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Animal Crackers

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Echinococcus

The parasites commonly found in fecal examinations of dogs and cats are roundworms (Ascaris), whipworms (Trichuris), tapeworms (Dipylidium caninum and Taenia), and coccidians (E. multilocularis). It has been reported in north-central United States and south-central Canada. Foxes and coyotes are the common definitive hosts. Rodents are the intermediate hosts and become infected by ingesting eggs passed in the feces. An infected rodent will have hydatid cysts in the liver. When a cat eats the rodent, adult worms develop in the intestinal tract. The adult tapeworm is too small to be recognized in fecal samples, but the eggs appear the same as those of Taenia. Humans may become infected with the intermediate stage but very few cases have been reported. High-risk groups include hunters and wildlife biologists. Prevention against hand-to-mouth transfer of eggs from contaminated objects or areas is important.

Highly effective drugs are available to treat dogs and cats infected with adult worms. Diagnosis is a problem because of the extremely small size of the worm and the need to differentiate the eggs from the common Taenia. Surgery is preferred treatment for hydatid disease when it has been diagnosed in humans but chemotherapy may be considered.

Roundworms can be transmitted to humans from vertebrate animals. Your veterinarian can tell you if you are in a region where Echinococcus may be found. Infected dogs and cats are asymptomatic but because of the risk of human infection, precautions should be taken.

Roundworms are an extremely important and widespread public health problem. Visceral larva migrans is a disease of children caused by eating dirt contaminated with embryonated ascidian eggs passed by dogs and cats. Treatment for ascariasis in kittens and puppies should be routine.

Popular Breeds

The American Kennel Club reports the “top ten” breeds registered in 1990. Cocker spaniels were the most popular breed for the eighth consecutive year, followed by Labrador retrievers, poodles, golden retrievers, Rottweilers, German shepherd dogs, chow dogs, dachshunds, beagles and miniature schnauzers. The bottom five ran kings were terriers, American foxhounds, Sussex spaniels, English foxhounds, and harriers. There are other registries, so these low rankings do not mean these are “rare breeds.” The AKC registered 1,253,214 individual dogs in 1990. The petit basset griffon vendéen (PBGV) was the 131st breed admitted to the AKC Stud Book in 1990. They were in 97th place with 354 registrations.

The Cat Fanciers Association registered 34,961 cats in 1990. The Persian was by far at the top of the list, followed by Siamese, Maine coon cat, Abyssinian, exotic shorthair, Oriental shorthair, Scottish fold, Burmese, American shorthair, and Birman.

In the United States, there are about seven governing bodies local shows and registries, the CFA being the largest. Standards for some breeds may not be recognized by all registries. At most shows there are classes for “Household Pets.” These are either longhair or shorthair and a breed name cannot be used for them. Tabby’s are a color, so “tabby cat” is not a breed or variety, although some dictionaries define it as “any domestic cat.”

It is estimated that there are 5 million dogs and 59 million cats in the United States. Projections indicate that the dog and cat population will increase by about one million each year. It is obvious that purebreds are a minority.

Pet Population Control

The overpopulation of unwanted dogs and cats is a serious and complex problem. Considerable guesswork is used to estimating the number of dogs and cats euthanized each year by animal shelters, but it is in the millions.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recognizes that animal population control is a major concern. The first priority is strict enforcement of animal control laws. This includes fines imposed on dogs allowed to roam and licensing laws that favor neutered pets.) Substantially higher license fee are recommended for animals that are not neutered. AVMA recommends licensing of all cats and control measures for them comparable with those for dogs. It also has an intensive public education/information program designed to make pet owners more responsible and concerned.

Neutering is highly recommended and it should be a requirement that animals adopted from any animal shelter be rendered sterile.

The most promising solution to the control of unwanted animals lies in the ultimate development of an effective and inexpensive, nonsurgical sterilization method for animals. Surgical sterilization is highly recommended but these procedures provide an ineffective solution to the control of animal overpopulation. Surgery must be used until a nonsurgical method has been developed.

An identification system for pet animals is needed to aid in identifying unwanted or unowned animals.

Irresponsible pet owners are responsible for most of the surplus dogs and cats. When dogs and cats are allowed to roam, the number of lost animals and contribute to unwanted pregnancies. Often owners lose interest when a dog grow up past the cute and cuddly stage. Dogs may be abandoned to shelters because of behavior problems.

The American Kennel Club’s Limited Registration program is basically non-breeders agreement — any offspring cannot be registered. We still need an enforceable “Planned Parenthood Program” for all pet owners.

Book Review


This book, with its most interesting illustrations, shows that cats are intelligent (apart and sensitive feelings). It explores ways to raise and train cats properly, evaluate their intelligence and enhance their potentials.

Some statements from the text — “Cats send a variety of messages through unmistakable body language. . . .” The household cat’s ability to manipulate humans has been perfected over the centuries. In most cases, when a cat wants to be picked up and petted, it is going to be picked up and petted! . . . A cat’s facial expression will vary considerably based on changing stimuli - the most obvious can be seen in facial dilation and dilation of pupils. . . . Rubbing against a person is a cat’s way of showing affection for a human. It also allows it the opportunity to scent mark that person.

It is universally accepted that purring is a sign of feline contentment - (other cat sounds are described). . . . A cat’s sense of smell is guinessed as being a hundred times more profound than ours.”

The three critical factors in raising a “supercat” are environment, early handling and nutrition, enrichment. . . . Kittens that grow up together provide social enrichment and companionship for one another. The ideal situation is to raise one of each sex together.

Long-haired cats were developed by man and so require human assistance with their grooming. . . . The question of whether or not pet cats should be allowed outdoors will always be argued. Giving a tomcat access to the outdoors exposes him to disease and danger and allows him to father numerous unwanted kittens and kill a variety of birds and small animals.”


Dogs are living longer today. A recent study shows that after weaning (infancy is the greatest danger period), the average life span has increased from 5.1 years to 8.7 years. After the first birthday, the life expectancy is twelve years. The Guinness Book of World Records (1990) lists an Australian cattle dog named Bluey as holding the record for canine longevity, at twenty-nine years, five months. Bluey worked as a stock dog for nearly twenty years!

The opening words: “Old dogs, like old shoes, are comfortable. They may be a bit out of shape and a little worn around the edges, but they fit well. Old friends know and accept our idiosyncrasies and our imperfections. And old dogs are the best friends. They not only accept us as we are, they don’t offer advice or criticism. The elderly pet makes few demands upon us and is usually happy to simply curl up by our feet.”

The book has numerous anecdotes, stresses the importance of providing for animals in emergencies, discusses rescue operations, has information on care and treatment of the problems and diseases of aging and has an excellent chapter on dealing with bereavement.

If your dog is a member of your family, you will enjoy this book.

V.M.D. or D.V.M.

There are 27 Colleges of Veterinary Medicine in the United States which are accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Of these, 36 award a D.V.M. Only the University of Pennsylvania grants a V.M.D. (Veterinarian Medicinae Doctoris) degree.

The University of Pennsylvania graduates can be recognized by their degree. Through 1991, the V.M.D. has been awarded to 4,702 graduates (1,010 women and 3,691 men), beginning with the first class in 1887.

To be grammatically correct, if “Dr.” is used before a name, the academic degree is not included after the surname. It should be Dr. John Doe, or John Doe, V.M.D., not Dr. John Doe, V.M.D.

Veternarian is a noun, veterinary is an adjective. There is a veterinary school, not a veterinarian school.