



Photo: istockphoto.com

John Saxton gives the low-down on treating our feline friends homeopathically

Caring for cats

In some ways cats are the most misunderstood of the species commonly kept as domestic pets. There is the ongoing (but essentially friendly) dispute between dog lovers and cat lovers, between those who value what they see as the closer bond that they can develop with a dog, and those who admire what is interpreted as the more independent nature of the cat. It is, of course, possible to love both and, contrary to popular myth, it is possible to keep both in the same household without World War Three breaking out.

The number of cats in the UK is rising as a percentage of the total pet population, but there are many factors involved in this shift, not all of them connected to a deep psychological attachment to the species. Perceived cost is one, and the changing patterns of human lifestyle another: the independence of cats is often seen as an easy option in that “they can look after themselves” and “they are not so demanding as dogs”.

In fact both species are pack animals and both have highly developed but different social structures. The cat is not intrinsically a loner, as is often imagined; it is rather that the nature of their social order is based on a degree of individual activity and freedom of action within the pack that is not found in dogs. Those people who keep both a cat and a dog will often say that “the cat keeps out of the dog’s way”, but this is not usually through distain or fear. Two or more cats in the same household will often avoid each other in the same way. Close observation as they move around will reveal that they generally move at different levels: one cat will stay on the ground, another will travel along the backs of the furniture, along the work surfaces etc, even to the same destination. When living with a dog, of course, it is the cat which goes to the higher levels. This pattern of individual movement is an instinctive behaviour pattern for the cat within its pack structure. Blocking it can create social tensions.

Cats are complicated yet rewarding pets and patients, well worth the necessary expenditure of effort

Independent does not mean anti-social. Cats have a highly developed sense of social responsibility and one way that they show this is by helping to feed the pack. The mouse laid at the feet of a horrified owner is not an aesthetic or hygienic time-bomb, but in fact represents a high expression of feline citizenship. To have this effort continuously rejected may be as hurtful to the cat as a child's rejection of a well cooked meal is to her mother.

It is often said that Natrum muriaticum is the cat's basic constitutional type and it is true that many Natrum mur cases are seen in cats. However, the other major constitutional types are also well represented in the species. The connection with Natrum mur is generally made because this remedy is regarded as representing a person who is aloof and a loner, fitting the cat's perceived overriding trait. However, the essence of Nat mur is of withdrawing emotionally (and sometimes physically) in order to avoid further mental hurt after some initial unpleasant experience. It is possible that many of the Nat mur cases that are seen have been pushed into that state because of the owners' failure to understand their emotional needs. Nat mur has, at its root, a need to be loved and appreciated, and this may be denied if the cat is thought of as being intrinsically independent and self-sufficient.

Similarly there may be social attachments and interactions involving cats that are not obvious to the casual observer. Cases occur where the death of one cat, apparently hated by another, leads to grieving in the survivor worthy of losing the love of its life.

When trying to assess the constitu-

tional remedy for your pet, remember that "cats will be cats". It is variation from the species norm that is significant; just because your cat catches mice with great gusto does not mean that it cannot be a gentle Pulsatilla type.

What conditions are cats prone to, and what homeopathic remedies can be useful? In addition to Arnica, Aconite, Calendula, Rhus tox (and Rescue Remedy), which have the same uses as in other species, other remedies can be helpful in specific feline conditions. Use a 30c unless otherwise indicated.

Aggression

A truly aggressive cat is a fearsome sight and opponent! There are some inherently nasty individuals which social adjustments alone do not calm. Belladonna at 200c or 1M can help in these situations.

Bites

These are regular occurrences and it is not only the belligerent un-neutered tom that receives them. Hepar sulph is an invaluable remedy. In high potency (200c) if given early, it will prevent the formation of an abscess. Ledum is a remedy for puncture wounds, which is what a bite is, and can be of use if given early, maybe alternating with Hepar. If the bite is a few days old and an abscess has already started to form, Silica will help to accelerate its formation and rupture, and ensure good drainage of the wound. Gunpowder is a much underused remedy and is useful for wounds with low-grade infection that do not heal.

Trapped toes and tails

These can easily happen under feet, doors etc. Hypericum has a major indication here for bruised and damaged nerves. If the affected area goes cold following the injury, this is an indication that the blood supply may have been damaged, and Secale may be of use.

Urinary problems

Some cats seem prone to repeated attacks of cystitis, without obvious cause. Cantharis is useful for acute attacks where there is much straining, pain and blood, but Causticum or Pulsatilla may be required for more chronic cases.

Cystitis may be linked to a build up of small stones in the bladder (gravel) and occasionally this will cause an acute blockage. Professional help will be required in these cases, but as an emergency measure a few doses of Sarsa-

parilla may give some relief.

