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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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Dear Suzanne,

This past month has been a busy one for ABA. We have a new assistant, a new puppy in our business family, and a new book award. Coral had eye surgery (see Our Piece) but has recovered nicely. We hope you all are having a wonderful summer - we can't wait to get some time off to take the dogs camping and hiking. We hope to have some new telecourses for you by the fall.

Best Wishes, Suzanne and Dan

- **Cat Piece:**
Breaking Up Cat Fights

Dog Piece: The Meaning of Play Bows

During our 4th of July get together, we all enjoyed watching Barb's new Airedale puppy Rita, try out her play behaviors with Coral, our 1 year old Irish Setter. (Are you noticing a theme here in dog



Recently, Steve found his cat Whiskers in a yowling match with another cat on his back porch. He didn't want things to escalate into a fight, so he reached down and picked up



Whiskers. Whiskers promptly responded by scratching and biting Steve so severely that he had to go to the emergency room. Steve couldn't understand why his loving cat turned on him when he was just trying to protect Whiskers from injury from the other cat. He was afraid that Whiskers had "gone mad," and that he would have to euthanize him. He called us for help.

names? Rita, short for Margarita, and Coral, reminiscent of the Coral Reefers?) On her still stubby little legs, in the tall grass it was a bit hard to tell when Rita was play bowing, but her pawing the air with one front leg helped to clarify her intent. Coral would usually play bow back at Rita and then run circles around her. Rita was still a bit too young to be able to chase Coral, which seemed to be what Coral was trying to entice Rita to do.

Have you ever given any thought to the purpose of play bows and how they might have evolved? The play bow is a ritualized display behavior, meaning it has communicative value and is fairly stereotypical, meaning there is little variation in the form of a play bow from one individual to another.

Dogs use play bows to initiate social play. In this context, the meaning behind the play bow seems to be "don't take what I do next seriously, I'm only playing". Play bows occur not only at the beginning of play bouts, but also in the middle of them. If dogs are already playing, why would they do this?

In a study of play behavior, ethologist Dr. Marc Bekoff found that play bows occurring during play bouts did not happen randomly. Instead, play bows were repeated both before and after other behaviors that could easily be misinterpreted. For example, play bows were more frequent both before and after biting that was accompanied by rapid side-to-side head shaking. The communication seemed to be "I'm still playing despite what I'm about to do or just did".

Contrary to a recent article in [Time magazine](#) this is not new information. Dr. Bekoff has been studying play since the 1970's and summarized much of his research in a book he co-edited with Dr. John Byers entitled [Animal Play](#).

What's interesting about play, and

This behavior is not that unusual and Steve needn't worry that Whiskers has gone mad. In fact, a visit to his veterinarian showed that there was nothing medically wrong with Whiskers. Many cats become aggressive to people that try to intervene in cat fights. In some cases it's just a matter of the person getting a hand in the wrong place and at the wrong time and getting bitten unintentionally by one cat or the other. In the fury of a cat fight, the cats may not recognize the person's hand and bite or scratch it.

Another cause for attacks on people interfering in cat fights is what is known as redirected aggression. This happens when a cat is motivated to attack one individual (could be a cat or a person) and is blocked from getting to that individual. The block may come from a person restraining the cat or trying to break up the fight. The blocked cat then redirects the aggression onto the person restraining him. This kind of aggression has nothing to do with the kind of relationship that the person and cat have with each other. Cats that are very loving and attached to their owners may redirect aggression to them in some circumstances.

People and other cats can be the victims of redirected aggression without actually interfering in fights. Cats that are threatening each other but not actually fighting may respond aggressively when touched or approached by others. The cats don't even have to be in the same place - one cat could be indoors separated by a closed window from his adversary. Cats can also hold their aggressive motivation for a long time after the initial encounter is over. We have had clients who were attacked an hour after the initial altercation between the cats.

All of this means that people should be very careful around cats that are fighting or aggressively aroused. Never, ever try to separate fighting cats with your hands or other parts of your body. Throw water on them, make a loud sound with an air horn or throw blankets over the cats to try to stop them. If your cat has been in a fight or has been threatening to another cat, stay away from him until he approaches you in a friendly manner. Even if your cat seems relaxed and friendly, be cautious touching him until you are sure his aggressive motivation is gone.

what hasn't been studied in domestic dogs is what goes wrong when interactions that seemingly start out as play escalate into a fight. Could it be that the dogs aren't play bowing as often as they should be? If they fail to play bow before biting in play, does this make it more likely their play partner will misunderstand, feel threatened, and respond with aggressive rather than play behavior?

Another possibility, as Bekoff mentions in the Time article, is that some dogs may signal play, but instead of giving an inhibited play bite, deliver a hard one. Whether this is intentional or just a "mistake", isn't known. We've all had an "oops" experience when we meant to give someone a playful shove for example and ended up accidentally knocking a person down. America's Funniest Home Video show has become popular based on these kinds of mistakes.

A final possibility is that some dogs may not interpret the play bow correctly. This is much less likely, because the play bow has evolved to be such a distinctive signal. It's hard to confuse it with other body postures.

As an aside, cats do not have a clear, ritualized play signal comparable to the canid play bow. This may be one reason why "play" cat fights often become anything but.

So next time you observe your dog playing, start counting the number of play bows. To do the before- after analysis as Dr. Bekoff did, you'd have to videotape the play bout. If any of you do - we'd love to see them!

EVVY AWARD



We were flattered and

Finally, never ever approach or try to touch a cat that is unfamiliar to you. You don't know where he's been or what he's been doing recently. He could be in a fighting mood and just waiting for someone to take it out on.

