

Are We Finally Coming Around?

Animal Protection
and Social Justice –
a Cause Whose
Time has Come



Plus

- *Being Courteous and Safety-Minded During Visits to the Vet*
- *The Dark Side of Horse Racing*
- *Managing Canine Collar Sensitivity*

Photo: State Representative
Diana Urban in front of the
Connecticut State Capitol

Something to Chew On

Dear Friends,

One of the ways we fulfill our promise to do the right thing for animals is by making a life-long commitment to the people and pets we serve. For instance, we provide our adopters with incomparable support, not just during the adoption process, but also throughout the animal's life. This commitment to our pets and clients includes the rare occasion when an adoption fails.

Below is an email to our volunteers, from Lindsey Pellino, Sanctuary Feline Care and Volunteer Manager.

As hard as we try to find the perfect forever-home for our pets, sometimes unforeseen circumstances occur. As those of you who do behavioral work know, cats can react differently in a real home, especially over time. When this occurs, we do our best to "save the home," meaning, keep the animal with its new family. But when this is not feasible, we will always welcome an animal back to Our Companions.

As such, Bruiser has returned to the Sanctuary. He was adopted along with an elderly diabetic cat named Felix. While Felix is thriving, Bruiser was having unanticipated stress issues related to the family's dogs. Even with behavior inter-

ventions, it was clear that this was not going to be a healthy environment for him.

While his return is sad, the silver lining is that we will all get to see him again! Furthermore, we now know what his next home should look like. To that end, we're certain he'll have many more applications - he's just so handsome! For the next few days, however, he won't be having visitors, to allow him to readjust to the Sanctuary and to de-stress.

Our adoption program is just one of the ways we fulfill our promise to do the right thing for animals; this fact is illustrated throughout this edition of *Our Companions News*. Our cover story, for instance, explores our efforts to pass legislation to prevent animal cruelty in Connecticut.

It is because of you, our generous and compassionate donors who provide 100% of our funding, that we are able to keep this promise. Countless lives, human and animal, have been impacted thanks to your commitment to us. On behalf of the people and pets we serve, we thank you for always being there for us and for all the beautiful animals, animals like Bruiser, we're here to protect.

Sincerely,



Susan B. Linker,
Chief Executive Officer
and Founder



Maria das Neves,
Board Chair

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Our Companions News is published three times per year by Our Companions Animal Rescue, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

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Are We Finally Coming Around?

Animal Protection and Social Justice – A Cause Whose Time has Come

By Jennifer Barrows



Slowly but surely, change is taking place nationwide in the area of animal welfare and protection. Here in Connecticut, thanks to the partnership between Our Companions, Connecticut Votes for Animals (CVA), and the leadership of a few key legislators, laws are now on the books allowing for companion animals to be more effectively protected against cruelty, neglect, and other inhumane conditions.

Almost always, getting a bill passed into law requires a multi-pronged approach: the commitment of a legislative leader, the input from constituents, and a clear and consistent message. If you took the time to share your concerns and request support from your legislators after receiving a legislative “Call to Action” during any of our recent efforts, then you have played a big part in helping to get these bills passed.

Our Companions’ legislative efforts have been in lock-step with Connecticut Votes for Animals (CVA), a nonprofit 501(c)(4) political organization, now in its tenth year, fighting for the protection of animals at the state level. One of Connecticut’s greatest animal protection successes was the passage of Desmond’s Law in 2016.

“This was a landmark accomplishment,” says CVA Board member Jessica Rubin, Esq. “It is the first law in the country – in fact, in the world – allowing attorneys to appear in court to advocate for justice in animal cruelty cases. As a result, courts are listening to arguments about animal suffering, justice, responsibility and community safety, and holding animal abusers accountable for their actions. We are proud of Connecticut’s leadership in this area and hope that our achievement will serve as a model for other states.”

