

Responsible Pet Ownership Ambassador Newsletter

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Main Article

Being a Considerate Pet Owner

Being a considerate dog owner was featured in our last issue but *all* pet owners, and not just those of dogs, have a part to play in developing a gracious society and better living environment for themselves and their neighbours. We shall discuss some of the issues other pet owners and even non pet owners can take note of:

Keep pets indoors

Pets such as cats are usually happiest and safest indoors. For example, cats sleep up to 18 hours a day and instead of having your pet cat sleeping in a drain, on a ledge, on a car, or on someone else's property, why not keep it safely indoors? It is dangerous for pets to be out without supervision. Pets can get in the way of traffic or even become the targets of abuse if they are outdoors by themselves. They can also fall sick or get into fights with other animals. Pets roaming the streets can also be mistaken for strays and be brought to the pound! Keeping your pets in also ensures they are not intruding into and dirtying or damaging neighbouring properties. Cats can also injure the neighbour's pets by dipping paws in fish tanks or reaching into bird and hamster cages. Pets can also steal food from the neighbour's kitchen or even dining table! Unhappy conflicts with your neighbours over such issues can be avoided by keeping your pets indoors. In addition, unsterilised pets that are allowed to roam can produce unwanted litters of babies that may eventually have to be put down.

Keep pets from being litterbugs

Scraps of food left for or by pets, and pet urine and faeces at common areas such as staircases, corridors

and lift landings are stomach turning and unhygienic! They are also unnecessary and avoidable if pets are fed and kept indoors. Such areas are also not suitable for keeping cages housing pets, which can block the passages and if improperly cleaned, are smelly. Housing pets in such a way indicates that the pet is an afterthought rather than a part of the family. Keeping a pet indoors provides a lot more owner-pet bonding opportunities.

Keep pets clean

Within the home, owners should keep their pets clean and maintain proper husbandry and hygiene practices. For example, cages and litter boxes should be cleaned regularly or else the smell will disturb your neighbours too. Limiting the number of pets will keep proper care manageable. Care should also be taken to ensure that pet fur or feathers are not flying out of your home and into the neighbours'!



Keep pet noises down

Besides dogs, other pets such as cats and birds can also create noise nuisance. Birds such as parrots (e.g: cockatoos, macaws) can make very loud squawking noises. These social birds need a lot of time from their owners and require a great deal of commitment as some can live up to 80 years. Cats' meowing may not be as loud but it can become irritating if continuous. Attending to the cat's needs, such as topping up the food/water bowl, cleaning the litter box or interacting with the cat will stop it from meowing incessantly. Caterwauling, the loud screaming or crying that cats make in a fight or in heat, can be avoided by keeping them indoors and having them sterilised.

Keep pets from having unwanted litters

Besides socialisation, training and securing pets indoors, owners can consider sterilising their pets. The benefits of sterilisation include a reduction in unwanted behaviours like wandering, caterwauling (for cats) and marking as well as problems with unwanted baby animals. Sterilised pets are usually also more docile.

Being a considerate pet owner means keeping pets

- indoors
- clean
- from being litterbugs
- from making too much noise
- from having unwanted litters
- for life

Keep pets for life!

Finally, keeping a pet is a lifelong commitment. Owners should never abandon their pets under any circumstances. It is cruel to throw away a pet that does not know how to take care of itself. Abandoned pets may become involved in traffic accidents, may suffer from starvation and disease, or turn wild and become a public nuisance.

Keep your cool

Remember that not everyone likes pets. Try to understand how and why people might be disturbed or irritated by your pet. It could be something you have not noticed or realised before. It could be resolved relatively easily by spending more time with the pet, ensuring all its needs are met, or training the pet. Helping non pet owners understand why a pet behaves a certain way can also help them play their part by not provoking a pet into defensive or unwanted behaviours. For example, as dogs are territorial, we can all avoid approaching an unknown dog or the property that it is guarding without permission from the owner. It is best also not to rush towards a dog to pet it even if it 'looks' friendly, especially if you are meeting it for the first time. Similarly, we can avoid approaching dogs just to get their attention as it is likely to encourage them to start barking loudly - a very normal dog behaviour that soon becomes irritating for all if it happens too often unnecessarily.



Keep kitty indoors

By Ms Jaelyn Lim, Committee Member, Cat Welfare Society (CWS)

Contrary to popular belief, your cat can lead a **fulfilled and happy life** as an indoor pet. All you have to do is to provide it with a safe and stimulating environment. Here's how to do it:

Step 1: Get the basics right

The first step to a happy indoor cat is to provide it with essentials like fresh water, quality kibble, a comfortable bed and a clean litter tray. Next, get your cat sterilised at the veterinarian's. When cats are spayed (for females) or neutered (for males), they will be less inclined to wander outdoors to look for a mate.

