



THE ANIMAL WELFARE LEAGUE OF ALEXANDRIA

# SPOTLIGHT

o.n a.n.i.m.a.l.s

IN OUR 42nd YEAR

SPRING 1988

## A SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION AT THE FUN DOG SHOW

*If you are thinking about adding a pet to your family, please consider visiting the Alexandria Animal Shelter. There are cats and dogs of all sizes, colors, ages, and breeds awaiting anxiously to be adopted into loving homes. These animals are bright, healthy and alert; many dogs are already house trained and some dogs are even obedience trained.*

*The struggle to eliminate the terrible abuse inflicted on animals by human ignorance, cruelty and neglect will never end. One way to continue this effort after you are gone is to remember the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria in your will.*

*The biggest single cause for the tremendous overpopulation of dogs and cats is the failure of pet owners to have their animals spayed or neutered. The Shelter staff has the very difficult task of euthanizing dozens of young healthy, but UNWANTED animals every week. Please, be a responsible pet owner. Have your pet altered.*

*Heart worm is very prevalent in this area. Every dog should be checked for heartworm in the early spring. If you have not already done so, please consult your veterinarian about this potentially fatal disease.*

*In our last edition of SPOTLIGHT ON ANIMALS, we asked our readers to call or write to the Hartz Mountain Corporation and urge that its new flea and tick spray "Blockade" be removed from the stores because of many reported cases of animals dying after "Blockade" was applied. We are very pleased to report that in a March 8 letter to the League, Hartz stated that it "... decided to temporarily remove the product (Blockade) from sale until additional test results are evaluated."*

*If you see a stranger pick up a loose dog or cat, ask him/her why the animal is being picked up, and try to get the person to provide identification. Note the appearance of the person and the animal; write down the description and the license number of the vehicle. If the vehicle has out-of-state plates, or does not have a local decal, be particularly suspicious. Do not hesitate to call the police immediately if you have any doubts at all about the motives of the person. Remember, there is a very active market for stolen animals—both dogs and cats.*

## Becoming One of the Family



*"B.J." poses with Mrs. McIntyre and her daughters.*

photo by Larry Davis

one, "B.J." apparently had seriously injured his leg prior to coming to the Shelter; shortly after being adopted he damaged the earlier injury and began limping badly. Extensive surgery was required to properly mend the earlier untreated injury, and a pin had to be inserted in his leg. After a lengthy recuperation "B.J." appeared to be on the way to recovery and a normal healthy life in a good home.

This unfortunate creature who already experienced so much neglect and pain in his life soon had another crisis to endure. The pin that had been inserted in the injured leg had worked loose and had broken through the skin. "B.J.'s" owner, although wanting to care for him, was unable to bear any additional expense for the dog, so "B.J." was returned to the Shelter. The League rushed "B.J." to the veterinarian and his leg was again treated.

The League Adoption Officer began to search for a new home for "B.J." On March 12, "B.J." and four of his Shelter buddies were introduced to the people watching and participating in our Fun Dog Show at Market Square. Mr. and Mrs. Andrew McIntyre and their family immediately fell in love with "B.J.," and as daughters Jeni, Shannon and Michele hugged the big Shepherd, Mr. and Mrs. McIntyre filled out the application forms.

After a month together the McIntyre family said, "B.J." is wonderful. He has adjusted perfectly and has become one of the family. He still has a slight limp, but we've noticed a big improvement."

Last summer a male German Shepherd was found wandering the streets of Alexandria and was brought to the Shelter as a stray. He was hungry, tired, and his coat was filthy. At the Shelter he was bathed, fed, and provided a clean, quiet place to rest. During his medical examination it was discovered that this handsome dog had heartworm, a potentially fatal disease. The League paid for his treatment, and "B.J." (the name given by the Shelter staff) recovered completely.

"B.J." was soon adopted but his troubles were not over. Unknown to any-

## Should You Spay Your Pet? A Very Important Question

by Mary W. Keisler, DVM  
Old Town Veterinary Hospital



As spring begins to blossom and many of the female dogs and cats begin their heat cycles, I am often asked the question whether or not one should spay their pet. In the majority of cases, my answer is a resounding yes! The following article will help explain my reasons.

The spay or ovariectomy is a surgical procedure in which the animal is placed under a general anesthetic in order to remove the ovaries and uterus. Your pet is usually hospitalized for 1 to 2 days. In general, the recovery period is about 1 to 2 weeks. Most pets appear a little sluggish the first 4 to 5 days after surgery. Although there is a small risk involved with the general anesthetic, the number of animals which may have a problem with the anesthetic is very small compared to the number of animals which will have problems if they are not spayed. Except for a possible increased tendency to gain weight, most animals show no behavioral changes compared to nonspayed females.