According to Our Companions CEO Susan Linker, the enactment of Desmond’s Law has made it possible for 25 cases to come about just in the past 18 months; there also have been far fewer dismissals than in the past, and better overall outcomes on sentencing. “The passage of the statute also opened up further dialogue and clearer acknowledgment of the link between animal cruelty and human abuse,” ex-



Diana Urban in 2016 with her mare, Ella. Urban is leaving the legislature after nine terms, during which she has been a tireless advocate for children, animals and fiscal responsibility. Photo credit: 'The Westerly Sun'

plains Linker. “Children and adults who inflict harm on animals often are perpetrators of similar offenses to humans.”

State Representative, Diana Urban (photo, above), fought for years to get Desmond’s Law passed. She will not be seeking re-election next term, but has dedicated her professional life to child and animal protection.

“Getting Desmond’s Law passed was an incredible achievement,” says Rep. Urban. “It was a remarkable team that came together to make it happen and I will be forever grateful to each and every person who gave their time and energy to such a worthy cause. We in Connecticut have indeed passed the first law in the country that puts advocates in court for egregious animal abuse. I am retiring from the legislature but I will be heading up the movement to take Desmond’s Law national, beginning with California and New York – and I know our team will be right there with me!”

Efforts also have been undertaken to better equip and empower Animal Control Officers (ACOs) to intervene and prevent animals from serious harm or death. For example, recently a



law passed requiring that dogs who are tethered (tied to a stationary object) outside must be taken indoors during times of inclement weather.

This session, efforts are being made to establish standards ensuring that outdoor dog shelters are soundly constructed, provide sufficient space, enable dogs to maintain a normal body

Continued next page

temperature, and allow access to water, among other requirements. This initiative is all the more imperative following the tragic deaths of two dogs in Connecticut. In January, local news was filled with a heart-breaking story of BJ, the dog who froze to death in the backyard of a Hartford home. Earlier in the summer, two dogs died from over-exposure during extreme heat.

“The goal of these bills is to give ACOs the authority to recognize and take action before serious endangerment occurs,” says Linker.

Other examples of progress in the area of animal protection are the Good Samaritan laws which allow for emergency medical technicians and police officers to break into cars without liability, in order to rescue pets from dangerous conditions.

The work continues

This year, CVA, Our Companions, and others are working to pass additional important legislation restricting the use of a probationary program called Accelerated Rehabilitation (AR) for felony animal abuse cases here in Connecticut.

Often used by defendants charged with animal abuse, AR is a program that, instead of a trial, provides up to two years of court supervision and thereafter removes any record of the crime. It is intended to be available for crimes “not of a serious nature.” Those charged with felony animal cruelty are accused of maliciously and intentionally maiming, mutilating, torturing, wounding or killing an animal. In cases where animal abusers receive AR, the perpetrators of egregious and violent offenses to animals can avoid a fine, jail time and mention in their legal record.

“Just imagine,” says Rubin, “you could hire someone to care for your pet, parent or child and check that person’s background record, but you would never know that the person was charged with a violent crime against an animal. Felony animal cruelty includes malicious and intentional violence, and the use of AR is an inappropriate response. AR should not be used in felony animal cruelty cases, and CVA is working hard with the Connecticut Legislature to enact policy toward this end, this session.”

Getting it done

Shepherding a bill through the legislature is no easy feat, and can take years, if the bill gets any attention at all. Every issue needs a legislative champion to agree to sponsor a bill, hold hearings, gather witnesses to air all sides of the issue, and work to garner support in the way of co-sponsors and final passage.

In the case of the private animal shelter legislation that passed just last year, it was personal experience that spurred House Minority Leader Themis Klarides to pen the bill that ultimately became law. Klarides went to adopt a kitten from a privately run animal shelter and was horrified by the conditions she found there. As a result, a new law is in place requiring all privately operated animal shelters in Connecticut to adhere to basic safety and hygiene practices.

In effecting any kind of public policy, as we’ve noted before, it’s important to be involved – to whatever degree you can – but at the very least, let your legislators know where you stand on important issues. Ask specifically for them to vote for or against something you believe in.

We are all witnessing an important unfolding: the animal welfare movement is a social justice movement whose time has come. Social justice entails the preservation of certain rights and opportunities, especially for the least-empowered members of a society. Animals have a basic level of self-interest that is often overlooked; they have an interest in not suffering, based on the premise that they possess intrinsic value, above and beyond how they are viewed or valued by human animals.

