Remember this process may take time so stay patient. With time, love, and persistence, you can help your pet overcome their fears.
Scratching in Cats
By Nicole Starinsky, Behavior Club President, Class of 2016

Scratching is a natural behavior for cats. The behavior may be utilized as part of grooming, to keep claws in peak condition, or to remove dirt or debris stuck to the nail. Additionally, scent glands in the feet may be stimulated by scratching, such that a scratching cat leaves both a visual and biochemical mark to other cats. The inappropriate scratching of household furniture by cats may be due to a number of reasons, most notably the lack or insufficiency of appropriate scratching posts. Inappropriate scratching can become problematic for many cat-owning families, and is a major reason why cats are relinquished to shelters.

Individual cats may have specific preferences in regards to scratching posts. It is important in both prevention for a newly acquired cat and management of a scratching cat to find a scratching post that the cat deems suitable. Both horizontal and vertical scratching posts should be tried, and the posts should be placed in areas where the cat likes to spend a lot of time. If a cat is already scratching inappropriately, try placing a post directly next to damaged furniture or carpet. Positive reinforcement can also work well in a cat that is highly motivated by food or treats. When the cat approaches the scratching post, reward her with a tasty food item. If she starts to use the scratching post, give her a super tasty treat! Any time the cat begins to scratch an unwanted surface, pick her up and place her on or near the scratching post. Yelling or hitting the cat while she is scratching furniture is not advisable and may lead to fear of her owner and other adverse consequences.

While training to utilize the scratching post correctly, it is important the cat be supervised. It is best to confine a cat that is scratching to a room where the only available surface for scratching is the designated scratching post. Once the kitty begins to use it reliably, she can have more freedom. Cats that are confined may scratch to attempt escape, which is obviously not desirable. If this occurs, try some other means of controlling scratching as outlined below.

Some cats will scratch only a few areas in the home or only specific objects or furniture. If this is the case, restricting access (or allowing only limited, supervised access) to these areas may curtail scratching behavior. Place desired scratching posts nears the cat’s preferred scratching areas, and make these as enticing as possible, while making the furniture or other undesired object of scratching as unappealing as possible. Feliway® or catnip can be applied to the desired scratching surface while a tarp or double sided tape can be applied to the undesired surface.

Nail trims should be done frequently during this process; alternatively, a product like Soft Paws can be applied to cat’s nails so damage to furniture is reduced. It is also important to make sure that a cat’s environmental needs are being met. Stress can increase scratching continued on page 8
Scratching in Cats - continued

behavior and should be minimized as much as possible. Stress can be reduced by introducing extra play time, as well as calm, classical music, pheromone diffusers, and hiding places from dogs or other stressful stimuli.

Despite all of these measures, certain cats may be refractory to training with the use of an appropriate scratching surface. One controversial option is the onychectomy, in which the cat’s first digit is removed on either the front paws or on all four. Declawing is an extreme measure and should only be considered if alternative options have failed and the cat risks losing its home or its life, or in households where scratching may cause harm to immune-compromised individuals (American Association of Feline Practitioners 2007). Veterinary behaviorists are an important resource to owners with scratching cats.

Scratching in cats can be costly to owners, both financially and emotionally. By increasing preferable scratching surfaces, creating a calmer environment, and utilizing positive reinforcement, many cats can be successfully transitioned to an appropriate scratching surface.
Student Section
brought to you by the Veterinary Behavior Club

Product Review: The Kong Wobbler™
By Ashley Ham, Behavior Club Vice-President, Class of 2016

The Kong Wobbler™ is available for both cats and dogs. Both versions have a screw off top that allows easy filling of the pet’s favorite treat or kibble.

The cat version has a detachable fuzzy tail that contains catnip to further get the cat interested in the toy. It can hold up to a 1/2 cup of food with a weighted bottom so that the toy can right itself after being tipped. The top is see-through plastic that allows the cat to see the food inside.

The toy seems to be hit or miss depending on the cat’s personality. The Wobbler requires the cat to work for the food within. Certain cats are not as food motivated as others and quickly lose interest even when the cat’s favorite treat is placed within the toy. In cats that are food motivated, the Wobbler is a good way for cats to get physical exercise and mental stimulation. It has been noted that sometimes cats will only play with the toy when the owner is not present. The Wobbler can be helpful in giving cats nighttime entertainment without bothering their owners.

Cat owners can have opposite problems depending on the size of their cat. For cats on the smaller side the Wobbler may be too heavy for them to properly handle.

For cats on the larger side, the cat can pick up the Wobbler and drop it on its plastic top causing it to crack.

The dog version comes in two sizes; the small size holds a half cup of food and the large size holds one cup of food. It is made from a high strength plastic polymer which allows it to withstand heavy chewing. The dog Wobbler is also weighted, requiring the dog to move the Wobbler around to get food to come out of the single hole.

The Kong Wobbler is a hit among dogs. It provides entertainment while they get physical exercise. This toy prevents dogs from gulping down their dinner and is helpful when trying to slim down a dog. The mental stimulation the Wobbler provides is helpful in situations where dogs have separation anxiety and or destructive behaviors.

Overall, the Kong Wobbler™ is a good investment for both cats and dogs. It provides mental stimulation and physical activity, which can help prevent unwanted behaviors and obesity.