

# Introduction to the Veterinary Profession

VETS30030 / VETS90122



Module – Care and welfare of domestic animals

Small animal behaviour and communication

Topic 2 – Cats

Video 1 – Sensing the world and communicating feelings

Rebekah Brown

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# Outline of small animal behaviour learning sessions

## **Dog behaviour**

1. Sensing the world and communicating feelings
2. Preventing behavioural problems in puppies
3. Behavioural husbandry of dogs

## **Cat behaviour**

- 4. Sensing the world and communicating feelings**
5. Preventing behavioural problems in kittens
6. Behavioural husbandry of cats

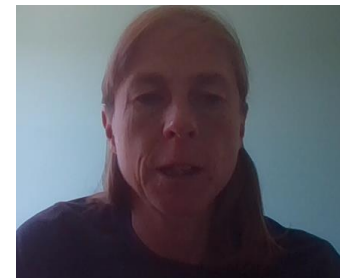
## **Dogs and cat behaviour**

7. Introductions
8. Managing undesirable behaviours



# Intended learning outcomes – Cat behaviour

- 1. Explain how a cat's sensory experience of the world may influence its behavior in order to best understand the cat**
- 2. Apply an understanding of the normal behaviour of cats in order to interpret their interactions with humans and other cats**
3. Describe strategies to prevent development of problem behaviours to maximise the welfare outcomes for humans and cats



## A cat's sense of the world - smell

- Predominant sense for cats
- Sense of smell is approximately 1000 times stronger than humans
- Have a vomeronasal organ (like dogs) and demonstrate the flehmen response when they detect a particularly interesting smell. The animal curls the upper lip, inhales with the nostrils closed and holds this position for several seconds.
- This closes the normal airways for a second so air goes through the vomeronasal organ.
- Strong odour sense part contributes to some litter tray issues



<https://myanimals.com/animals/the-vomeronasal-organ-in-cats/>

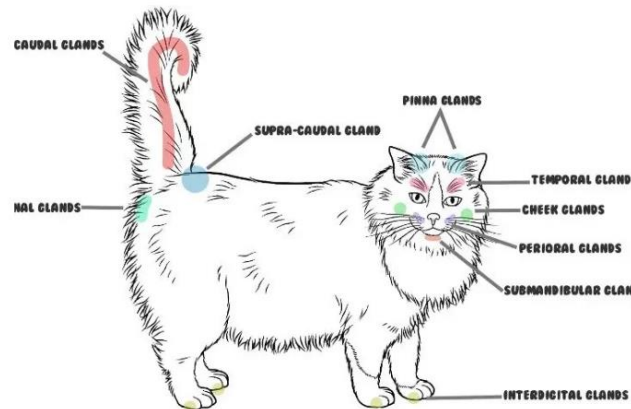


Wikimedia commons

# A cat's sense of the world - smell

- Pheromones are also important in cats and are released from many glands around the body (compared with dogs, which mainly release in urine and from anal glands)

<https://purrfectlove.net/scent-glands-on-cats/>



1. **Pinna:** outer ear flaps
2. **Temporal:** temples
3. **Cheek:** sides of the face
4. **Perioral:** mouth corners
5. **Submandibular:** under the jaw
6. **Interdigital:** between the toes
7. **Anal:** sides of the anus
8. **Caudal:** along the tail
9. **Supra-caudal:** base of the tail



- The main reason cats headbutt and rub against objects and people is to leave their scent (pheromones from cheek and temporal glands)



## A cat's sense of the world - smell

- Cats often rub heads as greeting and assessing each other
- Use pheromones to tell age, sex, repro status, possibly level of excitement



<https://www.petful.com/behaviors/how-do-cats-communicate-with-each-other/>

# Feline body language

- Aspects of this are covered in Lesson 2 of Module 1 of Fear-Free. You should have completed Module 1 before this week.
- Pay particular attention to parts of the body that give clues about how the animal is feeling