If we care about social justice in all areas, it’s imperative that we look at issues through a broader lens. Attempts to “tease out” one problem from one faction of society will never make truly lasting change for the better. Everything is connected. As noted earlier, we are finally recognizing the important link between animal abuse and human abuse. This point has been powerful in getting our message across to lawmakers and the public, and it’s helped us gain important momentum. Working together we can continue making strides that will improve the lives of all sentient beings.



Boning Up on Your Vetiquette

Being Courteous and Safety-Minded During Visits to the Vet



By Jessica Beganski

veti-quette

'vetəkət,'veta,ket/noun

1. the customary code of polite behavior in your veterinarian's office waiting room

Vetiquette may be a made-up word but it addresses a real-world problem: rude, bad or even dangerous behavior in the vet clinic waiting room. Judging by the behavior of some dog owners, one might think that some believe that the vet clinic waiting room is similar to the local dog park – a place for their dog to socialize and have fun. Some owners permit their dogs to freely meet and greet other dogs and people, completely unaware of the potential risk to everyone in the waiting room. While they probably are doing this without even thinking about it – and likely mean no harm – they are putting their dog and others at risk.

For two reasons, the vet clinic waiting room is not an appropriate place for dogs to be social. First, dogs who are at the vet are there for a reason – they may be sick or injured. They are there to get examined and may be there for shots or surgery. Most dogs at the vet are nervous or fearful. Second, most vet clinic waiting rooms are confined spaces, with dogs, cats and possibly other animals, all sharing the limited space at the same time. In other words, a veterinary clinic waiting room is the exact opposite of the fun dog park and should be treated accordingly.

Marie Joyner, Our Companions Director of Canine Operations, has some basic guidelines to help make your trip to the vet pleasant for you, your dog and your fellow waiting room occupants.

1. Maintain awareness of your surroundings. Remember that not all the dogs awaiting care have necessarily been socialized or are comfortable being there. It is important to maintain control over your dog at all times.

2. Leash your dog (retractable leashes don't count) and keep him or her away from all other pets. You do not know if the other dogs in the



waiting room are ill, injured, aggressive or anxious. A dog may be contagious but not yet diagnosed. It's best to assume the worst and just keep your dog away.

3. Keep your dog focused on you. If your dog can have treats, practice playing an attention game in the waiting room.

4. If another owner allows their dog to approach yours, you should let them know that you think it's best that they do not, since the animals may be anxious in that environment. If they do not rein in their dog, feel free to get up and let the front desk know that you need to wait elsewhere. You alone are responsible for your dog's well-being.

5. If your dog is severely anxious or aggressive, you have several options to avoid the stress of the waiting room.

Notify Your Vet. They may suggest you wait in your car. They may offer to text you when your exam room is ready or they may be able to offer you a side entrance, allowing you to avoid the waiting room altogether.

Visit a Mobile Vet. If a visit to the vet is completely out of the question, Marie suggests you

try one of the mobile vet services in your area.

There are many places where your dog can have fun – the vet clinic waiting room is just not one of them. It's best to avoid contact with other animals while there so that everyone is kept safe.

Another Option: Muzzle Training

Muzzle training is not just for dogs with aggression issues; it's also helpful for any and all dogs who may encounter a high stress situation, such as a visit to the vet or groomer – or in the event that your dog becomes injured. A muzzle is a safety device; it protects the dog as much as the people around him. Proper muzzle training and desensitization make it much less stressful for a dog to wear a muzzle when and if they need to. Our Companions has a training guide available if you would like to learn more about muzzle training.

...And They're Off!

The Dark Side of Horse Racing

By Tammy Wunsch



Horses are one of the most exquisite animals on the planet. Watching them run across fields and frolic is enough to enchant anyone. It is almost easy to believe that horse racing would be fun for a horse. As glamorous as horse racing is for spectators, the horse's experience is far less elegant.