- **Our Piece:**
Administering Medication

After Coral's recent eye surgery, she needed drops put in her eyes twice a day. For the first few days she tolerated this fairly well, but became increasingly more distressed and upset when we would try to



administer them. We aren't sure if Coral just found the drops annoying, despite our attempts to add some "positives" to the experience, or if they burned, due to a corneal ulcer she developed about a week after her surgery. At any rate, from then on, trying to put drops in her eyes became our worst nightmare.

One Saturday morning, we found ourselves doing something we vowed we would never do - wrestling Coral into a corner to get the drops in her eyes. Suzanne shook for probably 30 minutes afterwards, so we can't imagine how Coral was feeling (maybe doing better than her mom!). We refused to put any of us through that experience again, so we took to dropping the drops in Coral's eye when she was asleep, which allowed us to get at least one drop in each day (Coral is a busy 1 year old and doesn't sleep much during the day anymore!)

Desensitization couldn't be attempted until the medication was finished, because Coral's distressed behavior would be elicited each time we had to put drops in her eyes. And by then she could have cared less about treats.

What did we learn from this experience? That extra effort may be required to help our pets cope better with having medication administered.

Any kitty parent has likely experienced the pink antibiotic drops ending up on the walls,

honored to have received a first place EVVY Award in the "how to" category for our book, "Raising a Behaviorally Healthy Puppy: A Pet Parenting Guide", at the Colorado Independent Publishers Association's awards banquet on June 10th. The EVVY awards are given for excellence in self-publishing and are judged on professionalism, originality, cover design, book layout, writing, information, and interest. If you'd like to receive an informational brochure on how shelters, veterinary clinics, trainers and others can use the book to promote your business, just drop us an email at ezine@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com and we'll send one to you. And if you purchase 50 or more at our discounted price, we'll do a free one-hour in-service training for you and your staff (in telecourse format if needed). Details are in the brochure.

Meet Sharon Keefer



If we didn't believe in karma, or the stars aligning right, or any other label you can attach to good things coming out

of the blue, we definitely do now. When we went looking for additional marketing, administrative and website expertise, we couldn't believe we found another Keefer/Kieffer! Sharon saw our job posting and thought the position might be perfect for her, but we think she's perfect for us! We are extremely fortunate to have Sharon on our team as she has just the skill set we were looking for, and fits right into both our pets-are-

on you and everywhere else but down your cat's throat. While it may not be possible to completely compensate for drops that burn or medications that taste bad, we can do more to accustom our pets to having something put into a body opening when necessary.

For example, consider dropping neutral saline drops into your pet's eyes, followed by an irresistible goodie. It may be necessary to begin with baby steps. Start by just holding your pet in position, with the dropper bottle above her eye, giving her a treat, and releasing her. Slowly work up to actually administering the drop.

Take the same approach with oral medications. With one hand, hold your cat's head and open her mouth with the other (have your veterinarian show you how to do this) and pop in an empty gel cap. Follow with a small piece of tuna or salmon, or any other tidbit your cat loves.

Rub the inside of your pet's mouth with a good tasting substance before using pet toothpaste and brushing the teeth. Rub the inside of the ears with a dry cotton ball before trying to clean them or administer drops.

If you are adept at clicker training, another possibility would be to shape your pet to assume a specific position for administration of medication. This technique is often used in zoos and some research laboratories.

Whichever method you choose, you'll need to practice often, so this requires a bit of a commitment from you. And your pet could go weeks, months, or even years without requiring administration of medication. So you might find it difficult to keep motivated. But remembering a week's experience of having your best friend run from you when she sees the eye drops in your hand provides the needed motivation.

• **What's New:**
Dan in Guelph, Ontario Canada

In May, Dan was invited to speak in Guelph, Ontario Canada at a Symposium



family lifestyle and our somewhat chaotic business mentality - we-have-a-million-tasks-for-you-figure-out-what-you-want-to-do-first-and-let's-get-started! When you contact us, it's likely you'll reach Sharon or Barb first. [Click here](#) for the details of Sharon's background, and if you haven't yet met Barb, our first perfect match, be sure and read about her as well.

Sharon, Joy, and Grace were honored this month by Denver Pet Partners for their therapy work. [Click here to read more.](#)

July Specials

All Presentation CDs
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- [Understanding Dogs That Eat Poop: Coprophagia](#)
- [What You Don't Know About Dogs Can Hurt You](#)
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- [Helping Cats Co-Exist](#)

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entitled "Understanding and Training Your Dog in 2005." The three-day event had an outstanding group of presenters discussing a variety of topics such as the evolution and domestication of dogs, drugs and behavior, the dog-human relationship, and several lectures having to do with canine cognition, learning and motivation. Dan's talk was entitled "Pugs as Scent Detection Dogs: The Limits of Training in Every Day Situations." He discussed some of the obvious limits to learning (it's really difficult to get Pugs to do scent detection tasks with their very small noses) as well as some of the not so obvious ones [you can readily teach a dog to jump a wall to escape an electric shock (this is an example, not something we recommend!) but you can't teach him to scratch himself to do it]. Those interested in training any animal need to be aware of the biological, motivational and environmental limits to the learning abilities of their subjects, so that they can work around those limits or work most efficiently within those limits. If you are interested in learning and the behavior of dogs consider taking our live telecourses ["Fundamentals of Canine Behavior"](#) and ["Fundamentals of Animal Learning"](#). The information from both courses is also available in audio CD format.

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