Step 2: Create a stimulating environment

Cats are intelligent animals and will be bored without adequate mental stimulation. As cats are natural jumpers, a cat tree placed in a corner of the living room will offer climbing and jumping opportunities. Offer a variety of toys, such as a ball with bells, for your cat to chase and pounce on. Your cat will also find interactive toys such as a cat wand or a homemade cardboard tube with hidden kibbles very entertaining.

Step 3: Scratch those claws

Cats need to scratch their claws to loosen old nail layers. In the wild, they use tree trunks or other rough areas. If your cat is kept indoors, it should have access to a scratching post so your furniture do not have to bear the brunt of this behaviour. Putting catnip on the scratching post will entice your cat to scratch appropriately. It can also send your cat into a state of euphoria!

Step 4: Keep kitty safe

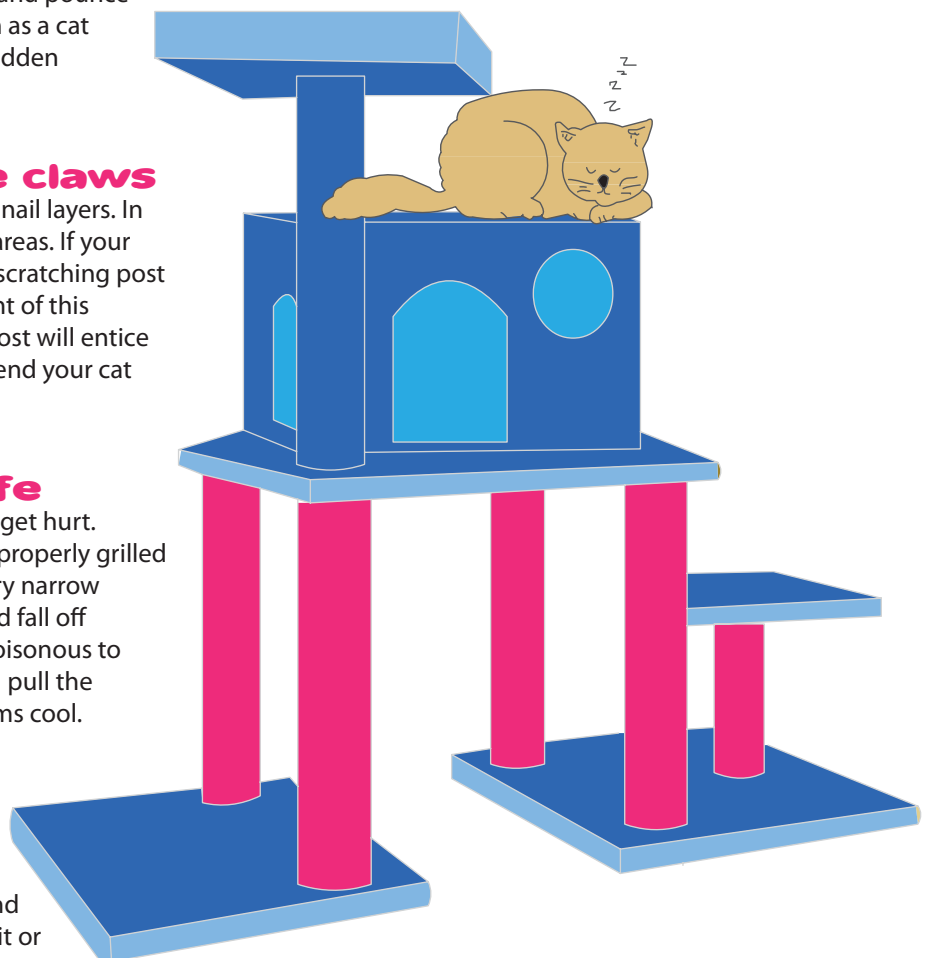
Cat-proof your home so that your cat will not get hurt. Always ensure that all windows are closed or properly grilled (remember that cats can squeeze through very narrow spaces) so it will not jump onto the ledges and fall off accidentally. Get rid of plants that could be poisonous to cats, keep cables tied up and out of sight, and pull the shades down on a sunny day to keep the rooms cool.

Step 5: Spend time together

Showering your cat with love and attention is part of being a responsible pet owner so spend time with your cat by petting or playing with it or grooming it with a brush. Doing this will deepen the bond between you and your cat!

Do you know?

Indoor cats generally lead happier and longer lives than outdoor cats. When cats are allowed to wander outdoors, they can become a public nuisance by defecating in common corridors, getting into garbage cans or contributing to cat overpopulation in your estate. Not only that, they also face dangers like road traffic, territorial animals, hunger and diseases. Most importantly, they lack affection and attention from cat lovers like yourself!



