

A Cat Lover's Opinion of Cat Cafes

Our topics for this week are Cat Cafe's:

- **Effects on cats stress levels**
- **Environment for disease transmission**
- **Efforts to adopt out homeless cats**

I have always liked cats. Todd, our current rescued house cat has free range of our house during the day with the exception of the kitchen and dining room. He is not allowed on counters and is fed his food in another room. His only contact with other cats has been with our barn cat through window and door screens. His litterbox and food and water bowls are used only by him. Rooms that he may have shed hair in are vacuumed every day. What I feel is best for Todd is not the same as that of a Cat Cafe.

Cat Cafes are a New Fad

Cat Cafes began in Taiwan in 1998 as a free roaming cats where people were also eating. This innocent looking, highly dangerous situation spread and sometimes evolved to other Asian countries. One of the evolutions of Cat Cafes was to become a means of rescuing homeless cats. Pressure to allow Cat Cafes in the U.S. increased but before Public Health authorities acquiesced, they required a single café to have a separate food area and another for cats with separate entrances. Oversight had to include animal control and health department inspections. In some cases, that is not enough.

Effects on the Cats

Cats normally are nocturnal, i.e, are most active at night and sleep 16 hours a day. They prefer to live in small groups, primarily of family members. One of the attractions of Cat Cafes is the hope they will introduce homeless cats to potential rescue home. That may occur, but it is at a price of stressing homeless cats, to excessive daytime activity with strangers and a constantly changing group of new cats.

Cat Infections

Café Cats are required to have standard vaccinations, but there are no vaccines for many transmittable diseases. Feline Infectious Peritonitis is one and is lethal to cats. Stressed young cats are most susceptible. Cats can also carry infectious diseases transmittable to humans for which there are no vaccinations such as toxoplasmosis. Their mouths have many more infectious bacteria than dogs' mouths. Their mouths and what ever they lick can be a source of infection in breaks of the skin in humans Plus, the most common zoonosis transmitted from cats

to humans is ringworm. Ringworm is the name for the skin lesion caused by a fungus, *Microsporum*. *Microsporum* is a common cause for *tinea capitis* and *tinea corporis*, ringworm of the head and body, in humans. It is a zoonotic fungus, meaning it naturally lives on the hair and dandruff of normal looking cats. The fungus also produces spores that can contaminate an environment for, at least, months. *Microsporum* can also be transmitted from air-borne cat hair. The risk of catching ringworm from cats is directly related to the concentration of cats and whether they are stressed, which increases shedding of hair.

Success as a Means of Adoption of Cats

Cat cafes try to operate the human food and beverage part as a for-profit enterprise, while the adoption of homeless cats is a separate non-profit enterprise. However, a case can easily be made that the cats are primarily an attraction to promote the for-profit business. Otherwise, the cafe and cats would not have to be in the same space and serviced by the same employees. Some Cafe Cafes have required a minimum purchase of food or drink to see their cats up for adoption. Cat Cafes need to have a reliable source of young, playful cats. Some cat cafes fall to the temptation of partnering with purebred cat dealers to have a constant source of young, healthy, attractive cats. This promotes the breeding of cats without a ready market, exacerbating the problem of finding homes for homeless mixed breed cats.

Cat Cafes Done Right

Our advice is that if you are interested in a cafe, go to a cafe. If you are interested in adopting a cat, go to a humane animal shelter. If you still want to eat and drink while checking out a group of cats, you should look for indications of good cat management, including hiding boxes for the cats when they get stressed, rules such as no picking up the cats, no chasing or rough play, and no waking of sleeping cats. The surroundings should look and smell clean. No cat hair dust bunnies should be seen. And finally, few if any cats should be purebred and healthy-appearing older cats should be present. All the cats should not be kittens.

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. Cat cafes are stressful to cats.**
- 2. Routine vaccinations do not protect cats from all the diseases they are exposed to in cat cafe environments.**
- 3. Means to find homes for homeless cats should not be combined with profit-making enterprises.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book

supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and available from all major science book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 150 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.