



Bellwether Magazine

Volume 1
Number 27 *Winter 1989*

Article 14

1-1-1989

Animal Crackers

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Animal Crackers

False Pregnancy

False Pregnancy (Pseudo-Pregnancy, Phantom Pregnancy, Pseudocyesis) is common in the dog and sometimes occurs in cats. It occurs after the heat period in animals which may or may not have been bred. The most noticeable sign is enlargement of the mammary glands six to twelve weeks after estrus. There may be secretion of a watery fluid or even milk. The bitch often becomes restless and may make a nest and mothers inanimate objects such as toys or slippers. Usually the condition will disappear without treatment. In some cases, a sedative and alternating hot and cold compresses on the engorged mammary glands may be helpful. There are reports of these bitches being used as foster mothers.

False pregnancy may occur in your animals after their first estrual cycle. It may follow every cycle or occur only occasionally. Veterinarians may recommend ovariectomy in bitches with recurring or severe false pregnancy.

It is advisable to check with your veterinarian. There is the possibility that the bitch might be pregnant or there may be a disease of the uterus (pyometra).

Book Review

The Atlas of Dog Breeds of the World, by Bonnie Wilcox, D.V.M. and Chris Walkowicz (TFH Publications, Inc., Neptune City, NJ 07753, \$100).

This big book, weighing over ten pounds, has a full history and description of over 400 breeds from all over the world. There are over 1100 full-color photographs. It is an ideal breed identification guide. The authors' belief is that pets should be chosen through knowledge of the breed. Breed information "will help dog owners see what causes the pleasing characteristics — as well as the ones that irritate them. Ingrained breed nature instills the sweetness, intelligence, loyalty, sturdiness, working and protective qualities that we desire in the various breeds. This very nature also motivates digging, yapping terriers; chasing, yelping herd dogs; aggressive, barking flock guards and mastiffs; straying, howling gun hounds; and independent, aloof sighthounds and pariahs."

Breeds are divided into eight groups. There are 23 flock guards included — only three (Komondor, Kuvasz and great Pyrenees) are AKC-recognized. White is the preferred color for flock guards — distinguishing the dog from the wolf, allowing them acceptance into the flock and making them visible from a distance when apart from the sheep.

There are 36 mastiff breeds, 17 recognized by AKC, including mastiffs, great Danes and Saint Bernards, as well as bulldogs, boxers, bull terriers and pugs. Rottweilers are also in this group.

There are 96 scenthounds, 68 gun dogs and 46 northern breeds. The Akits, Samoyed, chow chow and Pomeranian are AKC breeds in the northern group. There are 56 herding dogs, 47 terriers and 38 southern dogs. The sighthounds, pariahs and hairless breeds are in the southern group.

As interest in "rare" breeds increases, this book is an ideal source of information. In the description of each breed, the country or origin, weight, height, type of coat, color and breed registry (if any) are given. There is a glossary and bibliography. One omission is the address for breed registries (AKC, CKC, FCI, etc.) However, it is the best reference for identifying all known dog breeds.

Holiday Hazards

Christmas may be a hazardous time. Light cords, breakable ornaments and tinsel may cause injury. Holly, mistletoe and poinsettias are toxic if eaten. Chocolate contains a compound toxic to pets, causing vomiting, diarrhea, muscle tremors, seizures, rapid breathing and disorientation. Even one chocolate bar may be too much for a small dog.

A gift puppy should not be delivered just at Christmas. There will be more time to give it the attention it needs after the holidays. Give a leash and collar and a note saying the puppy will arrive soon.

Cold Weather Notes

Some dogs and cats live outdoors all the time. However, special care is necessary in cold weather. Windproof and waterproof shelter is necessary. It should be small with plenty of bedding. Check water at least twice a day. Extra calories are needed to help keep the animal warm. Cats may climb up into a warm engine of a parked car. If there are cats in your neighborhood, knock on the car's hood before starting the engine. Garage doors are another hazard for cats.