Your Cat and its Litter Box

By Ms Selina Sebastian, Education Executive, Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)

Litter train your kitty with a little know-how and patience

Did you know that cats/kittens are very easy to toilet train? I often come across people who are shocked that this is possible but it is true! All you have to do is give it a litter tray and kitty litter and you are on the way! Here is a guide for you to help your cat perform its task purrfectly.

How Big?

The litter box should be roomy enough for your cat to turn around. Do not get a small litter box to save room because it will not work because your cat will refuse to use it and you will have a bigger problem. When my cat grew bigger, I was puzzled at why it chose to do its toilet on the kitchen mat instead of the kitty litter box like it used to. I later realised that it was because it had gotten too big for its litter box. My advice is to buy a small litter box for a kitten and then get a larger one as it grows.

To Cover or Not To Cover - That is the Question!

Some litter boxes are open whilst others have covers. Those with covers usually look more presentable and help prevent the smell from escaping. Some cats like the privacy, while others dislike being enclosed. If you use a covered litter box, make sure your cat can get in and out easily. My cats have been using the open litter boxes without problems.

Where To Put It?

Cats are very particular when it comes to doing their business. You will have to find just the right place for the litter box. Here are a few tips you might find useful:

1. Do not put your cat's litter box next to her food or water bowl. It might just find another spot to use far away from its dining area (such as the bed!). I'm sure you would not like to have your toilet next to your dining table where you eat and neither would your cat!

2. Put the litter box in a quiet, low-traffic area, such as an infrequently used bathroom. A corner location is better than out in the open because a cat needs to feel secure.

What Kind of Litter?

Cats naturally bury their waste and this shows how clean they are. The kitty litter you provide substitutes for the dirt outside so it is important to choose the right litter.

There are several types of litter to choose from:

- Some are scented and some are unscented.
- Some clump together when they get wet and are easier to scoop.
- Some are like fine sand whilst others come in a pelleted form.
- Some are made of biodegradable material, such as wheat, corn or wood chips that break down easily in landfills.

Once you find one that you and your pet like, do not change it. Your cat can be very particular when it comes to her litter.

How Often Should I Change Litter?

Finally, the most fun part of taking care of the litter box – cleaning! Try to remove faeces and wet litter every day. This is important for two reasons. First, your cat likes a clean litter box and if it is not kept clean it will find another place to go. Secondly, if you do not scoop it every day, it will smell. Some people give up their cats to the SPCA for this reason but it is actually not the cat that smells bad but because the litter tray was not cleaned often enough.

You will have to replace all of the litter and clean the box with soap and water at least once a week. Try not to use bleach or other disinfectant because the residual smell might be so strong that it stops your cat from using the tray. If you keep all these points in mind, you are on the right track to a toilet-trained cat. All the best!





Rabbit Grooming 101

By Ms Betty Tan, House Rabbit Society Singapore (HRSS)

Rabbits are clean and tidy animals that take great effort in grooming themselves regularly. Even so, they still need help from their owners to look and feel their best. Grooming time also serves as a good bonding opportunity between rabbits and owners and a time to check for potential problems such as teeth problems, lumps, furmites, urine burn and sore hocks. It's a good habit to groom your rabbit at least weekly or more often, depending on your rabbit's fur length and type. Rabbits shed four times a year, alternating between heavy and light sheds. When your rabbit is going through a heavy shedding you will need to brush them on a daily basis.

Rabbit skin is very delicate and can tear quite easily. Great care needs to be taken when grooming your rabbit to prevent injuries. Below we discuss some of the basic things to take note during your regular grooming sessions.

Using the right tools

Choose safe and rabbit-friendly grooming tools. Some basic items include the following:

flea comb



nail clipper

soft-bristle brush



scissors

cotton wool/bud



Trancing your rabbit

A safe and effective grooming session requires a calm rabbit. One way to keep your rabbit still is to cradle it on its back or in your lap. Gently pet its face and nose to help it relax. This is sometimes referred to by bunny owners as 'trancing', because most rabbits tend to remain unusually still in this position, almost as if they are in a trance. If your rabbit remains calm, you can proceed to cut the nails yourself from this position. If not, have a friend cut the nails while you keep the rabbit 'tranced'. Always be sure to sit on the floor when cutting a 'tranced' bunny's nails. Some rabbits will come out of the trance with little or no warning. If you are sitting on the floor, the rabbit is less likely to fall from your lap and hurt itself. Bring the rabbit out of the trance by slowly returning it to an upright position.



