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Animal Crackers

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Some Notes On Cats

Cats are excellent companion animals and they are becoming part of an increasing number of households. While personality and suitability should always be considered, coat color and color variations are often the deciding factors in selection.

Animal

"Tabby" describes the pattern of cat coats in a number of different breeds. Though the color and complexity of the pattern may vary, there are stripes on the head, body, legs, and tail. The letter M can be traced on the top of the head and the outline of a butterfly over the shoulders.

Cat color has been carefully studied and plays an important part in breeding programs. Legend has it that all white cats are deaf. While deafness does occur in some white cats, selective breeding keeps the condition under control.

Apart from pattern and color, cat coats are usually classified as Shorthair or Longhair. Of course, there are variations in each group. The Somali is a Shorthair with a medium length coat while the Red coat is short and distinctly curly, and the American Wirehair has a dense, harsh, wiry coat. The Persian is the best known Longhair. Magnificent as it is, its coat can become matted and tangled unless groomed regularly. The Birman, a less familiar Longhair, may eventually become a preferred pet as it is said to have a coat that does not mat.

Peculiarities in the cat world are the tailless Manx and the stubby-tailed Japanese Bobtail. The Manx possesses a rabbit-like gait and is said to be an excellent swimmer.

Coat pattern, color, and tail—all serve to distinguish a companion animal continuously chosen by humans since the time of the ancient Egyptians.

Improving the Breed

Over 150 genetic defects have been identified in purebred dogs and the list is growing. Most of these disorders cannot be prevented or treated by medical procedures. The only way to eliminate them is by using unaffected animals in breeding programs.

A *dominant* trait is easy to control by selection of animals not showing the trait for breeding. A *recessive* trait may be carried unseen in the animal and transmitted to half of the offspring. Complications in this relatively simple process occur in the form of *polygenic* traits which come from the combined action of a number of genes.

As breeders seek ways to maintain and improve their strains, they find help in texts to detect inherited eye diseases and bleeding disorders as well as metabolic defects.

Pedigree studies are of great value in control programs. Breed Clubs can be of great help in this respect. A record of every animal in a pedigree should be studied to determine the most important problems in the breed. Conformation and behavior

should be considered as well as actual disease conditions. Once the ideal has been determined, breeding stock can be evaluated.

The American Kennel Club's new plan to improve judging calls for the expertise and commitment of parent breed clubs. The plan includes development of illustrated standards, reading lists and other educational material. The ability to recognize the "perfect" specimen of a breed is essential. With this knowledge, we can work on elimination of undesirable qualities.

F. D. Hutt's *Genetics for Dog Breeders* (W. H. Freeman and Co., San Francisco, CA, 1979) is recommended reading.

Much that has been written is opinion rather than fact, and may include information that is incorrect, outdated, or taken out of context. It always is better to use reference material from a scientific publication and check to be sure it is current. An excellent series of articles was published in the June 1982 *Pure-Bred Dogs—American Kennel Gazette*. This should be required reading for everyone concerned with breeding pure-bred dogs.

Kennel Clubs of other countries recognize breeds considered "rare" in the United States. The United Kennel Club in Kalamazoo, Michigan registers dogs of hunting breeds and others not recognized by the American Kennel Club, including American Eskimo, American Pit Bull Terrier, Toy Fox Terrier, American Fox and Coonhound, Bluetick Coonhound, English Coonhound, Plott Hound, Redbone Coonhound, and Treeing Walker Coonhound. It has been reported that these breeds will be recognized by the Canadian Kennel Club, which registers a number of breeds which cannot be registered with the American Kennel Club such as the Pudelpointer, Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, Finnish Spitz, Eskimo and Mexican Hairless.

Other "rare breeds" are the Canaan Dog, Lowchen and Chinese Shar-Pei. There are any number of pure-bred dogs and many registries other than the American Kennel Club. However, in the United States, the American Kennel Club is the governing body for registration and dog shows.

Admirers of the Jack Russell Terrier might note that these extremely popular small working terriers are not considered pure-bred.

Veterinary Hospital (VHUP) Patient Statistics

During the twelve-month period ending June 30, 1982, the total number of visits and admissions to the Veterinary Hospital (VHUP) was 18,956. The large majority of the patients were dogs, but several thousand cats were seen as well as many exotic species (birds, rabbits, rodents, reptiles, primates, skunks, and ferrets).

The largest number of cases were presented for different types of tumors, followed closely by fractures and other injuries caused by automobiles. There were 161 cases of hypo- or hyper-thyroidism, 132 cases of atopic skin disease and 170 blocked cats. Parvovirus disease was diagnosed in 93 patients. There were 137 cases of cystitis and 143 animals with cataracts. Idiopathic epilepsy was

diagnosed in 111 cases. Periodontal disease was treated in 84 patients. There were 40 cases of distemper.

Fleas and intestinal parasites were frequent problems. Seen during the year were animals with pneumonia, lead poisoning, gunshot wounds, hypertension, gastric ulcers, encephalitis, and glaucoma.

Poisonous Plants

Plant poisoning, although not common in animals, can occur because of potentially harmful house and garden plants. Dogs and cats frequently will eat grass with no ill effects. Household pets, particularly puppies and kittens, tend to chew almost anything that seems interesting. Sometimes, this is a sign of boredom or even a means of getting attention.

The possibility of plant poisoning is something to be aware of but rarely a cause for alarm. Gastrointestinal symptoms can be produced by azalea, ornamental bulbs (tulip, daffodil, etc.), mistletoe, and poinsettia. Some other plants cause clinical signs—such as nettle toxicity in hunting dogs and even marijuana poisoning where individuals purposely involve their pets in the drug experience.

Crackers

Catnip is a non-poisonous plant which causes peculiar behavior but has no toxic effect.

Grass awns (foxtail is a common one) can cause mechanical damage by penetrating ears, nose, conjunctiva, or even unbroken skin especially between the toes. They cause much discomfort until removed.

Poison ivy and poison oak do not cause skin irritation in animals, although the pet may carry the irritating material on its coat and "transmit" it to the owner. Cattle, horses and other herbivores eat the plant with no ill effect, but contact with the feces may expose humans to the irritant.

If poison is suspected, be able to identify the probable cause. In the case of plants, chewing the leaves does not necessarily mean actually ingesting them. There are poisonous household plants, but there is an alarming list of additional poisonous materials in the house and garden. Fortunately, most dogs and cats are not attracted to plants. The large majority of cases are reported as isolated instances—something "new" to report.

If your veterinarian suspects poisoning, there is an Animal Poison Control Information Center at the University of Illinois. Their number is 217-333-3611.

Dog Breeds

There are probably more than 400 breeds of dogs recognized in different countries of the world. In 1981, the American Kennel Club registered 1,033,849 dogs. The most numerous were Poodles, Cocker Spaniels, Doberman Pinschers, German Shepherds, and Labrador Retrievers. A total of 125 breeds were registered. Miscellaneous breeds, which cannot be registered or compete for championship points, are Australian Kelpies, Border Collies, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Miniature Bull Terriers, Pharaoh Hounds, Portugese Water Dogs, Spinoni Italiani and Tibetan Spaniels.

The Medical Records Department classifies all cases by species, breed, age, sex, origin (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, etc.) and by primary and up to three additional diagnoses. The information is of great value in studying the incidence of disease in different breeds and by checking increased incidence in different areas. For example, they can tell an investigator how many cases of parvovirus disease occurred in a certain area and which breeds were affected. Records from all cases seen for the past five years are readily available, and older records can be retrieved from storage.