Anatomy	Relaxed	Stressed
Eyes	Normal pupils	Large, round pupils
Ears	Forward	Out to the side; back against head
Spine/Posture	Rear of cat higher than shoulders; back flat	Body crouched; legs tucked under body
Tail	Straight up, inverted U at tip, soft curve below topline; gentle back and forth movement	Curled around body or tucked; forceful movement, thumping
Mouth	Closed	Open; panting; hissing, growling, spitting

\* Pupil size in cats is also significantly affected by light

## How cats communicate their feelings– relaxed cats

- Marking
- Urine marking often on vertical surfaces at nose height



[purina.co.uk](http://purina.co.uk)



[Naturesmace.com](http://Naturesmace.com)



[petmd.com](http://petmd.com)



## How cats communicate their feelings– relaxed cats

- Sexual behaviours
- Female – calling, rolling, body position
- Male – roaming, urine marking



<https://youtu.be/5aqzs-wlKm4>

# How cats communicate their feelings – feline ladder of aggression



These signs are common in examinations, shelter settings or where the cat cannot find a way to escape. A cat can progress as fast as .1 second through each step. Some cats will skip steps or suppress the body language as they escalate.  
Copy write 2017 – Sally J Foote DVM – [drsallyjfoote.com](http://drsallyjfoote.com)



## How cats communicate their feelings – anxious body language



## **How cats communicate their feelings – displacement behaviours**

- Cats use displacement behaviours in a similar way to dogs
- Common displacement signs in cats are grooming
- Appeasement is less commonly noted in cats than dogs.



## Stress-related behaviour and health consequences

- Withdraw when stressed or fearful
- Development of compulsive behaviours e.g. overgrooming
- Many urinary-related problems – spraying indoors, urinary tract disease (FLUTD)
- ‘Cat flu’ – feline respiratory disease



Vettimes.co.uk



Wikimedia commons



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Video 2 – Preventing development of behavioural problems - kittens

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# Outline of cats and dogs learning sessions

## **Dog behaviour**

1. Sensing the world and communicating feelings
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3. Behavioural husbandry of dogs
4. Managing undesired behaviour

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# Intended learning outcomes – Cat behaviour

1. Explain how a cat's sensory experience of the world may influence its behavior in order to best understand the cat
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## Developmental periods

- Neonatal 0-7 days – only senses are smell and touch
- Transition 7-14 days – start to show independent eating, movement, toileting and social behaviours
- Socialisation 2-7 weeks – discussed below
- Juvenile – 7 weeks to sexual maturity – play is important. Predatory play starts in the third month
- Adult - from sexual maturity
- Senior – from about 8 years



<https://www.mylondon.news/news/west-london-news/4-week-old-kitten-rescued-16391404>

## Kitten socialisation – preventing fear developing

- Critical socialisation period for kittens - 3 weeks until up to approximately 7 weeks of age
- Socialisation younger than for dogs – often before they see a vet or move to new home
- Socialisation to environments and objects as well as other animals and humans
- At this age tend to be interested in interacting with everything and everyone
- Experiences during this time have a disproportionate impact on the animal's perception of a given stimulus for the rest of its life
- Lack of exposure during this period predisposes to fear and anxiety of the stimulus later in life



Image:soulyrested



## Kittens – first vaccination consult

- Gentle handling and lots of treats in vaccination consults
- Role-modelling behaviour management
- Behavioural advice handout and discussion from first consult with the kitten
- Minimise restraint and do painful procedures last

