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## Behavior Education for Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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### Dear Suzanne,

You are receiving this December issue 2 days early because on Wednesday we will be on a plane to San Juan for our Caribbean Christmas vacation - perfect for a Parrothead like Suzanne! But Dan sure doesn't mind coming along!

Be sure to check out our What's New and Product Special sections for dates for TWO January telecourses plus an important update on our expansion of our online educational opportunities AND 2 NEW DVDs on cat behavior.

We wish you a joyous holiday season with your loved ones - both the two legged and four-legged varieties. We'll show your pictures in January from the Caribbean!

Best wishes,  
Suzanne and Dan

### **Dog Piece:**

**Do laws restricting breed ownership prevent dog bites?**



The effectiveness of Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) on reducing dog bites continues to be a hotly debated issue. Some cities and counties - such as Denver - and even entire countries - like the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain - have restricted the ownership

### **Cat Piece:**

**Territory versus Personal Space**

Social conflicts and fights among family cats are one of the most common cat problems we see, second only to inappropriate elimination. Many cat



of certain breeds of dog that have been labeled as dangerous. The specific breeds that are restricted vary from place to place but often involve pit bull type dogs and other dogs bred for fighting and personal protection.

Until recently, the debate has been based mostly on opinion rather than scientific evidence. Two studies, the most recent published this month, have addressed the issue in a scientific way and shed some light on this contentious and highly emotional issue. Both studies compared bite rates before and after BSL legislation was enacted.

In the earlier Scottish study, the researchers compared the incidence of dog bites seen in one emergency room for three months just before their Dangerous Dogs Law took effect and then again in the same hospital for the same time period two years after the law took effect. They found overall dog bite rates did not decline, and in fact were unchanged (99 dog bites). The breeds most responsible for bites before and after the legislation took effect were the same - German shepherds and mixed breed dogs. Bites from the restricted breeds - Pit bulls, Rotweilers and Doberman pinchers were very low but actually increased from 6 to 11 after the BSL came into effect.

The most recent study compared dog bites reported to the health department of Aragon, Spain for 5 years before and 5 years after the introduction of their Dangerous Animals Act. As with the Scottish study, there was no change in numbers of reported dog bites after the implementation of the BSL, and the breeds most responsible for bites both before and after the BSL were those unrestricted by the legislation - German shepherds and mixed breed dogs. The restricted breeds - American Staffordshire terriers, pit bull terriers and Rottweilers - were responsible for less than 4% of the reported bites both

owners who call us for help describe their resident cat as being "territorial" toward the newly acquired cat.

When we take a behavioral history from the cat owners, we find they are sometimes applying this label of "territorial behavior" to a variety of behaviors that are actually unrelated to one another and to the label of "territorial".

Territory is defined as an area an animal will actively defend. Territory is usually a smaller part of an animal's home range, the latter being defined as the area an individual regularly spends time. The entire home range is usually not defended so individual home ranges often overlap, but territories - at least in free ranging animals - usually (although not always) do not.

If a cat is displaying territorial behavior toward another cat, this will include attempts to drive the perceived intruder away. Thus, the resident cat may stalk, ambush, chase and even attack the new cat. In these cases, the resident cats are often successful at forcing the new cat into hiding. The new cat becomes afraid to come out of the basement, from under the bed or from behind the couch, because if he does the resident cat will go after him. This is NOT an acceptable quality of life for the new cat and this situation requires immediate attention.

Another common scenario when a new cat is added to the family is when one or both cats become threatening or aggressive when one invades the other's personal space. In these cases the cats tolerate one another if there is sufficient distance between them. In the early stages of their relationship that distance may be quite large, but because the cats' concern is personal space, not territory, we don't see one cat stalking and ambushing the other.

If one cat gets too close, the other may chase him just far enough to re-establish a safe social distance. There is no attempt to drive the other into hiding. Owners sometimes mis-label this pattern as territorial behavior when it really isn't. Problems can escalate if the cats can't keep each other sufficiently far away.

Years ago, when we moved in together and

before and after the BSL took effect.

These data suggest that legislation restricting the ownership of certain breeds of dogs is ineffective in reducing the overall rate of reported dog bites, and that the breeds subject to the restrictions were responsible for very few of the reported dog bites. In fact, they were much less likely to bite than more popular breeds such as German shepherds and Labrador retrievers. Laws attempting to protect the public from dog bites or any other hazard should be based on sound science, not personal and/or biased opinions or hysterical news reports.

*References: Klaassen, B., Buckley, J.R. & Esmail, A. 1996. Does the Dangerous Dogs Act protect against animal attacks: a prospective study of mammalian bites in the Accident and Emergency department. Injury, 27(2), 89-91.*

*Rosado, B., Garcia-Belenguer, S., Leon, M. & Palacio, J. 2007. Spanish dangerous animals act: Effect on the epidemiology of dog bites. Journal of Veterinary Behavior, 2(5), 166-174.*



**This month we're pleased to bring you new, improved and expanded editions of two of our most popular recorded feline programs, "[Helping Kitties Co-Exist](#)" and "[Helping Kitty be Good - by designing a cat-friendly home](#)" These programs would make the purrfect Christmas gift for the feline owning people in your life. They replace our previous narrated-slide CDs and are now available in both audio and DVD formats. Order before January 1, 2008 and you'll get free shipping on up to 3 copies of either title.**

combined our four-legged families one of Dan's cats - Vonnegut - and one of Suzanne's cats - Amos - never got along well. In the almost 18 months these two lived together before Amos' unexpected death from a cardiomyopathy, Vonnegut and Amos for the most part tolerated and avoided each other. The two severe fights these two had were when the cats were crossing paths in a small bathroom. Even though the bathroom had two exits, neither cat seemed to think they could avoid the other, and a fight erupted.

