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Behavior research for dogs

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Animal Shelter Enrichment Protocols for Dogs

Janet M. Scarlett, DVM, PhD, Cornell University

Nearly completed

Description:

An estimated 4 million dogs annually enter animal shelters in the United States. More than one-third of them, often healthy, adoptable animals, are euthanized because of limited homes and shelter space. Poor behavior is a primary reason for relinquishing a dog, and it also decreases an animal's adoptability. Many shelters have launched behavioral enrichment programs to help prevent problems and enhance the welfare of dogs in shelters. This study will evaluate the benefits of enrichment programs and how they may reduce stress for dogs, enhance adoptability, shorten the dog's time in the shelter and improve behavior and retention in homes after adoption. Understanding the effectiveness of these programs will provide optimum care for dogs in shelters and should minimize the behavioral problems that lead to failed adoptions.

Development and Testing of a Behavioral Screening Tool for Dogs Relinquished to Shelters

James Serpell, PhD, University of Pennsylvania

Ongoing—needs sponsorship

Description:

Canine behavioral problems are one of the primary reasons dogs are relinquished to shelters, where they often must be euthanized. Nearly half of owners cite behavioral problems as a contributing factor to giving up a pet, and a quarter cite behavioral problems as the primary factor. Even when not specifically reported in shelter intake interviews, behavior problems are likely a contributor because they weaken the human-animal bond. Although the Canine Behavioral Assessment and Research Questionnaire (C-BARQ) has been shown to provide reliable, objective data on a dog's behavior in the home

environment, it is impractical for use as a shelter intake assessment in its current form because of its length. This study will develop a shortened version of this survey and assess the reliability of the behavioral information provided by relinquishing owners by comparing C-BARQ results with in-house temperament tests and post-adoption assessments. The goal is to help shelter staff better predict an animal's adoptability.

Color as a Determining Factor for Adoptability of Dogs from an Animal Shelter

Traci McCullough, Texas A&M University, Veterinary Student Scholar

Completed

Description:

Sadly, there is a saying by people who work at animal shelters that "no one wants a black dog" because they are ugly, and the perception is that black dogs are not adopted as easily as dogs of other colors. Some reasons given are that black dogs are not easily seen in the dark cages, are not as friendly and are not desired by people seeking to adopt a dog. This study hypothesized that color does not determine the adoptability of a dog. The student worker collected data concerning color, age, breed, health and personality of 25 dogs. After the first 25 dogs were adopted, colorful bandannas were placed on all dogs up for adoption to test whether the bandannas would increase the visibility of black dogs. The findings were then compared with the data collected on the original 25 dogs. Study findings could help black dogs become adopted more readily.

Results: Coat Color Not a Factor in Dog Adoptions

This project tested whether a black dog is less likely to be adopted and whether increased visibility of black dogs would improve their adoption rates. Data show that adopters most commonly seek small and young dogs as well as white or predominantly blue dogs. Black and tricolored dogs are near the middle regarding types of coat colors in dogs being adopted, and yellow dogs are selected least often. The use of bright yellow bandannas did not statistically increase the adoption rates of black dogs. One interesting finding was that dogs located near the front of the shelter were adopted first. This may support the theory that people tend to adopt the first dog they see. No matter what people look for in a dog, animal shelters need to recognize major adoption trends. If they can find ways maximize a dog's potential, the likelihood of its adoption increases.

Behavior research for cats

Feline Reactions to Handling During Radiographic Procedures Based on Coat Color and Other Factors

Stephanie Coffey, Texas A&M University, Veterinary Student Scholar
Completed

Description:

This project looked at how cats behave in relation to their color as well as how they react when they are admitted for radiographs. When cats need to have a radiograph, they are often frightened and may be in pain because of a medical problem. The student researcher analyzed at least 50 cats who received radiographs at the university's College of Veterinary Medicine. She recorded their sex, their color, whether or not they had claws, how healthy or sickly they looked and why the radiograph was being performed. The cats were also grouped as friendly, neutral or aggressive. The researcher then compared the groups to determine whether there are any relationships between the color of the cats and their behavior.

Results: Coat Color Linked to Behavioral Differences in Cats

A previous but yet unpublished study at Texas A&M University assessed a variety of different factors in relationship to a cat's disposition and found that color seems to influence behavior. One specific point of interest was that cats with white markings tend to be either extremely aggressive or extremely friendly, whereas cats with other colorations are more likely to be neutral or calm. This study was an extension of the previous study, and the student assessed cats' behaviors when they were put into a routine, but often stressful, situation—a radiographic evaluation. As hypothesized, 10 percent of the cats assessed were aggressive, and all of them had white markings in their coat color. This study provides a great starting place for future research into evaluating links between temperament and physical factors, such as coat color.

Behavior research for dogs and cats

Comparative Behavior of Dogs Entering an Animal Shelter that Were Surrendered versus Captured as Free Roaming

Lisa Pina, Texas A&M University, Veterinary Student Scholar
Completed

Description:

Each year many animals end up in shelters because they are strays or their owners give them up. In this study, the student evaluated possible behavioral differences between surrendered animals and strays. The animals brought to the Brazos County Animal Shelter were observed for at least 20 minutes within the first two hours of coming to the shelter. They were watched again at least 20 hours later. The animal's behavior was recorded as well as its history, specifically whether the animal was surrendered or a stray. The behavior of these two groups of animals was then compared to see if any differences exist. Ultimately, by understanding these animals' behavior, shelter staff can better handle and train them, leading to better adoptions.

Results: Behavioral Differences Identified in Dogs in Shelters

This project observed dogs as they entered a shelter to see whether stray and surrendered dogs exhibit different behaviors. The study showed no difference between the behavior of free-roaming and surrendered dogs, except when divided into the subcategories of puppies and adults. Surrendered adult dogs stayed toward the front of their cage, seeking attention from people walking by. They were also more likely to play with toys, wag their tails and jump up on cages. Free-roaming adult dogs stayed in the back of the cage more often than surrendered dogs and were more likely to whine, pace, chew, lick and bark. Puppies exhibited most of the same behaviors whether stray or free roaming, but stray puppies spent more time moving about the cage than surrendered puppies. By better understanding the behaviors exhibited by different classes of dogs entering the shelter system, shelter staff can better tailor the care, training and evaluation of these animals to find them suitable homes.

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