Indoor housing is necessary for some breeds that cannot tolerate cold. Young puppies, older animals and dogs with health problems should be kept in a warm place.

Indoor pets require a few special arrangements. A sweater is a good idea for walks in extremely cold weather, especially for small, short-haired dogs. Dry off the dog after a walk in the rain or snow. Rock salt and other products used to melt snow and ice can irritate the paws. Inspect the paws for snow and chemicals after a walk — wash and dry if necessary.

Indoor pets tend to have less exercise during the winter months, so they may need less food. Cats may prefer to sleep and should be encouraged to exercise—playing with toys, etc.

Beware of antifreeze. Dogs and cats are attracted to it and may lap up the sweet stuff spilled on a garage floor. Immediate veterinary care is necessary if antifreeze is ingested. Many pets die as a result.

Veterinary Schools

There are 27 D.V.M./V.M.D. degree programs in the United States and four in Canada. In 1988-89, there were 8,574 students in the U.S. and 1,144 in Canada. Of the total enrollment, female students outnumber male students 57.5% to 42.5%, a trend that began in the 1985-1986 academic year. Enrollment continues to decline.

The class of 1993 at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine has 110 students, 74 (67%) women and 36 (33%) men. The average age is 26.6 years. 103 have undergraduate degrees (32 BA and 71 BS) and six have graduate degrees (one MA, four MS and two MBA). Only seven students matriculated after their third year of college. 72 (65%) of the class are Pennsylvania residents. 21 (19%) come from contract states, two from Connecticut, one from Delaware, four from Maryland, one from Maine, 12 from New Jersey and one from Vermont. There are three from California, one from Michigan and eight from New York.

Priorities are changing in veterinary practice. Companion animals are becoming important to the

well-being of their owners. Among livestock, disease may be manifested by decreased productivity rather than illness. Disease may be related to nutrition, management and environmental factors. Many of the infectious diseases which were of great importance in the past have been brought under control. Food-borne diseases are causing sickness in people and economic losses. The veterinary profession should be concerned about the safety of foods of animal origin. Animal owners have come to expect the veterinarian to help keep animals healthy and productive. Genetic problems, metabolic and chronic diseases, along with skin disease, have become important in small animal practice. As pets live longer, geriatric problems are more frequent.

Veterinary medicine has become a challenge. Specialization is increasing. It still offers a rewarding and productive career.



Ferrets

The domestic ferret (*Mustela putorius furo*) has become quite popular as a household pet. It is estimated that 6 to 8 million are kept in this country. Mail order catalogues offer products for ferrets — shampoos, grooming brushes, carrying bags, toys and a special harness and leash.

Some states (California, Georgia, New Hampshire) prohibit the keeping of ferrets and there are laws regulating possession in other states. Check local laws before obtaining one as a pet. The American Veterinary Medical Association warns that ferrets may be dangerous to infants and small children — attacking and biting them without provocation. Be sure a ferret will fit into your lifestyle before considering it as a pet.

Female ferrets are called jills and the males are hobs. They need a "ferret-proofed" home. They can crawl through openings two inches in diameter, and should be kept under supervision when not caged. They can be trained to use a litter box. Commercial ferret diets are available. Water must always be available — a hanging water bottle prevents spillage. They tend to cache food so dry food is preferable to canned products and table scraps.

Body odor is a problem with ferrets. The anal sacs must be removed surgically — a pet ferret will empty its anal sacs when frightened and the odor is foul. Neutering is indicated for the pet ferret. In the hob, castration decreases inappropriate urination, decreases aggression and helps control body odor. If the jill is not mated, she will remain in continuous estrus, causing bone marrow hypoplasia and death. The pet jill should be spayed. Neutering may be done at five months of age.

In addition to neutering, ferrets must be bathed once or twice a week to keep body odor under control.

Ferrets have been domesticated for centuries. Understand the special problems and requirements and be sure you can be a responsible owner. Too many ferrets have been abandoned by disenchanted owners.