Horse racing on the surface seems so sophisticated. Thousands of race goers dress up nicely, drink fancy beverages, place wagers, and hobnob with celebrities. Racing season officially starts in May with the Triple Crown of racing: the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont Stakes.

The racing industry is a business that is motivated solely by financial gain. A mare's fertility cycle is manipulated to produce a foal every year when she would normally produce one only every two years. The mare is kept pregnant approximately 90 percent of her life. When the breeder is done with her, she is typically discarded or euthanized.

More money is actually made from breeding than racing. Most foals with deformities are instantly euthanized. Some may be treated surgically, but this risks further injury to the foal. Horses at thoroughbred sales can be sold for tens of thousands of dollars, or a few hundred dollars if they are destined for the slaughterhouse.

To keep a champion mare pregnant time and time again, her most recent foal needs to be taken away from her when he/she is about 30 days old. The foal, however, is potentially lucrative and must be provided with a nurse mare, or, as breeders call them, "junk mares." A junk mare is a non-thoroughbred mare that has had her own foal and is producing milk. The breeder has no use for the junk mare's foal and they are often brutally done away with, sold to the leather tanning industry, abandoned, or slaughtered to provide meat for foreign palates. Rescues are able to save a small number of these abandoned foals and give them a second chance at life.

Horses are social creatures and are most content while grazing in an open pasture with other horses. Horses that are training for racing



are typically confined in their stall for up to 23 hours per day. They are prohibited from socializing and endure an extreme training regimen that can lead to neurotic behavior, stomach ulcers, and respiratory diseases. They are exercised merely to train them to provide profit. When a horse is no longer profitable – either through racing or breeding – they are auctioned to the highest bidder.

A racehorse's misery starts when the horse is just six months old. The foal is separated from its mother and begins training – wearing a saddle and bit, carrying a rider, and learning how to load into a gate. Racing causes great physical strain on a horse's body and formal track training – running and racing against their stablemates – begins when a horse is just 18 months old. The juvenile horses can enter races as early as two years old. Since horses' bodies are not fully developed until they reach six years old, they are forced to endure training before their skeletal systems have fully developed. This strain can cause fractures, pulled tendons, and torn ligaments. Over time, strenuous training can cause more serious physical ailments, injuries, and even death.

In the wild, horses run fast, but only for short periods of time. In a race, jockeys use whips to force their horses to continue, often past the point of exhaustion. A survey in Britain found that jockeys use their whip an average of 30

times per race, even when the horses are past the point of exhaustion and out of contention. Horses are also often fed illegal drugs to mask injuries or illnesses.

The New York Times reported in 2012 that on average, 24 racehorses die on racetracks every week – nearly 2,000 annually at racetracks in the United States. These numbers don't include horses that are injured and later euthanized away from the track. The racing industry promised Congress to make the "sport" safer. While anabolic steroids have been banned, lax enforcement, inaccurate data, and limited testing make it difficult to track the true number of injuries and deaths that actually occur at the track. Conditions in other countries are even more deplorable than in the United States.

If you thought horse racing was an exciting and elegant sport, we hope after reading this article you will think differently. The best thing we can do to support humane treatment of horses is to stop attending, watching, and supporting the horse racing industry. We also hope you will share this information with others to educate them on the realities of horse racing. The industry will continue as long as there is an audience and profit to be made. Horses should not be treated as commodities and should instead be allowed to live their lives in comfortable, humane conditions and preferably in the company of other horses.

The Sanctuary is in Bloom and Ready for Visitors!



Have you visited our Sanctuary lately? The facility has just undergone a sizeable expansion and we have lots of beautiful new space to show off. And you know what this means, don't you? It means we have even more adorable animals for you to meet! So what are you waiting for?

With each day getting longer and warmer, now is the perfect time to take a ride in the countryside. Come visit our beautiful campus, complete with welcoming feline and canine cottages, burgeoning gardens, and walkable grounds. We are open to the community for tours on Saturdays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

At our Sanctuary, you won't find animals confined to cages. Our furry residents are free to roam around, play freely, and interact with visitors. At this very special place, we perform miracles every day, helping hurt and traumatized animals learn to trust and thrive – and eventually find their forever homes. Come see where it all happens – it's an experience you won't soon forget.

