



## In This Issue

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### Dog Piece

#### Fatal Dog Attack in Colorado

Some of you may have heard about the Colorado woman who was tragically killed a few weeks ago by three pit bulls. Suzanne has been interviewed several times by both television and print media regarding the attack. She has this to say -

I've been an expert witness in two fatal dog bite cases, one in Wyoming and one in Kansas. There were breakdowns in both situations where interventions should have been done, but weren't. Both were accidents waiting to happen. This recent case may prove to be as well.

As in any serious dog bite injury case, the breed of the dogs has become an issue. Claims range from it's not a breed problem but how a dog is raised and trained, to pit bulls and other breeds are inherently dangerous and have no place in society. Loud voices are calling for everything from a repeal of breed specific bans to enactment of breed bans on a wider scale.

There's no denying that breed differences in aggressive tendencies exist. This is not the same thing as claiming that a specific breed is inherently dangerous. Certain breeds in the wrong hands however, are more likely to end up being dangerous.

Effectively preventing fatal and serious dog attacks will require multi-faceted programs that go well beyond focusing on the breed issue. Based on our experience and review of the dog bite literature, Dan and I have put together our ideas for steps we think could be helpful.

1. Work with local authorities to create effective, but fair, animal control ordinances. Better definitions of "dangerous dog" are needed that are not based on the "one free bite" idea or on vague wording such as approaching someone in an

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#### Our Piece

**Question: My four year old neutered male Jack Russell Terrier has been walking up to people when at the local doggie park, lifting his leg and urinating on them. He hasn't been discriminatory - he's peed on both men and women. He's housetrained and seems to love people. Why is he doing this?**

It's most likely that this JRT is urine marking people at the park. Dogs show the same behavior when they lift their legs and pee on bushes, sign posts and fire hydrants. Urine marking is a form of olfactory communication.

It's not clear what dogs are trying to communicate when they urine mark. Think of it as your dog leaving his business card that contains personal identification information (in chemical form) for others to read. Dogs can learn about each other's reproductive status (in heat or not in heat, mature or juvenile, neutered or intact).

Why would this JR want to urine mark people? The short answer is we don't know. It doesn't seem to be that the dog dislikes the person. No matter how gross this seems to us, we have to remember that dogs don't think about pee as something disgusting. It's just something they use to communicate.

In our experience, dogs are more likely to mark people they don't know well. Often, these folks are dog owners as well, and have doggie smells. It's possible that these doggie odors trigger the marking. We know that dogs frequently mark over the scents of other dogs.

"apparent attitude of attack". A category of "potentially dangerous dog" to distinguish dogs who have not bitten but who have shown threatening behavior has proven helpful in some states.

2. Consistently enforce dog at large ordinances, and add substantial penalties for repeat offenders, especially those who have other animal ordinance infractions. Many bites could be prevented simply by preventing dogs from running at large.

3. Create educational programs in canine behavior for district attorneys and judges who prosecute animal offenses. Courts need to better understand and interpret the information presented to them by experts in dog behavior.

4. Prosecutors and judges must be encouraged to take animal ordinance violations seriously. Too often, animal control officers tell us, animal cases aren't prosecuted vigorously.

5. Mandate owner education programs for first time offenders of dog at large and dangerous or potentially dangerous dog ordinances. These educational programs should discuss canine social and agonistic behavior, communication signals and body postures, and owners' responsibilities in "bite-proofing" their dogs.

6. Mandate a behavioral evaluation of any dog cited as dangerous or potentially dangerous. Threats and aggression are not the same thing. Dogs who have snapped or bitten do not all present the same level of risk to public safety. Risk assessment must include not only the dog's behavior but also the owner's. Recommendations, consequences and penalties should have some flexibility to accommodate the specifics of individual cases.

7. Continue to promote and encourage neutering of male dogs, as intact males are over-represented in almost all bite statistics. (Spaying females obviously has health benefits and helps control unwanted breeding, but there is no clear evidence that intact females are more prone to aggressive behavior).

8. Work with city and county governments to increase funding for professional education for animal control officers. The [National Animal Control Association](#) (NACA) offers week-long programs at three different levels.

For a good review of this issue see Lockwood, R., "The ethology and epidemiology of canine aggression" in [James Serpell's book The Domestic Dog](#)

If you have a dog with an aggression problem, [click here](#) to schedule a consultation with us. To learn more about our legal consulting services, [click here](#).

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## Cat Piece

### Understanding Your Cat's Unusual Behavior

Maybe in all the excitement at the doggie park, the JRT goes up to a person, smells another dog and pees on the person's leg without realizing that it is a person he is marking. He may also be primed to mark on any upright object because he's overly stimulated by all the smells at the dog park.

