



Annual Review of Cases 2003

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Introduction

This APBC Annual Review of Cases, based on data submitted by participating members, has been published each year since 1994. This year, in addition to analysing trends in the data for dogs and cats collected during 2003, the use of psychotropic drugs to support behaviour modification programmes has been considered.

The purpose of the review is to examine trends in behavioural problems seen by members and to look at relationships between the presentation of certain types of behavioural problem and other aspects of pets' lives. It is not the intention of the authors to imply causal relationships between these factors and the problems, since the data are necessarily anecdotal rather than the results of controlled scientific experiment. However, anecdotal evidence is not without value, and may highlight factors that need to be taken into account when, for example, rescued dogs are re-homed, or a particular breed is recommended as a pet. It should also be born in mind that this review concerns a population of animals referred for behaviour therapy and may not reflect trends in the general population.

Cases Submitted

773 dog and 66 cat cases were used for this review as representative sample of the total seen by members of the APBC during 2003. The cases categorised by species and gender can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Cases categorised by gender and species

	Dogs		Cats	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Number of animals	429 (56%)	344 (44%)	32 (48%)	34 (52%)
% neutered	64%	71%	97%	97%
Number of Problems	910 (59%)	692 (41%)	54 (49%)	57 (51%)

The average number of problems per dog - 2.1 (2.1 for males, 2.0 for females)

The average number of problems per cat - 1.7 (1.7 for males, 1.7 for females)

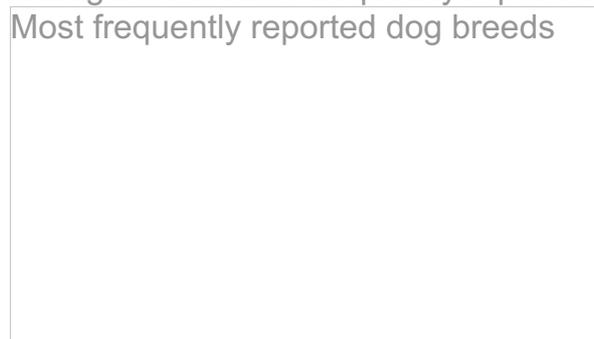
The proportion of male dogs seen falls within the range observed over the past nine years of between 58% and 64%. An increase of 4% in the proportion of bitches neutered has been observed in 2003 compared to 2002, although the proportion of dogs neutered

remains the same. For cats the proportion of males to females referred has decreased in 2003 while the amount of both sexes neutered is 97%, which falls between last year's figures of 98% for females and 96% for males.

Breeds

Mongrels and crossbreeds were, as always, the most numerous type of dog seen, accounting for 20% of all cases. It is likely that this represents the proportion of mongrels in the dog population compared to any one breed of pedigree dog. However, it is also possible that they are over-represented in the population of reported cases because mongrels and crossbreeds are more likely to be taken to and obtained from rescue centres than any individual breed of dog.

Figure 1. Dog breeds most frequently reported in 2003



As has been found for the past nine years, Border Collies and German Shepherd Dogs are among the breeds most commonly referred. This year for the first time however, there were more Labrador retrievers than German Shepherds seen, although only 2% more. This compares with 25% more German Shepherds than Labradors in previous years. It is unusual for this breed to appear in the list of most frequently seen breeds, even though they are the most common breed registered with the Kennel Club each year.

Cats

Domestic Short-haired cats are the most frequently referred type, this effect being mainly due to the high proportion in the UK population.

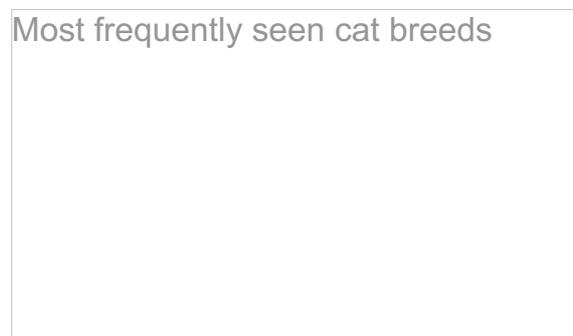


Figure 2. Breeds of cat most frequently represented in the cases reported during 2003.

Oriental breeds such as Siamese and Burmese are also quite well represented in the cat population and in the cases reported this year, while less popular types such as Maine Coon Cat and Birman occurred as single individuals.

