



Spring 2003

Animal Crackers

M. Josephine Deubler
University of Pennsylvania

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Recommended Citation

Deubler, M. Josephine (2003) "Animal Crackers," *Bellwether Magazine*: Vol. 1 : No. 56 , Article 31.
Available at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/bellwether/vol1/iss56/31>

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Bats

The bats on the new United States postage stamps are getting a lot of attention. In Pennsylvania, bats have a huge impact on the insect population and are of great benefit to farmers and foresters. However, they remain misunderstood, unappreciated and feared by many.

Bats are the only predators of night-flying insects and play a role in controlling many other insect pests. A single bat can consume as many as 500 insects an hour. A colony of 100 little brown bats may consume more than a quarter of a million mosquitoes and other small insects in a night. This is a great help in the control of West Nile virus.

Most northeastern bats have just one or two pups a year, usually born in late May or early June. Bats hibernate during the winter (December through March). Recreational cave exploring (spelunking) can threaten the survival of bat colonies – some caves in the Northeast have gates to limit human access.

Bats have a variety of habitats – fields, forest, cities and suburbs. When a lone bat or a colony is found in a building, humans may consider this a problem. The best way to get a lone bat out of the house is to let it find its own way out. Confine it to as small an area as possible, and open all windows. It may be necessary to bat-proof your home by sealing entrance holes and providing an alternate roost, or bat box. These boxes may be on a pole or in trees but must have seven hours of sunlight. Because of their beneficial role in controlling insects, many people want to attract bats to their yards and gardens by using bat boxes.

A Homeowner's Guide to Northeastern Bats and Bat Problems is available from Pennsylvania State University (single copies are free of charge). Telephone 814-865-6713 or on the Web at <<http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/uh081.html>>.

Presidential Cats

India, a black cat, was brought from Texas to the White House by the Bushes. Socks, Chelsea Clinton's cat, went to live with secretary Betty Currie when the Clintons left the White House. Jimmy Carter had a Siamese named Misty Malarky Ying Yang. Gerald Ford also had a Siamese, Shan. Presidents Kennedy, Coolidge and Wilson had cats. Theodore Roosevelt had a polydactyl, Slippers. William

McKinley had an Angora. Rutherford Hayes had a Siamese, Siam, said to be the first recorded Siamese in America. Abraham Lincoln was the first White House cat owner. He once said, "No matter how much cats fight, there always seem to be plenty of kittens."

Pet Travel to UK

The United Kingdom has relaxed its six-month quarantine restriction on cats and dogs entering the country from the United States and Canada, provided the animals meet the requirements of the UK Pet Travel Scheme (PETS). To qualify, the animal must be fitted with a microchip, vaccinated against rabies (but not before three months of age) and blood-tested at a recognized laboratory, issued an official PETS certificate and treated against ticks and tapeworms.

The microchip must conform to an ISO standard used in Europe. Many microchips used in America and Canada are not compatible and the owners may need to carry a scanner with them.

Only two laboratories in America are recognized at this time to perform the fluorescent antibody virus neutralization test and one only accepts samples from dogs and cats belonging to the military. The sample should be taken about 30 days after vaccination. There is a six months wait from the time a successful blood sample is taken and entering the UK.

Dogs and cats must be treated against tapeworms and ticks not less than 24 hours and not more than 48 hours before they are checked in to travel, and must have official certification from the USDA and CFIA.

The animals must travel in a container with a seal applied by a government official and on an airline approved for PETS by the UK Government.

It's possible that the rules may change. More information can be obtained on the PETS Website – <www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/>.

More Animal Groups

A reader sends:
a prickle of porcupines
leap of leopards
cackle of hyenas

Definitions

Mule – the sterile offspring of a mating between a jack (male donkey) and a mare (female horse).

Hinny – progeny of a stallion and of a jenny (female donkey), more horse like in appearance than a mule.

Horse hinny – male hinny

Mare hinny – female hinny, also called a molly.

Wether – a male sheep castrated at an early age before secondary sex characteristics have developed.

Bellwether – leader of the flock.

Cryptorchid – an animal with undescended testes also called a ridgling (usually a horse) or rig.

AKC Registrations

In 2002, the American Kennel Club registered 958,503 dogs. This is the first time in many years that the total has been below a million. Labrador retrievers lead the list with more than twice the number of golden retrievers, which are in second place. The others in the "Top Ten" are German shepherd dogs, beagles, dachshunds, Yorkshire terriers, boxers, poodles, Chihuahuas and Shih Tzu.

Labradors have led all the breeds every year since 1991. In 2002, 154,616 were registered. Almost all breeds had lower numbers than in 2001. Of the 150 breeds listed, only 41 showed increased registrations in 2002. Cavalier King Charles spaniels had the largest increase, followed by mastiffs, bulldogs, Havanese, and Portuguese water dogs. Last on the list are otterhounds with only one litter and 17 individual dogs registered.

An Ibizan hound placed first in the Hound Group at Westminster this year. In 2002, this breed ranked 147th, with 50 dogs registered. Jack Russell Terriers, now called Parson Russell Terriers, showed a slight decrease in numbers, although they are very popular on television.

The AKC and breed club web sites are extremely helpful for those thinking about a puppy. Study before you buy. Start with <www.akc.org>.