46 Floeting Road, Ashford, CT





An Act of Perpetual Kindness

Leaving a Legacy for the Animals of Tomorrow

Our Companions, with your help, is making a difference in the lives of pets and people each and every day. Everything we have done – and everything we ever do – is always with an eye toward the future.

Our Companions is fortunate to have some very special donors who are committed to helping future generations of animals in need of a second chance, and for this reason, we established the *Forever Home Society* (FHS).

Members of FHS are committed to supporting our shared vision far into the future, by including Our Companions in their estate plans. We hope you'll consider continuing your support in this very special way, by joining the *Forever Home Society* and helping us to create a more compassionate future for both animals and humans. Below, is a current listing of the *Forever Home Society* members – we hope you will consider adding your name to this list.

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Ms. Elizabeth Aaronsohn	Ms. Jamila Hadj-Salem	Ms. Doris Phillips
Ms. Mary Jean Agostini	Ms. P. Hanmer	Mr. Neil and Mrs. Kathy Pierson
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If you have already included Our Companions in your estate plans, please let us know so we can welcome you as a member of the *Forever Home Society*. To learn more, please contact Susan Linker at (860) 242-9999, ext. 301 or email SusanL@OurCompanions.org.

Legal Language and Tax ID

If you wish to name Our Companions in your will or estate plans, we should be named as: Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary, DBA Our Companions Animal Rescue • Legal Address: P.O. Box 956 Manchester, CT 06045 • Tax ID number: 41-2047734



Forever Home Society Member Feature

Susan Mason

Forever Home Society Member since 2012

“Deciding to include Our Companions in our estate planning was an easy decision. My husband Rob and I have been involved in OC since our move to Connecticut in 2007 when our dear neighbor Chris Shivery introduced us to Susan Linker and her growing organization. We were blown away by what she and her staff had created and knew that we wanted to support OC.

While we no longer live in Connecticut, we continue to be amazed at what Our Companions has done with the Sanctuary in Ashford and their effort to provide a lifetime home for so many animals.

In addition to our annual giving, including Our Companions in our estate planning will ensure that we will continue to be able to support its vision and efforts that remain so near and dear to our hearts.” - Susan Mason



Gwendolyn Mason

Be a Hero to the Animals – They Need You More Than Ever OC Kicks Off Spring Fund Drive

By Susan Linker

Thanks to your generosity and support, Our Companions is able to provide comfort, safety and unconditional love to many of our region’s most vulnerable companion animals. Your donations also allow us to provide effective programs that help humans and their pets, as well as our communities.

As a result of last year’s \$1.2 million dollar Sanctuary expansion, the costs associated with running our organization have never been greater, making our fundraising efforts ever more daunting.

As we once again turn to you, our most dedicated members, for support, I’d like to share how donating to Our Companions is not only an opportunity for you to participate in creating a brighter future for companion animals in Connecticut, but it’s also a financial investment you can feel absolutely confident about. We want you to know that:

- Annually, **84% of our budget is directed towards our life-saving programs.**
- 2017 was the **16th consecutive year in which we did not incur even one cent of debt.**
- Last year, it cost us only **three cents to raise a dollar**, significantly below the national average for nonprofit organizations.



In recognition of our efficiency, we recently received a score of **99.63 (out of 100)** from **Charity Navigator**, America’s largest independent evaluator of nonprofit organizations. Perhaps it comes from our scrappy, start-up roots, but we are accustomed to stretching every dollar donated to help the animals.

To ensure that we have the necessary funding to **support our programs and expanded Sanctuary operations**, I hope you will consider renewing your support by making a generous gift before **June 30th**.

With 99% of our funding coming from charitable donations, everything we do is made possible by you. Thank you for being a hero to the animals and thank you for taking this incredible journey with us.



OC Celebrates 2017 Leadership Donors



The late Katharine McLane, known to her friends as K.K. with her dog Jenny.