The problem most frequently reported in canines was, as usual, aggression towards people (see Figure 3). This included aggression towards owners and members of the family, territorial behaviour, aggression to visitors within the house and aggression over food, and accounted for 40% of all problems reported in dogs and 35% in bitches. Aggression towards other dogs, including aggression to unfamiliar dogs and to other dogs in the same 'pack', both of the same sex and opposite sex made up 17% of dog cases and 18% of bitches. Separation problems, which encompassed separation anxiety, fear of a specific stimulus and occupational behaviour, gave 10% of problems reported in male dogs and 12% in females. The single most prevalent behaviour in both sexes was learned attention seeking. This type of behaviour is one which often occurs in conjunction with other problems, but taken alone it accounted for 7% and 8% of reported behaviour problems in dogs and bitches respectively.

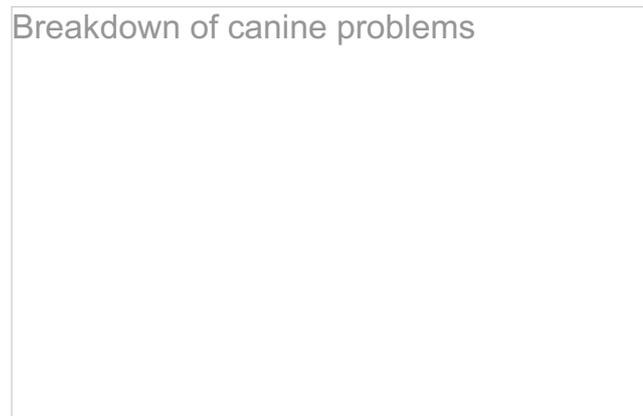


Figure 3. Breakdown of canine problems reported. Key: AP = Aggression to people; AD = Aggression to dogs; SP = Separation Problems; LA = Learned Attention Seeking; FP = Fears & Phobias; CP = Problems in the Car

Analysis of Feline Problems

In felines aggression is usually less reported than in canines, and Figure 4 shows that aggression towards people made up 23% of the problems reported, while aggression to other cats was 13%. The most commonly reported problem was indoor marking, consisting of spray and squat marking, or middening, and this made up 25% of the problems seen.

Less common problems such as attention seeking, difficulties with house training, and self-mutilation make up 6%, 5% and 4% respectively.



Figure 4. Breakdown of feline problems seen. AP = aggression to people; AC = aggression to cats; FP = fears and phobias; HT = house-training problems; IM = indoor

marking; AS = attention seeking; SM = self mutilation.

Use of Medication

Psychotropic medication such as anxiolytics and antidepressants can be helpful in the resolution of certain types of behaviour problems. Although they can only be prescribed by a veterinary surgeon, those members of the APBC who are not themselves qualified in this way may confer with the referring veterinary surgeon as to whether medication is appropriate in support of behaviour modification. Such medication is, with few exceptions, prescribed only for use in conjunction with an appropriate behaviour modification. Drugs alone are unlikely to 'cure' a behaviour problem, such as a separation problem. If improvement does occur but behaviour modification is not carried out the animal is likely to revert to the problem behaviour as soon as the medication is stopped.

Pheromone diffusers are used for both dogs and cats. They have the advantage that, since the active ingredient is taken in via the Jacobson organ rather than the digestive tract or by injection, they are not likely to cause any harm to the animal and have no known side effects. They can therefore be recommended for many conditions characterised by anxiety and can be combined with other forms of medication without causing unwanted side effects or drug interactions.

The only pheromone commercially available for canine use at present is Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP). This is a synthetic preparation of a pheromone produced by lactating bitches from the mammary region. The pheromone is advertised as having a relaxing effect on adult dogs as well as pups, and can therefore help with problems caused by, or causing, anxiety.

Canines

Prior to consultation with a behaviourist 5% of dogs and 7% of bitches were taking psychotropic medication. The conditions for which these individuals were referred represented the whole spectrum of behaviour problems. After consultation, 24% and 26% respectively were prescribed medication or a pheromone diffuser by the referring veterinary surgeon to support the behaviour modification programme recommended by the behaviourist.