In the normal female, the primary reason for being spayed is to prevent the heat cycle. In dogs the heat cycle includes a bloody discharge, attraction of male dogs, accidental matings, pregnancy and unwanted puppies. Most female dogs have 2 heat cycles a year with each cycle lasting about 3 weeks.

Cats' heat cycles are a little different. Many cats can go in and out of heat every 3 weeks. Their cycles usually begin in late winter or early spring and last throughout the summer. Most of the heat cycles last about 1-2 weeks. Their is usually no bloody discharge but instead a marked behavioral change. Many females become quite vocal and affectionate. Many owners report their cats are constantly rolling on the floor, brushing against their legs or crying. There is much more variation in the heat cycles of cats than dogs and each cat can be different.

Approximately 20 million pets in the United States are euthanatized (put to sleep) each year or die from exposure, starvation or trauma. Most animals euthanatized at humane shelters are healthy but abandoned or unwanted pets. Efforts by many, including humane societies and veterinarians, to encourage owners to neuter their pets have resulted in 30% fewer dogs and 37% fewer cats impounded by humane organizations in 1982 than in 1972. In spite of this improvement, the number of pets needing homes far exceeds the number of humans able to provide lasting and loving care.

Most dogs go through their first heat cycle between 7 and 12 months of age. The smaller breeds tend to mature earlier than the larger breeds. Most cats have their first heat cycle sometimes after 6 months of age. There are exceptions to this, however. The best time to spay your pet is shortly after they turn 6 months of age and *before* they go into their first heat. Previously it was believed that every female should go through at least 1 heat cycle to allow development of their female characteristics. Recent studies have shown that this is not true and that by spaying an animal before her first heat cycle there is a significant decrease in risk of mammary cancer. As individual situations may vary, your veterinarian should be consulted about when the surgery should be scheduled. If a dog has already had a heat cycle then the best time for spaying is about 2-3 months after completion of their heat cycle. Spaying during a heat cycle should be avoided unless prescribed by your veterinarian. As cats may go in and out of heat every 3 weeks, it may be difficult to find a time when they are not in heat. If this is the situation, I usually recommend spaying the cat about 1 week after her heat cycle.

Besides preventing the heat cycle and unwanted pregnancy, there are several important health reasons to spay a female dog or cat. These reasons include prevention of mammary cancer, uterine infections, and ovarian tumors. Other medical indications for spaying occur but will not be expanded upon at this time.

Mammary cancer is the most frequently occurring neoplasm in the female dog, and the third most frequently occurring tumor in the female cat. Studies have shown that female dogs spayed before any heat cycle have only 5 percent of the risk of having mammary cancer as intact bitches. A sparing effect on mammary cancer has been noted in any female dog spayed prior to experiencing 2 or

more cycles. Overall, spayed females have 12 percent of the mammary cancer risk of intact animals. Once mammary gland cancer is found, in most cases an ovariectomy should be performed with the mammary gland removal. This does not stop the cancerous process of the mammary glands but helps prevent other reproductive tract diseases. Some malignant mammary tumors have been found to be hormonal dependent. With these tumors spaying can be especially beneficial.

Pyometra is a life-threatening condition of the canine uterus in which the uterus becomes infected and filled with pus. For approximately 9-12 weeks following ovulation in each heat cycle, the progesterone hormone level is greatly increased. During this period, progesterone increases growth of the lining of the uterus and promotes glandular fluid secretion. These secretions promote an excellent environment for bacterial growth. Progesterone also decreases the ability of the uterus to fight infection. If an animal is given a mating injection (after an unwanted breeding), the potential for a pyometra is even greater. Pyometra develops most commonly in females that are six years of age or older. Dogs that have had one or more pregnancies appear to be no less susceptible. Clinical signs of the disease occur most commonly 5-6 weeks following their heat cycle. The uterus becomes filled with pus and if left untreated, many patients will die. Unfortunately, medical treatment such as antibiotics usually is not effective. The most effective and often the only treatment is an emergency ovariectomy. Obviously surgery at this time has a much greater risk but often cannot be avoided. Considering the large percentages of pyometras that occur, even pets used for breeding should be spayed after they are no longer being bred.

Ovarian, uterine and cervical tumors in dogs and cats are fairly uncommon when compared to mammary cancer. Most affected pets are between the ages of 5 and 15 years. About 10-15 percent of these tumors found are malignant. Fortunately, most of these tumors do not spread rapidly. Treatment of these tumors involves surgical removal.

Considering the many unwanted pregnancies and the prevention of mammary cancer, pyometra, and reproductive tract tumors, the question of whether to spay is very important. Every pet owner should be well informed of the risks and problems of not spaying, and unless one is committed to breeding, the spay procedure should be strongly considered.