Our Companions hosted more than one hundred members of the McLane Society at the beautiful Hartford Golf Club during OC's annual Donor Appreciation Brunch on Sunday, April 22nd. Attendees had an opportunity to socialize, enjoy a delicious gourmet brunch, and learn about the latest accomplishments of the organization.

"The McLane Society celebrates those individuals, businesses and organizations that support Our Companions Animal Rescue at the leadership level," says Our Companions CEO Susan Linker. "Henry and Katharine K. McLane were the first donors to Our Companions. They took a chance on us early on because they shared our belief that every animal deserves love, dignity, and kindness. Their support meant the world to us, and every year we celebrate their initial contribution and those of all the leadership donors who have followed."

The entire staff of Our Companions would like to thank the 2017 Henry and Katharine K. McLane Society members (listed on pages 10-14) for their generous investment in our work and for making everything we do for the people and pets we serve possible.

2017 Henry and Katharine K. McLane Society Members

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Harriet Hesh

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When a Worm is Not a Worm

Nobody wants their pet diagnosed with worms. Worms are the parasitic creatures many pet owners fear, especially two types, roundworm and tapeworm, that are found visually in feces or vomit – often alive and crawling! But ringworm, often mistakenly thought to be a worm due to its descriptive name is not actually a worm. In fact, it is not even caused by a worm and has nothing to do with worms.

Ringworm (dermatophytosis) is a fungal infection of the surface layers of the skin, hair and nails. Dermatophytes are fungal organisms that cause ringworm and originate in warm, damp soil. Fungal spores attach to a pet's (or human's) skin and hair cells. They rapidly reproduce and are easily transmitted by direct contact or simply by touching contaminated surfaces, for example a tool used while gardening. Ringworm is more frequently seen in cats, particularly the young or those with compromised immune systems, although dogs and other animals are also affected. Not only is ringworm highly contagious between animals, even of different species, it is also considered a zoonotic disease – meaning it can be transmitted from animals to humans. Transmission can even occur human to human.

Signs of Ringworm

Ringworm's namesake circle of raised red skin lesions is the hallmark of the infection in humans. Signs of ringworm in animals may not be as obvious, as these lesions do not always appear or are concealed by the animal's fur. Patchy hair loss is a more common sign and occurs when spores infect individual hair shafts causing them to become fragile and easily broken.

The following are typical signs of ringworm:

- Dandruff
- Patches of fur loss

- Scabby crusted skin
- Broken hair stubs
- Dry scaly skin
- Red lesions especially on the head, chest, tail and back
- Skin thickening and discoloration
- Excessive grooming and scratching
- Pitted scaly claws or infected nail beds

Diagnostics

Physical examination and testing are performed to rule out other causes of skin conditions such as allergies or mites. If ringworm is suspected, your veterinarian will scan the cat's entire coat in a darkened room with a hand-held ultraviolet light called a Wood's Lamp. In positive ringworm cases, the presence of fungus is revealed, as it glows fluorescent yellow-green.

While the Wood's Lamp remains a useful screening method, the possibility of false-negative results and occasionally even false-positives, warrants additional testing. Fungal cultures often provide a more accurate diagnosis. Samples of fur and skin debris are plucked off the cat and placed in a culture medium, which is observed daily for fungal growth and, if found, examined under a microscope for presence of ringworm spores. Positive results may be confirmed in as little as two days, however, it may take up to 14 days or longer. Unfortunately, false-negative cultures may also occur.

Skin biopsies can be performed if testing proves inconclusive. This provides a more definitive diagnosis but typically requires sedation. In some suspected ringworm cases, treatment is initiated to gauge response before undergoing biopsy procedures.

Treatment

Treating ringworm not only addresses the affected pet but also minimizes the spread of

infection to humans and other pets. Treatment is a lengthy process and may take months to completely resolve. In the meantime affected pets remain contagious generally for a period of three weeks while undergoing aggressive therapy, or an extended period of time with minimal treatment. Mild infections may resolve with ointments or creams alone, however, typically a combination of anti-fungal oral medication in conjunction with topicals and specially medicated shampoos and dips are administered to fully eradicate ringworm. Whole-body shaving, especially for long-haired cats is beneficial for ease and increased effectiveness of treatment. Prescribed regimens should be followed exactly, for six weeks minimum, as stopping sooner may cause recurrence. During treatment, follow-up fungal cultures are obtained until two consecutive negative cultures indicate success.