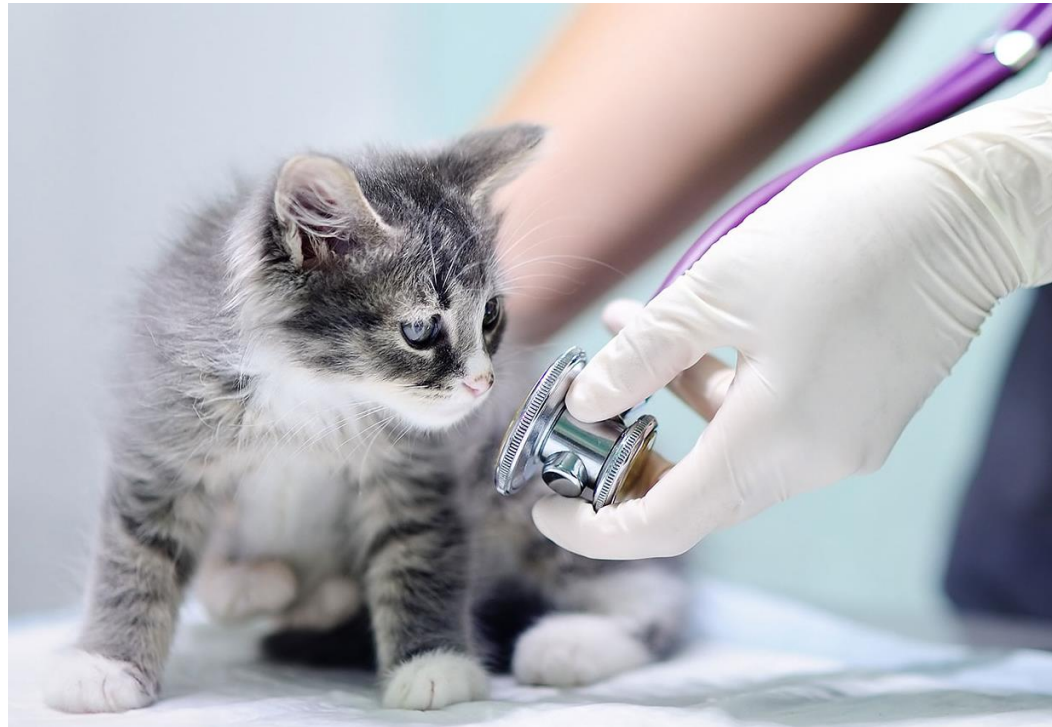


Image:vetcaretauranga.co.nz

## Kitten socialisation – Kitten Kindy

- As with dogs, educate owners on common behaviour problems and management
- Handling and simple commands
- Processes and items involved in health checks and medication e.g. use pill popper to dispense treats so later will be easier to medicate



<https://www.stevedalepetworld.com/blog/kitten-socialization-classes-a-kittens-mind-is-a-terrible-thing-to-waste/>

## Kitten socialisation advice

- Unfamiliar people of different sizes, genders and wearing different clothes
- Children
- Unfamiliar cats
- Other animal species e.g. cat-friendly dogs
- Being handled
- Different types of litter
- Cat carrier
- Car journeys
- Objects and sounds within the home
- Outside (on harness)



<https://www.purelypetsinsurance.co.uk/blogs/how-long-does-it-take-for-cats-and-dogs-to-get-used-to-each-other/>

<https://www.nutrenaworld.com/blog/kitten-socialization>

## Kitten management advice - territory

- Home is the cat's core territory but may have wider areas it marks and roams across
- Problems occur when the cat feels its territory is not safe from other animals/people
- Ensure there are enough resources within the territory for the cat to feel comfortable



## Kitten management advice - litter

- Inappropriate elimination major issue with cats so very important to educate owners
- Size, number and location of boxes are all important, as is the type of litter
- Boxes should be cleaned at least daily
- Do NOT use strong disinfectants as the smell may deter kittens/cats from using the box
- Place kitten in box when they eat, drink or wake up – most likely times



<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/>



## Kitten management advice - scratching

- Scratching really important in cats but owners often complain about furniture
- Must provide a scratching option that pleases the cat. Usually like old, smelly posts that owners don't like
- Foil can deter cats from scratching furniture



<https://www.advantagepetcare.com.au/au/training/cat-four-ways-stop-your-cat-scratching-furniture/>



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## Behavioural husbandry – key aspects

- Adequate physical exercise
- Adequate resources
- Social requirements
- Positive experiences (social and non-social)
- General responses to poor behavioural husbandry
  - Withdrawal (often not fully appreciated by owners)
  - FLUTD
  - Cat flu





## Behavioural husbandry – physical exercise

- Requirement varies a lot
- Owner input depends on indoor vs outdoor
  - Indoor need vertical space and enrichment
  - Toys like fishing lines, laser pointers
  - Outdoor enclosures



