

Approaching and Catching Cats

Our topics for this week are:

- **Differentiating Non-Aggressive Cats from Aggressive Cats**
- **Proper Approach and Capture of Non-Aggressive Cats**
- **Capture of Aggressive Cats**

Cat bites and scratches are very common in humans, especially children, the elderly, and women aged 20 to 35 years old. Most bites can be avoided by knowing how to assess the risk in an individual cat and using the appropriate approach and capture for the situation.

The cat's attitude should be observed before attempting to capture it. Most cats can be classified as nonaggressive or fear-aggressive. Nonaggressive cats are still resentful of restraint and respond best to an unhurried approach and loose gentle restraint.

Nonaggressive Cats

The handler should move slowly but with confidence, and use a calm assuring voice, and lower his body near the cat with his side toward it. Small bits of food treats can be used if needed to lure the cat closer to the handler. Cats should not be stared at nor leaned over.

A friendly approach by a cat is with its tail held up with back legs slightly extended. Purring may be audible. It will almost touch who they approach with its nose and may rub its face and head on the handler. Rolling over and exposing its belly is not a submission sign in cats. It is an invitation to play, but touching the abdomen may trigger a playful bite.

An apparently friendly cat should be allowed to approach the handler's extended index finger, which mimics another cat's nose, to smell it. The handler can then quietly and slowly move his hand to stroke the cat's head. Cats are not threatened by extended fingers and will not suddenly bite as dogs may do. Stroking a friendly cat's back results in arching of their back to press more firmly against the stroking hand, a signal of invitation for more petting. A slip leash should be applied and then the cat is moved so that it is in front of the handler facing his right side. The handler's left hand reaches over the cat's back and grasps the cat's right front leg. Holding the front leg prevents escaping the handler's support or the cat climbing up the handler's chest. The left wrist is then under the cat's juncture of the abdomen and thorax for support of its body. The right hand holds the slip leash and is kept near the cat's head to pet it as it is carried and grasp the scruff of the neck if struggling occurs. Lifting the cat should be done

without squeezing its chest. The handler's right hand is used to comfort and distract the cat while being carried.

Distraction techniques can help minimize the needed restraint for handling cats. These include gently rubbing the cat's head and ears, scratching the ears or throat and chin, gently and rhythmically tapping the cat's head or face, blowing softly on the nose, and stroking or wiggling the cat's foot or leg.

Aggressive Cats

The body language of an aggressive cat is that of piloerection, arched back, tail down with its tip flicked slowly, and ears erect and pointed forward. If approached, it will flatten its ears back, bat with paws, and lean away from the threat, vocalizing. Aggressive cats must be handled by two people. The primary handler has to concentrate on only the restraint. The other person performs the examination, administration of medications, or other procedures needed. The handling room should be prepared for possible escape attempt. All doors, windows, and cabinet doors must be closed. Access to vents, backs of refrigerators, chimneys, or any other escape or hiding area that will impede efforts to recapture the cat if it escapes during the first capture attempt must be blocked. Anything breakable or spillable on countertops should be removed.

If a cat is in defensive posture but does not attempt to strike and retreat, a loop from a slip leash should be dropped over the cat's head to provide a means of gently moving the cat toward the handler. The handler can then either stroke and pick the cat up or if necessary, use additional capture means (wrap in a towel, pull into a transport crate or box, or administer chemical restraint). Use of a thick towel to begin the stroking and gradual wrapping of its body from the neck back may be effective. Thick leather gloves with gauntlets to protect the wrists and forearms are an alternative, but less desirable, approach.

Fractionous cats that will attack when capture is attempted in a cage should be entrapped by a capture pole, cat tongs, nets, or a cat loop on a flexible rod. Cats can wiggle, roll, and spin in a net; therefore, gloves or towels may need to be used to hold the cat down to administer medications or sedatives.

Feral cats may be caught in humane cage traps which are commercially available or netted and transferred to a squeeze cage for chemical restraint to be safely handled.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Most bites and scratches from cats are the result of failure to assess the cat's temperament and use the appropriate approach and capture technique for the situation.**
- 2. Distraction techniques are very helpful in handling non-aggressive cats.**
- 3. All means of escape should be blocked before handling an aggressive cat.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 325 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.