Fungal spores are shed easily and can remain indoors or out for a year or longer. Cleaning the environment is important to avoid further contamination and prevent recurrence of the infection. Remove contaminated hair by the following methods:

- Vacuum carpets and furniture
- Damp mop tile or wood flooring daily
- Steam clean carpeted areas regularly
- Disinfect surfaces with a diluted water/bleach mixture
- Remove hair and debris from grooming brushes and combs
- Clean pet food bowls, clothing, bedding and towels regularly

Managing ringworm cases in multiple-cat households, as well as animal shelters or kennel facilities, is especially complicated due to the difficulty of containing the spread of infection.

Exposure to ringworm does not necessarily mean a person or pet will become infected. Many factors contribute such as age, health status, and the amount of contaminants in the environment. If you discover skin lesions or suspect a possible ringworm infection on yourself or family members, call your physician and seek veterinary care for your pet. No one wants to suffer the unpleasant effects of ringworm – even if it is not an actual worm.



Technically Speaking is written by Certified Veterinary Technician, Lyn T. Garson, to address basic information on animal health issues and how they needn't be barriers to adopting a great pet.

To submit a question for consideration in a future edition of Technically Speaking, call us at 860-242-9999, ext. 301, or e-mail editor@ourcompanions.org.



The birds and the bees are in full swing this spring, and kitten season is upon us. This means lots of happy households will be growing with the addition of a kitten or two. Kittens bring such bright, cheerful energy into a home, yet sometimes we don't think about how they learn their typical cat behaviors. It turns out that allowing kittens to have adequate time with their birth mothers is the key to their eventual healthy adjustment to a home life with humans and other animals.

Not all kittens are so fortunate. Sadly, some are orphaned before their mother has had a chance to nurse and raise them properly – either as a result of her premature death or some other unfortunate event. Why is this mother-baby bond so important to a cat's healthy development, and what challenges do orphaned kittens face? Karen Aseltine, Our Companions' feline behavioral expert, offers some helpful insights on this subject.

The Ideal Situation

Without question, a kitten gets its best start when allowed to grow and develop within the feline family unit for their first twelve weeks of life. A mother cat provides all of the necessary physical care to their offspring; milk supplies essential nutrients; tongue baths keep them clean; and her presence protects them from predators. She is their first role model – kittens learn a lot from their mother about how to survive, how to use a litter box, and how to deal with minor stressors. The sense of security that the mother cat provides her kittens also enriches their emotional development. Under her watchful eye, and benefitting from her direction and discipline, kittens learn how to react to people and other animals.

Socialization is critical, and kitten siblings



teach each other how to behave around other cats, as well as humans. As in the case of human children, their play sessions help prepare them for “the real world,” and a mother cat will usually intervene if they start to play too rough.

Potential Fostering Challenges

Orphaned kittens miss out on being taught these critical life lessons the natural way, and have to be reared by humans. Fostering kittens is both a challenging and rewarding task for those who take it on. While human caregivers' efforts won't ever rival those provided by a dutiful mother cat, we can do a fairly decent job, particularly if we avoid certain pitfalls.

One thing to be wary of is that if kittens receive too much attention, with little to no direction or discipline, they can form attachment issues. Caregivers can inadvertently encourage overreliance, leading the kitten to bond so dependently that they form separation anxiety. They might also develop and exhibit bullying behaviors toward any critter who dares to steal the caregiver's attention or affections.

Normal kittens nurse with their cat mothers not only during feeding times, but also when seek-

ing comfort, closeness, and stress release. Orphaned kittens don't have this outlet, and often redirect this suckling drive toward humans, their litter mates, or through strange compensatory behaviors, such as compulsive sucking or licking of blankets, particularly wool blankets. Without a feline mother to bond with, orphaned kittens' mental and social development are much slower. A mother cat gives baths not only to keep her kittens clean, but also as a means of bonding with them. This lack of bonding for an orphaned kitten can lead to timid, fearful, and aggressive behaviors as the cat grows up. They might play too roughly with other cats, or be terrified of every new stimulus, or have trouble learning new skills.