Cats also get their share of kidney problems and one potential trigger for both that and bladder stones is that sometimes cats do not drink enough. When their food is dry, many do not increase their fluid intake enough to compensate. This tendency is accentuated in Pulsatilla cats, as they both prefer dry food and do not feel the need to drink. Any sudden and marked increase in thirst in a cat should always be taken seriously. It is advisable to consult a professional in these cases, but Apis mel, Nat mur, Phosphorus, Mercury and Lycopodium are all of great use in kidney problems.

Respiratory problems

Respiratory problems tend to involve the upper part of the system, and bronchitis, sinusitis and chronic nasal infections are often seen. These may arise following an outbreak in the area or, on occasion, following vaccination. Remedies to consider are Pulsatilla when the discharge is whitish, Kali bich when it is thick and yellow, Silica in chronic cases where the discharge is white and Nat mur which shows a thinner more watery discharge rather like egg white. Arsenicum album as a constitutional type is seen in cats (think of the exceptionally neat, delicate cat, moving gracefully and always cleaning itself) and this is another remedy that is useful for respiratory conditions. Thuja may be considered if there is an obvious link to vaccination.

Gingivitis

A common condition in cats that can be one of the most difficult to clear. The first thing to check, especially in the older animal, is the teeth. No remedies are going to help if dental work is required. Once that or other general conditions have been eliminated, Merc sol is a possibility where there are red ulcerated gums, much salivation and bleeding ulcers. In some cases Merc cyanatus may prove more effective. Hepar sulph should be considered where there is much pain on eating, and Carbo veg can help in the milder case.

Skin problems

These are seen regularly in cats and many of the symptoms can be traced to mental causes. Ringworm can be a symptomless condition in cats and can be tested for by means of a simple culture from a few hairs. Bacillinum is a major remedy for this condition, but



Photo: Enid Segall



Sepia may be called for.

The conventional diagnosis of “miliary eczema” or “flea bite eczema” is often made for those cats exhibiting dry, irritant scabs on the legs and/or body, possibly with areas of hair loss. Although cats can become infested with fleas, often no “visitors” are ever found. This does not stop the conventional world prescribing large and regular quantities of anti-flea treatments, usually to no effect! The underlying cause frequently lies in the emotional sphere, with the origins being traced to some upset in the cat’s environment and change in the pack dynamic. Nat mur and Staphysagria are the two remedies of most use here, both having elements of grief, mortification and suppressed anger in their pictures.

Problems with anal glands are occasionally seen, although these tend not to be as common as in dogs. They may be associated with other health problems, notably skins. Hepar sulph for infected and Silica for blocked glands are indicated. The glands should not be removed surgically except in extreme circumstances; they are one of the “safety-valves” of the body.

Eyes and ears

The external ear is part of the skin and, as with anal glands, can be part of a more general problem. Mercury where there is ulceration in the ear, Tellurium

when there is a strong fishy smell to any discharge and Silica for chronically inflamed ears are all useful. Haematomas, where the ear flap fills with blood, can be treated with alternating doses of Arnica and Hamamelis: this may take time to resolve and the amount of discomfort the animal is in must be considered before deciding to continue this treatment.

Remember Euphrasia for watery runny eyes and Argent nit for infected conjunctivitis. Cat fights will occasionally result in scratches to the cornea. Aconite, Ledum and Symphytum are useful first aid treatments, but professional help should be sought in these cases.

Spraying

This is a social/hygienic problem not a health hazard for the cat. Changes in emotional balance are usually the cause rather than urinary problems. It is easy to tell the difference between spraying and cystitis: with cystitis urgency and pain are seen, whilst with spraying there

is deliberation in the choice of target, and the same few spots may always be involved. A new arrival in the household, or even just locally, can trigger the behaviour. Cases have been known where the break-up of a relationship has started it – the cat was obviously fonder of the departed ex-partner than the owner was!

Staphysagria is often the indicated remedy, as it addresses the resentment aspect of the situation. Hyoscyamus may help also: this is often explained as being a manifestation of the lewdness found in the remedy picture and in many cases these cats will deliberately spray while they are being watched. (Interestingly, in the James Herriott era there was a standard “cure-all” veterinary preparation for a wide range of urinary complaints whose major ingredient was Henbane, the source material for Hyoscyamus).

The above, of course, is not exhaustive. Cats are complicated yet rewarding pets and patients, well worth the necessary expenditure of effort.



John Saxton BVetMed VetFFHom Cert IAVH MRCVS has been using homeopathy for just over 25 years. He currently runs a homeopathic referral practice near Leeds, as well as lecturing both at home and abroad for the Homeopathic Professionals Teaching Group. He is also President of the Faculty of Homeopathy.