

# **Feline Husbandry**

**Diseases and Management in the  
Multiple-Cat Environment**

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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to all of the cat lovers (individuals and groups) who have supported me and my research during the past 18 years. I am particularly indebted to the members of Save Our Cats and Kittens, who were there when I needed help the most, and to the Robert H. Winn Foundation affiliated with The Cat Fanciers' Association. Finally, I am grateful to my own family, my wife Gerie and our children Stephanie, Holly, Collin and Megan, and to my mother Evelyn Pedersen. Though the word "husbandry" is often applied to the relationship of man and his animals, the term is firmly rooted in experiences of the ultimate living group, the human family.

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# Preface

The domestic cat is one of the most difficult animal species to propagate under conditions of close confinement and intense breeding. This is due in part to their comparatively thin veneer of domestication and, in part, to their distinct constitutional nature. Unlike cattle, horses, sheep, goats and dogs, cats are solitary and territorial animals. Therefore, it is against their nature to be confined to limited space and with a large number of other cats. Overcrowding and poor husbandry lead to myriad infectious diseases and behavioral problems. The fact that cats are pure carnivores has also led to many nutritional problems. Though cats require large amounts of animal tissues for food, modern commercial cat foods are increasingly of nonanimal origin. This has led to an interesting array of nutritional disorders.

In spite of difficulties in rearing large numbers of cats in confined quarters, catteries and multiple-cat households are a permanent and increasingly common fixture of modern civilization. Therefore, we must learn how to raise cats in a manner conducive to their optimum health and reproduction. This can be approached in 2 ways: to further domesticate cats by careful selective breeding so they can better tolerate multiple-cat environments; or to optimize conditions within the multiple-cat environment in such a way as to ensure good health. Unfortunately, neither approach is widely practiced. Genetic selection is largely for body conformation and coat color, and often involves extensive inbreeding. Inbreeding, especially when done improperly, leads to more genetic defects and developmental anomalies, and less vigor. Unfavorable husbandry and breeding practices are not done intentionally. Rather, they result from a lack of knowledge of proper husbandry and breeding procedures. Hence, the impetus for this text.

This book was written for veterinarians, laboratory animal managers, veterinary students and cat breeders. This audience was targeted because the goal of raising healthy cats requires that both veterinarians and cat breeders work together. Unfortunately, both cat breeders and veterinarians tend to look only at the individual sick animal: What disease does it have? How do we treat it? The real questions should be: What disease does it have? Why did this disease occur? How can we prevent it from happening to others?

When dealing with confined cat populations, the individual animal is only an indicator of problems in the environment as a whole. Most disease, whether it is behavioral, reproductive, genetic, infectious or nutritional in nature, results mainly from inadequacies in management of the environment in which modern cats live. Therefore, control of disease in multiple-cat environments involves good husbandry practices. The word *husbandry* literally means "to manage carefully and economically." Though often applied to farmers caring for livestock, good husbandry is a moral obligation for everyone involved in the human-animal interaction.

Niels C. Pedersen, DVM, PhD

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