## Walk, Don't Jog

Does your dog really enjoy jogging with you? Of course all dogs enjoy being with humans under almost all circumstances, but a more important question is, should your dog jog?

Unlike humans, dogs do not perspire. The only way a dog can dissipate heat is by the exchange of air through breathing or panting. This is not an efficient way to dissipate the constant high heat which builds up in a dog's body during strenuous exercise such as long runs. Obviously in hot weather the heat build-up intensifies and the possibility of heat stroke develops.

Dogs by nature are not "distance runners"; they are "sprinters." Of course, breeding techniques in a few breeds have increased the distance capabilities for some dogs; however, the bone and muscle structure, cardiovascular capability, and lung capacity make most dogs poor "distance runners." Their bodies simply are not structured for endurance runs (jogging).

Add to these concerns the problems of the dog's feet. When you jog, the bottoms of your feet are cushioned with heavy socks and high-quality Nikes or Reeboks. The dog has only the pads that nature provided. These pads offer excellent protection for walking or perhaps scampering around the back yard, but they are not suitable for long runs on hot pavement or gravel.

Dogs, like humans, should get regular, proper exercise; but remember, dogs are not humans. Their bodies and capabilities are different. The best exercise for your healthy dog is to gradually build up his endurance so that both of you are comfortable with a daily long walk in the cool of early morning or late evening. It may not be as exciting as jogging, but if you really care about your dog, don't expect him to do things that his body simply was not designed to do.

## Canines in Competition

The Animal Welfare League held its annual Fun Dog Show at Market Square Saturday morning, March 12. The show was part of the all-day St. Patrick's Day festivities organized by the Ballyshaners, a local Irish organization. Under a bright sunny sky, the enthusiastic crowd of over 1,000 people watched, cheered, applauded, and laughed as 113 dogs appeared in the competition. The 25 categories included the biggest dog, the smallest dog, the dog with the curliest tail, the "most Irish dog," and the dog with the most unusual eyes. District Judge Daniel F. O'Flaherty was the judge, and Mr. Jerry Kamins was master of ceremonies.

One highlight of the morning was the introduction of five beautiful young dogs from the Animal Shelter. These frolicking, healthy young canines stole the hearts of the many dog-lovers and four adoption applications were quickly submitted.

In addition to the dog competition,



"Blue," a handsome mixed-breed canine, adopted from the Shelter, proudly displays the award he won in our Fun Dog Show. With "Blue" (left to right) are Pat Troy, owner of Ireland's Own Restaurant and St. Patrick's Day Parade Chairman; Millie Bobbitt, "Blue's" owner; and District Judge Daniel F. O'Flaherty, who judged the show.

the League distributed literature on humane education, how to prevent the loss of a dog, and general information on the Animal Welfare League and its numerous services in Alexandria.

## Hot Weather Tips for Animal Owners

The buds have appeared on the trees, the tulips have bloomed, and the azaleas are ready to decorate the Alexandria scene. Yes, warm weather has arrived. As this warm weather saturates the area, it is necessary to talk about dogs in hot cars. Every year we see the same scene in shopping center parking lots throughout Northern Virginia: A dog that was left in the car—"just for a few minutes"—gasping for a breath of cool air as the temperature in the car soars to an unbearable intensity. There is no doubt that these dog owners are probably well intentioned when they take their "best friend" for a ride to the store. But the sad fact is these dogs could suffer terribly, and then die—YES, DIE—in such situations. In a car with the window slightly opened, and parked in the shade on an 85° day, the temperature will reach 102° in less than 10 minutes. A dog simply cannot survive in such an oven-like intensity.

If you truly love your dog, please leave him home in hot weather. Your dog will be much happier and healthier at home in a cool spot with plenty of fresh water. Be a caring and responsible pet owner!

If you are concerned about dogs being left in cars in hot weather, and would like to receive literature on the subject, or perhaps be willing to distribute flyers/posters warning people about the danger, please call the League at 370-4498 and leave your name and address. We will mail the material to you.

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

**Animal Groomers.** Duties: To bathe and groom the animals at the Shelter to help make them more adoptable. No previous grooming experience required. Time commitment: 2 to 3 hours per day, one or more days per month.

**Assistant Adoption Officers.** Duties: To work in the Shelter assisting people in the selection of animals and the processing of adoption and spay/neuter applications. Time commitment: 2 to 3 hours per day, one or more days per month.

**Drivers for Wildlife.** Duties: To drive orphaned or injured wildlife from the Shelter to wildlife rehabilitators in the Alexandria area. Time commitment: one hour per day, one or more days per month.