To prevent this embarrassing behavior, the JRT's owner may want to keep his dog on a long leash at the doggie park for a while. The JRT shouldn't be allowed to run right up to people and sniff them. Instead, the owner should have the JRT sit in front of the stranger and be greeted quietly.

If the owner knows some of these folks, he could ahead of time instruct them to encourage sitting with a tasty treat. Over time, the dog's immediate response when running up to a new person becomes sitting for a tidbit rather than lifting his leg.

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## What's New at ABA

### Home From Vacation

Well we are back from our Caribbean vacation in the U.S. and British Virgin Islands. While we were expecting blue skies and sunshine, instead we experienced record setting rain.

Parts of the islands saw 18 inches of rain in 4 days from an 800 by 300 mile storm system that parked itself over the entire Caribbean while we were there. Flooded roads, mud slides and power outages replaced sunny days on the beach we were hoping for.

We can't complain too much though. We still snorkeled (in the rain), shopped, had great food and got to explore (in ponchos and wet clothes!) a beautiful part of the world.

We both had dreams about rain for the first week we were home. Despite everything, we're glad we went. We hit the ground running when we returned, with our [free teleclasses](#).

### Free Teleclasses

Our free teleclasses were so well received, we've decided to repeat one

Cats seem mysterious to us because their behaviors appear unusual and unlike our own. For example, have you ever noticed sometimes when your cat is sniffing something he'll get a funny look on his face? The cat will open his mouth slightly, pull his upper lip back and look like he is breathing deeply. What is the cat doing and what does it mean?

This funny look is a flehmen response (pronounced flay-men). Flehmen is a German word that means to curl the lip. The behavior can last several seconds. Horses, cattle and goats also show the flehmen response but the curl of the upper lip is more obvious than in cats. Flehmen allows the cat to draw odors into the vomeronasal organ (VMO), a specialized receptor that opens into the roof of the mouth just behind the front teeth. It seems the VMO allows cats to get olfactory information about other cats.

Behaviorists don't know much about how the VMO works, why only some animals have it, what olfactory information it processes, and how it affects behavior. Flehmen is most often seen when male cats sniff the urine of other cats. They may be determining if a female is in heat or if another male is sexually active.

Female cats also show flehmen when they are around other females in heat and when investigating kittens. Less often, cats show flehmen to other kinds of odors as well. Our cat Buffet will occasionally show the flehmen response to his catnip toys or to new objects we bring into the house. We have no idea what olfactory information he is processing. He doesn't seem to show any behavior changes in reaction to whatever information he acquired from the flehmen behavior.

When Suzanne was on the TV show Unsolved Mysteries years ago, she explained that flehmen behavior accounted for a cat's response to the smell of natural gas. Contrary to the owner's interpretation, flehmen is not a face of disgust. The cat doesn't necessarily think the odors smell bad, it's just a different way of smelling. The next time you see your cat making funny faces, you'll know he's just checking his "pee-mails"!

To learn more about your cat's behavior, sign up for our [What Your Cat Wants You to Know](#) two week telecourse.

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of them in January. On Thursday January 8 at 6pm Mountain time, we'll again be offering Creating A Cat Friendly Litterbox. This is a free class, but you must register by sending an email with your name and email address to [ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com](mailto:ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com). We'll send you back a message containing the telephone number to call and the access code. Class size is limited to sign up soon!

In the meantime, we wish you all a Happy Holiday season and joyous New Year.

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### About Our Services

#### Dr. Suzanne Hetts to speak in Cleveland

As you read this, Suzanne is in Cleveland Ohio speaking at [Forever Friends Pet Care Center & Hospital](#) in Grafton, Ohio. Owned by Dr. Larry Forthofer, the husband of Suzanne and Dan's good friend Dr. Marsha Heinke.

Forever Friends provides premier lodging, recreation and pet health services in a park-like setting just outside of Cleveland, Ohio.

Suzanne will be doing staff training on various aspects of behavior wellness, as well as doing a public seminar for pet parents on how to better understand their pets' behavior, sort through myths and popular beliefs that interfere with their relationships with their pets, and provide tips on how to prevent common pet problems. [Read the entire press release.](#)

If you'd like us to provide custom designed seminars for your group or organization, please call Dan or Suzanne at 303-932-9095 or drop us an email at [info@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com](mailto:info@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com). Visit **Forever Friends Pet Care Center** on line at [www.foreverfriendspet.com](http://www.foreverfriendspet.com).

Animal Behavior  
Associates, Inc.  
4994 S. Independence Way  
Littleton, CO 80123

303-932-9095  
[AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com](http://AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com)