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Animal Crackers

M. Josephine Deubler
University of Pennsylvania

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Early Neutering

Pet overpopulation is a leading cause of death in dogs and cats with millions of unwanted animals euthanized each year.

Many animals adopted from shelters are never neutered and this is the basis of the problem. Most veterinarians recommend the procedure be performed between five and eight months, but neutering before puberty (four months in cats and six months in dogs) is a safe and effective means of pet population control with minimal surgical and anesthetic risks. Several studies have found that early neutering affects skeletal and physical development, behavior and urethra function in much the same manner as "traditionally" timed surgery.

In many cases it may not be indicated, but early neutering should be supported as an aid in pet population control.

AKC Statistics

There were 1,277,039 dogs registered by the AKC in 1995. Leading the list were Labrador retrievers, followed by Rotweilers, German shepherd dogs, golden retrievers, beagles, poodles, cocker spaniels, dachshunds, Pomeranians and Yorkshire terriers. The highest ranking terrier (16th) was the miniature schnauzer.

There were 1,252 All-Breed AKC Conformation Shows held in 1995 and the title of Champion (CH) was won by 20,036 dogs. Titles were awarded in 30 other AKC event categories – field trial, obedience, hunting, herding, lure coursing, agility and earthdog.

The Labrador has been America’s most popular breed for the past five years. Its trainability has made it the most widely used guide dog in the world. Its easily maintained coat is another trait adding to its popularity.

Potbellied Pigs

After ten years, many misconceptions about potbellied pigs still exist and homelessness has led to establishment of shelters for abused, neglected and abandoned animals. They are not ideal household pets. Aggression is probably the number one reason for needing to find a new home for the pig. Another problem is size – they keep growing for several years and rarely weigh less than a hundred pounds at maturity. Although they are reputed to be non-shedding, they "blow their coat" at least once a year, resulting in extreme scratching.

Generally, they are not full-time house pets and should have access to an outside area at all times. PIGS, a sanctuary in West Virginia, will adopt out pigs to homes without small children, in pairs or to homes seeking a companion for their pig. Careful thought must be given before bringing an exotic pet into a home.

BSE

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), commonly known as "Mad Cow Disease", was first identified in the United Kingdom in 1986. It is not known to exist in the United States. Import restrictions have been in place since 1989 and active surveillance efforts began in 1990. Research to date does not show connection with meat, the brain and spinal cord have been found to be infectious. Milk and milk products are considered safe. Gelatin is considered safe for human consumption because BSE infectivity is destroyed in the production process.

There is much misinformation and speculation about the disease. The latest information and fact sheet is available on the Internet at the APHIS Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service home page at http://www.aphis.usda.gov. The School’s Center for Animal Health and Productivity has put together comprehensive information on BSE that is updated regularly on its Internet home page. You can reach it at: http://nciahpwww.nbc.upenn.edu/bseinfo.html.

Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

On January 1, 1986, the Cavalier King Charles spaniel became the 140th AKC recognized breed competing at championship shows. This toy breed is descended from the small conformation spaniel of the 16th century. Ladies of the court found the little dog would serve as a hot water bottle and flea catcher as well as an adornment and companion. Their name comes from King Charles II, who, according to diarist Samuel Pepys, spent more times playing with his dogs than attending to affairs of state.

The Cavalier is one of the largest members of the AKC’s toy group, weighing about 16 to 20 pounds. They come in four distinct colors. The two broken colors are Blenheim (white with chestnut markings) and tricolor (white with black and tan markings) and the whole colors are ruby (very rich red) and black and tan (black with tan markings). Whole colors should have no white markings. The breed is not trimmed but the coat must be brushed. A trimmed dog is severely penalized in the show ring.

The standard describes the temperament as gay, friendly, non-aggressive, sporting, gentle and affectionate. Cavalier tails rarely stop wagging, especially when the dogs are running.

A book which gives more detailed information is Sheila Smith’s Cavalier
Book Review


This medical reference guide represents the work of 32 authors on the faculty staff of the School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California. The book provides medical information in a way which helps the owner understand disorders and how they are dealt with by the veterinarian. It will help make the dog owner a better care giver and provide information the veterinarian often does not have the time to give.

Beginning with selecting a dog and discussions about the different breeds and their characteristics, there are chapters on living with your dog and what to expect from puppies and the older dog. As an estimate, one might say that small-breed dogs become aged at approximately 11 years, medium-sized dogs at 10 years, large-breed dogs at 9 years and giant-breed dogs at 7 years.

Behavior, including misbehavior, is well-covered. Unfortunately, people often choose a dog because of its size, coat, or distinctive coloration, or because it is cute as a puppy. The primary reason for choosing a particular dog should be its behavior. Tendencies to challenge an owner for dominance, engage in excessive barking, seek affection, or be easily trained are certainly more important than a dog's color, size or shape.

There are chapters on nutrition, reproduction, birth control and genetics. Diseases, including infectious diseases and cancer, are explained. There is a guide to help confirm one's suspicion that something is wrong and veterinary attention should be obtained. Vaccinations and vaccination schedules are explained.

The glossary has many definitions not found in home dictionaries. The book has answers to so many questions, it should be very useful to the owner seeking knowledge about health disorders and preventative steps to improve the overall quality of life and care for their pets.

Dogs and people have interacted for thousands of years. Man has used dogs as hunters, herders, guardians and companions. In The Domestic Dog, its evolution, behavior and interactions with people, and anthology compiled by James Serpell, Marie A. Moore Associate Professor of Human Ethics and Animal Welfare at the School, Dr. Serpell and others discuss the evolution of the dog into the animal it is today.

The collection of material is scholarly and it is not an easy read. However, it is quite interesting and a lot of the information has not been discussed in the popular press. Based on firm scientific research, the book dispels many myths and stereotypes about dogs, and it will be the definitive reference work on dog behavior for many years to come. The volume is helpful to those working with dogs, be it as herding or hunting dogs or as pleasant companion animals.

The book is divided into three sections: Domestication and evolution; Behavior and behavior problems; and Human-dog interactions. There are plenty of illustrations and charts and each chapter ends with a reference section which lets those interested in finding further information dig a little deeper.

The Domestic Dog is published by Cambridge University Press. The paperback edition is $19.95, the hardback edition is $69.95.

Dr. Peter Dodson, professor of anatomy, has written his third children's book. In An Alphabet of Dinosaurs creatures, from the ankylosaurus to the zephyrosaurus are shown hunting, eating, running and fighting in great detail and vivid color. The brief text panels are interesting and a distinctive, anatomical feature for each animal is shown as a line drawing. Youngsters will enjoy this book, not just the pictures, but also the challenge of sounding out the names of the beasts.

The brief chart section in the back book gives an overview of "what, where, when" and is prepared so that children can understand the subject matter. The color illustrations are by Wayne D. Barlowe and the line drawings are by Michael McCarver. The book is published by Scholastic Inc., its price is $14.95.