When particular problems are considered, it becomes apparent that some types of behaviour were more frequently prescribed drug support than others. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of cases of the four most prevalent problems, for which medication was recommended. The category of behavioural problem for which drug support was most frequently used was separation problems. Since there is a psychotropic drug which is specifically licensed for separation anxiety this is not unexpected.

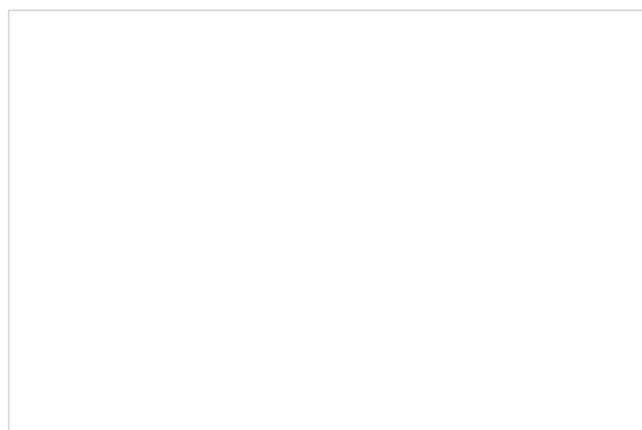


Figure 5. Percentage of cases prescribed psychotropic drugs and pheromone diffusers for particular categories of behavioural problems.

By far the greatest proportion of canines referred for separation problems were assessed by the behaviour counsellor as having problems due to over-attachment to social stimuli or to a fear of being alone due to a stimulus that causes distress. A smaller number of individuals showed fear of a specific stimulus when alone or occupational behaviours such as chewing. This distribution of cases was reflected in the prescription of licensed medication with anxiolytic properties that helps to reduce dependence on social stimuli. Those canines whose separation problems appeared to be due to other causes were generally recommended a DAP diffuser.

Fears and phobias can also respond to treatment with anxiolytic drugs combined with behaviour modification such as desensitisation and counter-conditioning programmes. For these dogs the medication used may be a tranquilliser or sedative given on an 'as required' basis. In addition pheromone diffusers are advertised as being effective for sound phobias, so are often suggested for this type of problem, either alone or in conjunction with other medication.

Generally aggression is not treated with psychotropic drugs. This may be because some such drugs are reported to have a disinhibiting effect on the dog and may therefore increase aggression. The exception is when the animal is also treated for fear or anxiety related problems, such as sound phobias and separation anxiety that may be related to the aggression. Similarly, where aggression was fear-based a pheromone diffuser was sometimes thought to be helpful.

There is no clear correlation between the original environment of the puppy and the later necessity for medication. If the originating environment of those treated with drugs or a pheromone is examined separately it can be seen (Figure 6) that animals obtained from a rescue situation were prescribed more psychotropic drugs than those from other environments, but that pheromone diffusers were recommended for more individuals who were obtained from a domestic environment.

Figure 6

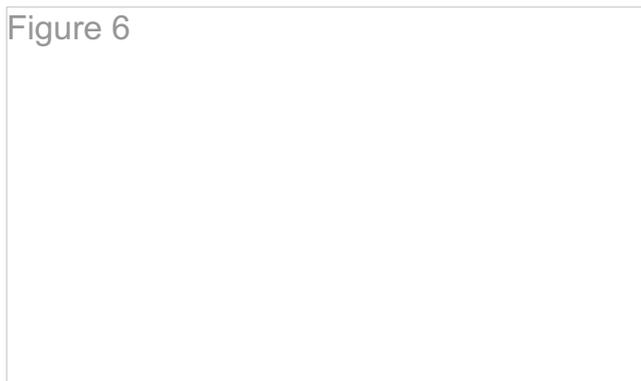


Figure 6. Proportion of canines treated with psychotropic drugs or pheromone diffusers compared with environment the animals were obtained from.

However, when the two categories of treatment are amalgamated as in Figure 7, it can be seen that canines from rescue situations were prescribed more treatment overall, though by rather a small margin. The effect of the originating environment is likely to be subject to age of attainment, as has been shown in previous reports, and the potential effect on the subsequent use of psychotropic drugs or diffusers needs further study.

