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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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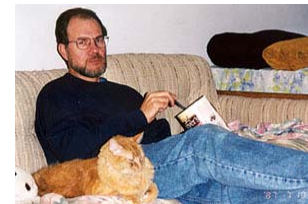
For many years animal behaviorists believed that when fighting broke out among dogs living together it was due to dominance instability. That is, the dogs were fighting over who would be

Dear Suzanne,

Fall is here with cooler temperatures and more activity from our animals. This month we consider two different activities - fighting and being close to others.

• **Temperature-Dependent Love In Cats**

As the evenings have become cooler this fall, our cat, Buffett has re-appeared. During the warm summer months he normally sleeps at night on the cool tile of our bathroom. But as the temperatures drop, he begins to sleep on our bed again. This is a regular seasonal event with Buffett: he sleeps on the floor in summer and on the bed next to us, in the winter. Does he love us less in the summer and more in the winter or is there a simpler explanation that has nothing to do with attachments? Since Buffett is a long-haired tabby cat with a good layer of body fat, it is quite likely that his choice of sleep spots has more to do with the control of his body temperature.



Behavioral ecology is replete with examples of animals altering their behavior to aid in thermoregulation. Desert lizards will bask on

dominant. Certainly, there are some situations where dogs fight over possessions, attention from the owner or a favorite sleep spot in what has been described as a struggle for dominance. Whether or not the concept of dominance helps us explain this is a matter of debate. Perhaps it is better described as conflict over the specific situations that trigger the fighting - the possessions, attention or sleep spots. But this is the topic of another article.

In the last few years we have seen fighting among dogs that doesn't fit the classical view of dog conflicts and could be best described as bullying. In these situations, one dog threatens, the other shows a submissive gesture or attempts to flee, and the threatening dog continues to attack. In most encounters between dogs, submissive displays such as looking away from the other dog, lowering the head and tail or rolling over and exposing the belly turn off the threats or attacks. That seems to be the function of submissive displays - to turn off threats or aggression. So the bully dogs continue to threaten or attack despite the best attempts by the other dog to end the conflict. This is not a dominance instability problem. If it was, you would expect the "dominant" dog, the aggressor, to stop the attack when he got his way and got the other dog to defer to him.

It isn't clear why bully dogs behave the way they do. In some cases we suspect that the bully may not recognize the submissive displays as attempts to cut off the conflict. Dogs that were poorly socialized to other dogs may have such deficits. In other cases, the bully seems to know what the signals mean, he can behave appropriately with other dogs, but he just doesn't care. Why these dogs behave this way isn't known.

Resolving bullying isn't easy. Favoring the "dominant" dog, that is letting the aggressor have his way and continue

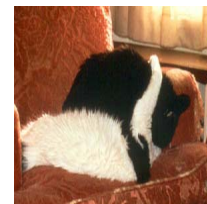
rocks early in the morning to warm up then curl up under the rock during the heat of the day to cool off. Since cats are pretty sedentary most of the time and aren't generating a lot of heat internally, it follows that they will seek heat sources like electric blankets and warm humans when things get cold. In warmer weather, they probably don't need the external heat source to keep their body temperatures up. In fact, the extra heat from a person may make cats uncomfortably warm.

This hypothesis could easily be tested by altering the temperature in your bedroom and looking where your cat sleeps. Turn the heat up on some nights and turn it down on others and see if your cat varies his sleep spots. Clearly, the air temperature isn't the only factor that effects where a cat sleeps. Things like the cat's body fat and activity levels, how much the owners thrash around in their sleep and how attached the cat is to the people will also influence choice of sleep spot.

The take home lesson is to not be offended if your cat abandons sleeping with you. It may have nothing to do with you or how your cat feels about you, but rather how warm you are!

• Why Cats Aren't Always As Smart As They Seem

Over the years we have seen a number of cases of cats becoming aggressive to feline housemates when the housemate went to the veterinarian for a check- up or treatment. Cats that have been getting along well, suddenly become threatening and aggressive when the hospitalized cat comes home. It's as if the cat that stayed home no longer recognizes the other one as his housemate. He may growl, hiss and even attack his former friend. What's going on here?



Do cats have such short memories that they can't remember a housemate for more than a few hours? No, cats can remember things for more than a few hours. This seems to be part of a larger pattern of recognition mistakes that we see in dogs as well as cats. Cats can become aggressive to familiar cats when familiar cat becomes ill, injured or behaves in

to threaten doesn't help, and can make the problem worse. Like other aggression problems, it can be dangerous to try to work with fighting dogs and owners should consult with a behavior consultant experienced in working with aggression problems. One strategy we have employed is to not let bully behavior work for aggressive dogs. When dogs continue to threaten in the face of a submissive opponent they are immediately removed from the situation on a time-out. Such threatening behavior loses the aggressor the opportunity to be with the owners or to have access to toys, chew items or sleep spots. In addition, the aggressor is rewarded for calm friendly behavior in carefully structured interactions with the other dog. The idea is to teach the bully other ways to behave rather than aggressing. If you want more information about dog to dog aggression, look and listen to our new audio and slide presentation CDs on "Understanding Canine Conflict" soon at our website.

There's much that we don't know about dog aggression. We will be better at preventing and treating aggression problems when we know more.

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unusual ways. We have seen cases of cats and dogs that would attack housemates when the housemate had a seizure. In some cases the attacks were severe.

Owners frequently interpret this behavior as the group culling out the weak of the species. This makes no evolutionary sense. Killing the infirm confers no evolutionary advantage to other group members because most members of social groups are related to each other and killing relatives usually doesn't help in propagating one's genes. In addition, there is no evidence of such killings in wild animal groups. If it was truly advantageous to kill the weak, it should be widespread in animal social groups.

We aren't sure why cats and dogs attack housemates but it is likely that the cat just back from the veterinarian and the sick cat or dog all act differently and perhaps smell differently from normal. These differences seem to be enough to keep the animals from recognizing each other, even though they look the same. Dr. Peter Borchelt, a noted applied animal behaviorist, has said that this demonstrates that cats (and dogs) don't always have the innate wisdom we might expect. What Borchelt is saying is that cats and dogs recognize each other not so much by looks as by movements and smells. So when an animal is faced with conflicting information - "he looks like my buddy, but he sure smells and acts different" - then mistakes are made. Unlike people, cats and dogs don't seem to be predisposed to recognize each other by looks alone. As a result they look dumb at times.

One implication of this is that if you take one of your cats away from home for a while, or if one becomes sick, you should re-introduce them slowly and carefully. Keep them separated from each other until you are sure they are going to get along. Supervise introductions and try to associate them with pleasant things like treats or gentle petting for both cats. As you may know, once cats have had a bad interaction it is hard to patch things up. It's better to avoid these nasty mistakes.

- **What's New at ABA**

This month we are proud to announce the birth of several new products. Our new books

"Help! I'm Barking and I Can't Be Quiet" and **"Raising a Behaviorally Healthy Puppy"** are now available. In addition, we have produced a number of new audio CDs and narrated slide presentation CDs. Among them are our popular telecourses **"Fundamentals of Canine Behavior"** and **"Fundamentals of Animal Learning"**, and other popular topics including **"Introducing Your Dog to Your New Baby," "Managing Chaos at the Door"** and **"What Cats Want: Creating a Cat Friendly Environment"**.

The narrated slide presentations are an innovative new technology that allows you to view and hear a slide presentation on your computer, just as if you were in the audience at a lecture. It requires no special programs and runs on PCs using Microsoft Windows 98 or later. At this point in time they won't run on MacIntosh systems.

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You'll find these new products on our website on October 20th.