Brushing

Brushing your rabbit's fur regularly helps to get rid of any loose fur and prevents tangling/matting. Rabbits groom themselves frequently and any loose fur is easily swallowed. Ingesting too much loose fur can lead to the formation of fur balls in their digestive system. Rabbits with longer fur are prone to developing matted/clumped fur, which can become painful and difficult to remove. Use a flea comb to untangle any mildly matted fur. Use a pair of scissors to gently and carefully break off mats. This may take time and rushing it could cause pain and injuries for the rabbit. Use a soft-bristle brush to brush off any loose fur. To avoid mats, groom your rabbit often. Rabbits that do not have much space for movement and keep lying on one side or position may also develop mats in specific areas on which they rest often.



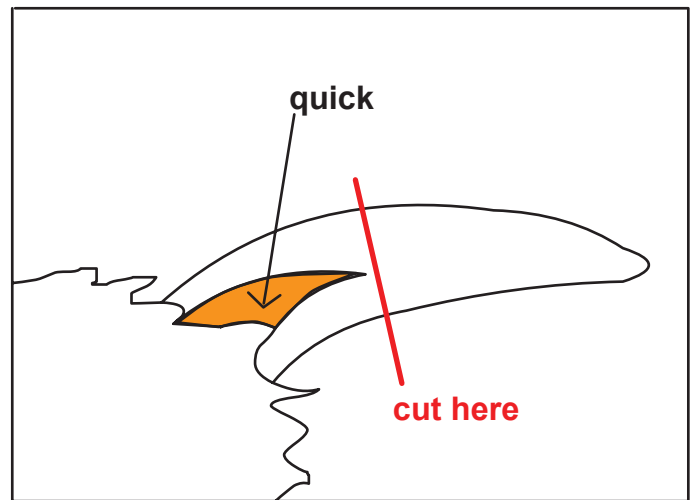
Cleaning the scent glands:

During grooming, it is a good idea to check the rabbit's genital area and scent glands, which are located on both sides of the genital mound. Occasionally the scent glands will need to be cleaned. If you take your thumb and index finger and gently press on the area beside the genital mound, the scent glands will open and become visible. A bit of a pungent odor and some dark waxy material are normal. If the waxy material has hardened, you can gently use a moistened cotton bud to soften it and drag it away from the area. Do not dig or irritate this area.



Trimming the claws

Like dogs and cats (and us!), rabbits need to have their claws trimmed regularly. Overgrown claws can break easily and cause serious pain for the rabbits. It also makes it hard for rabbits to hop around. Examine the claw to locate the quick, or the vein (see picture below). Some rabbits' nails are quite dark, so you will need a small flashlight to locate the quick. Cutting into the quick will cause your rabbit to experience some pain, and it will bleed so cut just below the quick. If you do accidentally trim the nails too short, use corn-starch to stop the bleeding.



Avoiding furry problems!

If you cannot set aside time for grooming sessions more than once a week, avoid getting a rabbit with medium to long length fur, such as an angora. These rabbits usually require daily brushing to avoid serious matting and to keep happy and healthy.

Keeping good habits

With practice and patience, grooming sessions should be an enjoyable time for you and your bunny.



Reaching the Heartlands

AVA participated in the MacPherson Town Day 2009 on 12 July 2009 at MacPherson Community Club. Graced by Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, the Town Day provided an opportunity for residents within the constituency to socialize and bond with family, neighbours and friends. In addition, residents also learnt about responsible pet ownership through fun games.



Doggy Fun under the sun

On 28 June, AVA met dog owners with their furry friends at the Dogs Day Out event held at the West Coast Park. Owners dropped by our booth for fun games, information and tips on being a responsible and considerate dog owner.



AVA RPO Roadshows 2009



We are holding exciting RPO Roadshow events on three consecutive Sundays - 15, 22 and 29 November 2009 and we look forward to seeing you! Expect interactive activities such as skits, pet demonstrations, talks, storytelling sessions and more! Programme details will be sent to RPO Ambassadors via email closer to the dates.

SPCA World Animal Day Event!

An invite from SPCA

A super important day in Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) calendar is coming up. It's World Animal Day on the 4 October. SPCA is planning a day of fun and learning and a whole bunch of exciting activities that Sunday. It's a special opportunity for anyone who loves animals to come together and be part of something special. If you don't want to be left out, email us at updates@sPCA.org.sg to be kept in the loop of the finalised details of this special day or visit the SPCA website at www.sPCA.org.sg closer to the date.

What is World Animal Day about?

This special day started in 1931 at a Convention of Ecologists in Florence as a way of highlighting the plight of endangered species. Since then, it has expanded to include all kinds of animal life and is widely celebrated in countries throughout the world. The 4th of October was chosen as World Animal Day as it is the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals.

AVA RPO Art Competition 2009 results

Thank you to those who participated. Results will be announced at our RPO Roadshow event on 29 November 2009.



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