If you want to help us help animals, and you can give a few hours a month for any of the three programs mentioned above, please call the League at 370-4498. We will give you the details.

#### MAIL TO:

Animal Welfare League of Alexandria  
P.O. Box 20050, Alexandria, VA 22320

YES, I CARE ABOUT ANIMALS AND I WANT TO SUPPORT THE LEAGUE IN ITS WORK.

Enclosed is my check for my 1988 membership dues.

\$15 Individual       \$25 Family       \_\_\_\_\_ Special Gift

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The League is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization established in 1946.

# Feline T-Lymphotropic Virus in Cats

by Cat Cockburn, DVM

*Note: This article was prepared by Dr. Cat Cockburn for SPOTLIGHT ON ANIMALS. The article is intended primarily for veterinarians. Questions or comments should be directed to Dr. Cockburn at the Alexandria Animal Hospital.*

Recently, several cases of Feline T-Lymphotropic virus infections have been documented at the Alexandria Animal Hospital. The typical case is an older outdoor cat with periodontal disease, chronic recurring upper respiratory infections, and anemia. All cases seen have tested feline leukemia virus negative. This report is to inform you of the nature of the virus, etiology, suspected pathogenesis, course of the disease and typical outcome. Information regarding the laboratory performing the test, cost of the test, and the sample required is included at the end of the text.

Retroviruses, RNA viruses with reverse transcriptase activity, have been classified into three families. The feline leukemia (FeLV) and the feline sarcoma virus (FeSV) belong to the retroviral subfamily of oncornaviruses which are characterized by induction of the tumors in the host animal. The feline syncytia-forming virus (FeSfV) is a member of the subfamily spumaviruses which appear to not induce disease in the host, yet produce persistent infections. A recently isolated feline retrovirus, feline T-lymphotropic virus (FTLV) has been characterized as a member of lentiviruses, the third subfamily of retroviruses. Lentivirus infections are typically characterized by a prolonged asymptomatic period of latent infection, followed by induction of clinical syndromes including oral disease, encephalopathies, pneumonia, rheumatoid-like arthritis, and immunodeficiency

states. Lentivirus infections persist in the host and do not resolve.

FTLV was initially isolated from cats in a northern California cattery suffering an array of various infectious disorders. Death in ten cats from the same pen was preceded by clinical syndromes including severe anemias, chronic respiratory infections, suppurative pyodermas, otitis externa, chronic diarrhea, emaciation and severe periodontal disease. An immunofluorescence assay utilizing FTLV infected lymphocytes was developed to detect seropositive cats from this same northern California cattery. This same immunofluorescence assay is currently utilized as the diagnostic assay for detecting FTLV infection. An ELISA test for detection of antibody to FTLV will soon be available.

The most common clinical syndromes so far observed in seropositive pet cats include chronic upper respiratory infections, severe periodontal disease and stomatitis, chronic diarrhea and wasting, and unexplained fever. Chronic pyodermas, acute necrotizing enteritis, military dermatitis, chronic abscesses, anemia and lymphomas have also been reported. These clinical syndromes are often associated in some cats with FeLV infections. Neurologic signs have also been observed in a small percentage of seropositive cats and include dementia, aggressive behavior, psychomotor abnormalities, and convulsions.

Ongoing studies involving experimental inoculation of specific pathogen free kittens with FTLV has provided some insights into the acute and early stages of FTLV infection. In the early stages of FTLV infection of experimentally inoculated cats, generalized peripheral lymphadenopathy, transient neutropenia, fever, and superficial bacterial infections have been observed. The neutropenia, fever and lymphadenopathy are followed by a disease-free period of undetermined length. A prolonged

asymptomatic period of viral infection is a consistent finding in lentivirus infections in other species, including the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection in man, where the virus can remain in a latent state for five years or longer after the appearance of seroconversion.

Epidemiological studies are in progress and have yet to be completed. Results of an ongoing serosurvey evaluating serum samples from cats with chronic illness indicate that approximately fifteen to twenty percent suffer FTLV infection. It should be noted that this study is examining a high risk or ill population of cats and that this figure does not reflect the incidence in the general population of cats. Currently, cats seropositive for FTLV have been found in all regions of the United States. Seropositive cats have also been located in Japan, Great Britain and Europe. Seropositive cats tend to be older outdoor cats in rural environments. Mode of transmission has not been determined, but close and prolonged contact with an FTLV-infected cat apparently appears to be necessary for transmission. Inoculation via bite wounds may be necessary. Vertical transmission from an infected queen to her kittens has not been documented.

Like FeLV infections, FTLV infections can be treated only symptomatically with fluid therapy, antibiotics as necessary and other supportive measures. Until more is known about transmission of FTLV, isolation of infected cats is recommended.

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