



The Bristol Cats Study: a pioneering longitudinal study of cat health, welfare & behaviour

A.B. Garvey¹, A. Kathrani², E. Hall¹, J.L. Williams¹, J. Murray³ and E.Blackwell¹

¹School of Veterinary Sciences, University of Bristol, Langford, Bristol, UK

²The Royal Veterinary College, London, UK

³Dogs Trust, UK

Background

- Launched in May 2010, 2203 kittens registered initially in the city of Bristol and later from all around the UK.
- 9 years later, there are still **1731** cats actively participating in the study.

Method

- Owners are sent surveys once a year by post.
- Researchers have access to medical histories to compare with owner-reported signs and illnesses.
- Cats can then be chosen for further involvement in targeted studies.

Retention rate of cats in study = 78%

Current Study by Author:

“A prospective study of environmental risk factors for chronic gastrointestinal disease in cats”

The Study has two aims:

1. What is the prevalence of chronic gastrointestinal disease among the Bristol Cats?
2. What are the environmental risk factors for chronic gastrointestinal diseases and specifically is stress a risk factor?

1. Data collected from 5 year old cats shows that **43** had visited the vet that year for **gastrointestinal signs** (weight loss, reduced appetite, vomiting, diarrhoea) out of **1731**.

Prevalence = 0.024

150 cats experienced vomiting or diarrhoea without attending the vets.

Prevalence = 0.086

2. To measure stress as a risk factor we have devised a behavioural test to assess cat personality comprising of:

- Stranger test
- Novel object test
- Habituation to a novel sound
- Paw preference test (lateralisation study)
- Hair cortisol testing



Fig. 1: Novel object used – a mechanical bug

Completed Studies from the Bristol Cats Study

Prevalence of, and risk factors for, gingivitis:

- Identified associations between gingivitis, diet and cat characteristics

Risk factors for Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) in cats up to 12 months of age:

- Rural locations associated with higher odds of RTAs than towns, cities or suburban locations
- Increased risk for cats that hunt at the roadside as well as those that lived close to a ‘long straight section of road’

Health issues and problematic behaviours in cats confined indoors or allowed outdoors

- Identified associations between outdoor access and a range of health and behavioural signs including obesity, negative behaviour towards owners and inappropriate elimination

Owner-reported signs of Lower Urinary Tract Signs (LUTS) in cats:

- Prevalence of LUTS was 4.3%, 3.8% and 6.0% at ages 18, 30 and 48 months, respectively
- Indoor-only lifestyle at the age of 18 months and a change in diet between the ages of 12 and 18 months were risk factors for owner-reported LUTS at the age of 18 months

Early-life risk factors for feline obesity

- Feeding dry food as the only or major type of food in the diet and restricted outdoor access increased risk of feline obesity

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