Our "[Helping Kitties Co-exist](#)" program provides details on how to design a living space for a multi-cat household to minimize conflicts among cats. With only 2 fights in 18 months, we consider these techniques to have been successful with Amos and Vonnegut.

If you are a pet professional, you'll find this program a valuable resource for your clients who have just added an additional cat. Shelters should promote it to adopters taking a new cat home to resident cats, and veterinarians should see that it goes home with clients when they bring a newly acquired cat in for the first veterinary exam. Contact us about our quantity discount pricing on this and other educational products.

• **Our Piece:**  
**Love Does Mean Having to Say You're Sorry**

Suzanne recently traveled to Summit County (home to many of the Colorado ski areas that received several FEET of snow last week) to give a talk at the animal shelter there about helping cats coexist. Included in the presentation was a discussion about reconciliation behaviors and how they differ between cats and dogs.



First, what are reconciliation behaviors? These are body postures, communication signals, and other behaviors social animals use to repair social bonds following a conflict. It's important for social animals that live in groups to be able to "make up" and resume a cooperative relationship after a dispute.

Register EARLY for our two January telecourses-webcasts. Pia Silvani is back with her ever popular ["Becoming a Great Dog Training Instructor"](#) beginning January 17th. And we are offering a NEW 2 week course on ["Managing the Home Alone Dog"](#).



*As the end of the year approaches we look back on the year and give thanks for the good things that have come our way. We here at ABA are thankful for our health, our families and our pets, but we are also thankful for all of you that have been our customers, clients, colleagues and friends over the last year. You've enriched our lives with your thoughts, questions, comments and ideas. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for you. We wish all of you a happy, prosperous and peaceful new year. We look forward to our contacts with all of you in the coming year and to providing you with some exciting new services and products to help you improve your relationships with the animals in your life.*



Reconciliation behaviors have been most studied in primates by noted ethologist Frans de Waal. In primates, reconciliation behaviors include eating together, mutual grooming, hugging, holding one another's hands and even testicles (all we'll say about THAT behavior in this family newsletter!)

While not formally studied in dogs, we've all seen dogs that, after biting or snapping at a family member or other familiar person, or after a fight between two family dogs, display behaviors that could be thought of as reconciliation behaviors. Clients have told us their dogs immediately "look sorry" and approach them, or their canine opponent, appearing to be asking for forgiveness.

Canine behaviors that could be considered reconciliation behaviors include licking one another, especially around the ears and mouth, submissive behaviors such as crouching and rolling over, playfully pawing at the other, or lying close together.

It would be interesting to study whether the presence and frequency of specific reconciliation behaviors after a fight between family dogs is correlated with successful long-term resolution of the fighting problem. Or whether family dogs that never learn to get along also never show reconciliation behaviors. But that's another discussion.

It appears that it is more difficult for cats to make up after a fight. It would stand to reason that reconciliation behaviors would be less likely to be in cats' behavioral repertoire because cats do not form the same type of highly structured groups that dogs do. Cats are perfectly capable of solitary living and do not have to rely on a group to find food and raise young.

We haven't often heard cat owners describe these "sorry" looks from their cats. In addition, cats can stay aggressively aroused for much longer than dogs, so avoidance of each other after a social conflict may be prolonged. It seems to take cats longer to calm down and to "trust" their companion again after a fight or social conflict.

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This was one of the points of Suzanne's talk to

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the shelter. That establishing a good relationship when a new cat is added to the family through micro-managed introductions is absolutely crucial. Because if cats start off on the wrong foot with each other, it can take months for them to learn to get along, and in some cases actually prevent them from ever establishing a friendly or at least tolerant relationship.

If you're thinking about adding a new cat to your family, or know someone who is, our "[Helping Kitties Co-exist](#)" program would be ideal. This new title replaces our previous narrated-slide CD and is now available in both audio and DVD formats.

### • **What's New:** **Upcoming Telecourses**

Ms. Pia Silvani will be offering her very popular telecourse "[Becoming a Great Dog Training Instructor](#)" starting January 17th. Be sure to register early as this class fills up quickly.



Starting January 23 we'll offer a NEW two session telecourse titled "[Managing the Home Alone Dog.](#)" This course will examine the causes, treatment and prevention of one of the most common complaints made by dog owners - behavior problems when their dogs are left home alone. Continuing education credits with CCPDT and CACVT are pending.

In February, look for our "[Shining the Light of Science on Canine Behavior](#) " telecourse in a new format. The four hour course will now be available on demand, online. This new format has a number of advantages. It will allow us to include both video and audio as well as written materials. The course will be broken into a number of short segments, allowing you to progress through the course at your own pace. We're also adding online test questions and a final exam so you can test your knowledge of the material. The exam will allow the web version to be accepted for CEUs by a variety of organizations. This new format will make our courses more accessible to everyone, including our international subscribers. And we expect it will greatly improve your comprehension and retention of the material. Once this initial

course is tested, we'll likely be offering more in this format.

We'll also be adding discussion groups for our Canine Behavior and other courses that will still take place by telephone and webcast. Anyone who has taken the online courses will be eligible to participate in the discussion groups. More details to come in January!

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Finally, during December Dan and Suzanne will be doing "research" on the effects of Caribbean sun and fun on the minds and bodies of hard working animal behaviorists. We'll let you know our findings in January.