



Im-purrfect Perceptions of Cats May Be Costing Them Their Lives *Survey Identifies Negative Attitudes and Potential Groups for Ownership*

Denver/Dec. 9, 2009 — Misunderstandings and myths often give cats a bad rap—and may even be costing them their lives. Although more cats than dogs live in U.S. homes, fewer of them receive veterinary care, less health research is conducted on their behalf, and most cats that enter shelters are euthanized. A recent online survey sponsored by [Morris Animal Foundation](#), the [American Pet Products Association](#) and [Maddie's Fund](#) gathered information about perceptions of cats and likelihood of cat ownership among non-cat owners. If envisioning the typical cat owner brings to mind the “crazy old cat lady,” prepare to be surprised. View the survey summary at www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org/cattitudes.

The bad news is that more than half of those surveyed had an overall negative attitude toward cats. Top drivers for negative opinions were litter box smell, shedding, unprovoked biting and a perceived inability for cats to get along with other pets. The three top-rated negative behaviors cited were “jumps on counters/tables,” “scratches furniture” and “spits up hairballs.”

“Interestingly, the primary negative factors for not owning a cat can be readily addressed with appropriate behavioral training, scratching posts and specific diets,” said Patricia N. Olson, DVM, PhD, president and CEO of the Foundation. “If people had a better understanding of feline health and behavior, they might be more willing to adopt a cat.”

The good news: about 10 percent of the non-cat owners surveyed would definitely or probably consider having a cat, and an additional 12 percent would maybe consider having a cat. Top factors driving positive opinions about cats included the match between a cat and a person's lifestyle and a cat as being a potentially good pet for children. The three top-rated positive behaviors cited included “likes to play,” “entertains itself” and “makes people smile.”

The 2009–2010 National Pet Owners Survey, reported by the American Pet Products Association, stated that 38.2 million U.S. households own 94 million cats. If 10 percent of households not owning a cat adopted one, an additional 6.2 million cats might find a home.

So who might welcome a feline friend into their home? The survey indicates groups, perhaps not considered before, who may be interested in cat adoption. Going against the stereotype of the “crazy old cat lady,” men were more likely than women to consider a cat, and younger respondents had a more positive attitude toward cats than did older respondents. More information on groups inclined to adopt a cat is available in the survey summary at www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org.

“Many of the negative attitudes indicated in the survey responses are based on stereotypes and misperceptions of feline behavior,” Olson said. “Studies have shown that cats significantly benefit human health and well-being, so if we as a society could work to eliminate the negativity surrounding cats, both cats and humans would reap the benefits.”

Morris Animal Foundation previously worked with veterinary, corporate and individual partners to determine why fewer scientists are studying cats (relative to dogs) and to find solutions to that problem. The result of those efforts led to the [Happy Healthy Cat Campaign](#), which launched November 2008 to increase funding for feline health and welfare research and for training of new feline-focused scientists. This 2009 survey was part of the campaign.

Media Contact:

Heidi Jeter, director of marketing and communications
hjeter@MorrisAnimalFoundation.org, 303.243.2345

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