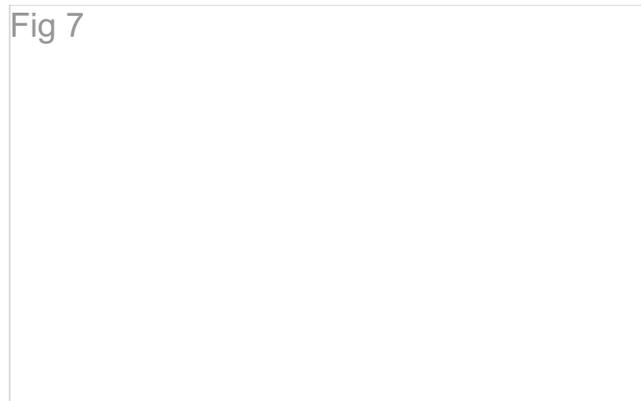


Figure 7. Treatment with both psychotropic drugs and pheromone diffusers compared with environment the animal was obtained from.

It is not possible to draw any firm conclusions from this data for several reasons. Firstly it is impossible to know the early environment of most rescue dogs; secondly the effects of being placed in a rescue situation are difficult to estimate and impossible to separate from the effects of the treatment the dog received prior to being rescued; thirdly, there may be some overlap between situations that are classified as 'Non-Domestic' and those designated 'Domestic'.

In addition, when considering all the above information about levels of prescription of drugs and diffusers it should be noted that opinion about medication for the treatment of behaviour problems varies among the community of behaviour counsellors. The use of drugs also depends on a number of factors including the willingness of both the client and the referring veterinary surgeon to use medication for this purpose.

Felines

Since so many feline behaviour problems have anxiety at their root it is no surprise to find that a greater number of cats than dogs are treated with anxiolytics or pheromones. Of the small sample represented here, 10% of individual cats were being treated with medication or diffusers before referral while after consultation 5% were prescribed anxiolytics and 59% were recommended to use a pheromone diffuser.

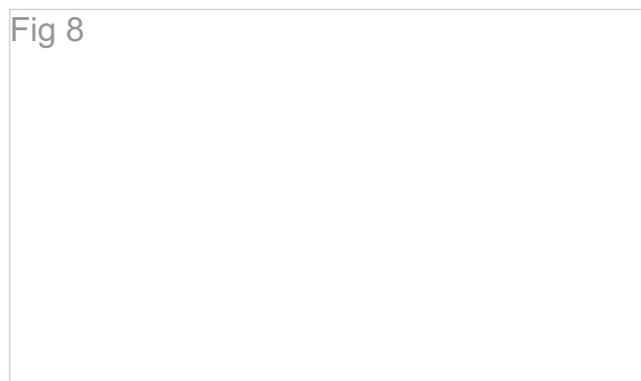


Figure 8. Proportion of problems in each category treated with drugs or medication. AP = aggression to people; AC = aggression to cats; FP = fears and phobias; HT = house-training problems; IM = indoor marking; AS = attention seeking.

As for canines, the different categories of problem were analysed separately. Figure 8 shows that the least likely problems to be treated with a diffuser or medication were aggression towards people. For the rest of the problems analysed between 70% and 80% were treated with diffusers. It is likely that this similarity is a function of the small sample

size, but it should also be noted that all but three of the individuals treated were recommended to use pheromones rather than drug treatment. Of those three, two were engaging in self-mutilation, for which anxiolytic medication can be generally particularly helpful.

The pheromone diffuser most often used for felines is Feliway, a preparation of one of the fractions of the feline facial pheromones. This is the fraction that appears to be used by the cat to increase its sense of security within its own territory. It is particularly useful in cases of indoor marking and of aggression towards cats within the same household.

Summary

Canines

- Most frequently referred canines were Mongrels, Border Collies, Labradors and German Shepherds
- Most frequently diagnosed problems were aggression towards people, aggression towards dogs and separation problems
- Problems for which psychotropic medication or pheromone diffuser were most frequently prescribed were sound phobia and separation problems
- Separation problems most commonly treated with medication were over-attachment to social stimuli or fear of being alone due to environmental stimuli.

Felines

- Most frequently referred felines were Domestic Short-Hairs, Siamese, and Burmese
- Most frequently diagnosed problems were indoor marking, aggression towards people, aggression towards cats, and fears and phobias
- Most categories of problems were treated with the support of pheromone diffusers, except for aggression towards people.