The Good News

With proper socialization from surrogate cat mothers or human caregivers, many kittens can overcome these obstacles. While a lot of behaviors are genetically pre-programmed, we can assist on the “nurture” side of things to overcome any deficiencies of “nature.” Even if they don't have all of their social signals figured out and may even have a few behavioral quirks, with the right guidance and emotional support, orphaned kittens can grow to be purrfect companions.

If you find yourself in a situation where you are raising an orphaned kitten, be sure to contact your veterinarian to learn about the kitten's physical needs; and feel free to reach out to Our Companions so we can share more detailed information on how you can provide your kitten with all it needs to become a happy, well-adjusted member of the family.



Karen Aseltine is the Feline Behavior Manager and Caregiver at the Our Companions Sanctuary. Karen is a Certified Cat Behavior Counselor and serves as one of our resident “kitty psychologists.” She receives questions every day about cat behavior. This column will highlight the most commonly asked questions.

To submit a question for consideration in a future edition of *The Scoop*, call us at 860-242-9999, ext. 301, or e-mail editor@ourcompanions.org.



Having recently adopted a retired racing greyhound named Trudy, my wife and I were eager to learn how best to interact with her, ensure that she is comfortable in her new home, and give her the best shot at learning appropriate behaviors. One of the practices we were told to avoid is "collar grabbing." Marie Joyner, Canine Operations Director at Our Companions, offers the following advice on the subject as well as possible alternative practices that will be more effective in dealing with your canine companion.

Why Dogs Dislike Collar Grabbing

Due to a multitude of factors, some dogs are highly sensitive to having their collar touched. Typically, this sensitivity results from a negative association they have formed with collar grabbing in the past.

We humans tend to use the collar as a control mechanism to prevent our canine companions from performing an unwanted behavior or as a way to direct dogs to desired locations. For example, if a dog is barking at a gate at the sight of a human it does not recognize, a dog owner may grab their collar to restrain them or keep them from going outside; or the collar grab may be used to direct a dog away from an off-limits area of the home. Likewise, collars tend to be grabbed by humans when crating a dog or departing a location. In such cases, the collar grabbing is likely being linked, in the dog's mind, with negative consequences.

For older dogs or rescues, collar grabbing may exacerbate negative associations that were created due to over-handling as a puppy or during an abusive period in the rescue's life prior to its being adopted. In the case of especially fearful or collar-sensitive dogs, having a human grab



them from behind by the collar may cause an instant reaction such as growling, snapping, or biting. In fact, an estimated 20 percent of dog bites occur as a result of a person's attempting to grab a dog's collar or scruff.

Preventing and Managing Collar Sensitivity

Ideally, it's best not to grab a dog's collar or neck area when attempting to crate them, reprimand them, or drag them away from something they may interpret as pleasant. Instead, dog owners can use different tactics such as luring the dog with treats and using enthusiastic commands for redirection.

Desensitizing dogs to collar-touching may be effective in reducing their associated stress or anxiety. To accomplish this, practice proactive, casual collar-touching with your dog in the comfort of your own home, independent of trigger situations, and reward your dog when they allow you to place your hands near their collar. This practice is best performed by the dog's primary handler, as this individual already possesses a strong bond with the animal that will facilitate learning.

As always, Our Companions offers a broad range of tips through its very popular dog training classes. If you are struggling with canine behavioral issues, such as collar grabbing-associated aggression, don't feel discouraged. Sign up for a training class that both you and your dog will enjoy. It's a relatively small investment that will benefit you and your pet for years to come.



Our Companions Canine Operations Director, Marie Joyner, receives questions every day about dogs and their behavioral issues. Marie's Den answers some of the more commonly asked questions.

To submit a question for consideration in a future edition of Marie's Den, call us at 860-242-9999, ext. 301, or e-mail editor@ourcompanions.org

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