<https://catiospaces.com/catios-cat-enclosures/>

## Behavioural husbandry – resources

- Cats are like toddlers – don't like sharing and need everything NOW
- Main resources:
  - Food
  - Water
  - Resting/hiding places
  - Sleeping places
  - Litter trays – covered in previous video
  - Scratching posts – covered in previous video



## Behavioural husbandry – food



- Generally solitary eaters even in multi-cat households
- Quiet area and not against a wall – like to be able to check for danger
- Normally eat a lot of small meals each day – grazers
- Food dispenser toys can provide good enrichment



<https://www.catfooddispensersreviews.com/cat-treat-dispensers-toys-reviews/>



[petmd.com](https://www.petmd.com)



## Behavioural husbandry – resources

- Water – prefer large, shallow ceramic bowls or running water
- Water away from food as live prey can contaminate water source – double bowls a problem

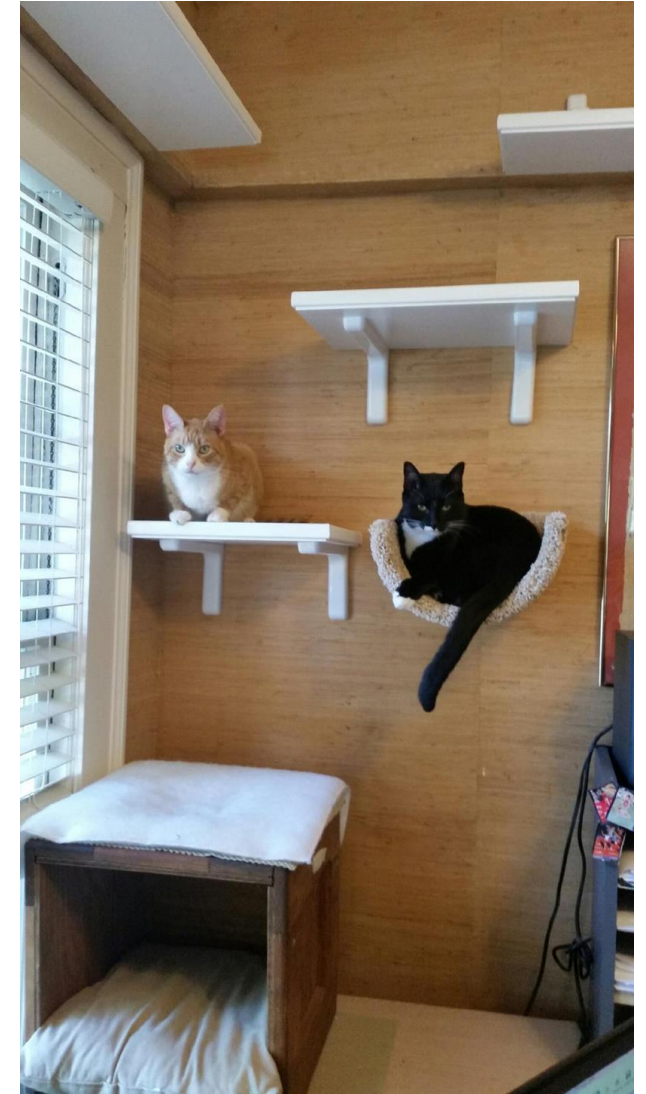


<https://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com/is-your-cat-ready-for-a-water-fountain/>



## Behavioural husbandry – resources

- Resting/sleeping places – up high, multiple exits
- Humans are also popular resting places!





# Behavioural husbandry – social requirements

- Cat society can vary from solitary to large colonies
- Can socialise with other cats or humans



Youtube.com



# Behavioural husbandry – positive non-social experiences

- Need opportunities to express normal predation behaviour
- Play behaviour often occurs in short, intense bursts
- Rotate toys
- Places to mark e.g. scratching posts
- Resting places with a view of garden/other activity provides good stimulation
- Hiding food so cat has to hunt for it



Cats.lovetoknow.com