



WINN FELINE FOUNDATION

For the Health and Well-being of All Cats

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FORAGING BEHAVIOR IN CONFINED CATS

PROJECT STUDY: Foraging behavior under threat and enrichment in confined cats

Principal Investigators: Dr. Mikel Delgado, Dr. Melissa Bain, Dr. Tony Buffington; University of California-Davis

Interim report summary, W17-033

Domestic cats in the wild hunt and eat small animals that they do not share with other cats. They spend most of their time looking for food, and usually eat many small meals each day. When cats live indoors, they cannot hunt and may have to share food bowls with other cats. Not being able to hunt for food limits cat's activity, which may make them more likely to become fat. Living with other cats also can change eating habits. Competing for food can lead cats to eat less often, and to spend less time eating (although they may eat more or less total food). These changes in the way cats eat may have serious and harmful effects on their health and welfare.

In this study the investigators are comparing the eating habits of healthy, adult cats in either single or two-cat homes. All cats in the study wear an activity tracker attached to their collar and have video cameras set up near their food dishes. Cat owners are recording the amount of food the cats eat each day. From the video data, the investigators can determine how long cats spend at their food dishes, how they eat, and what they do while they are eating. They are also able to look at the type of interactions (both positive and negative) that cats have with both their owner(s) and with other cats at mealtime. They are also analyzing the overall quality of the cats' housing, as well as their general health and behavior. For half of the cats, they are providing a food puzzle (a toy that dispenses dry food) to learn if a food puzzle that lets indoor cats "work" for their meals provides behavioral benefits or changes their feeding behavior.

The investigators have included 18 single-cat households and 13 two-cat households in their study. They have coded over 350 hours of video of cats at their food bowls as mid-May 2020. From the observations they have made so far, food bowls appear to be important resources for pet cats. The cats in their study are visiting the feeding areas between 15-30 times per day and spending over an hour a day in the vicinity of their food dish. They have also observed signs of conflict between cats who are fed from the same food dish or in the same general area. As the investigators finish coding the video, they expect they will have a better understanding of cats' feeding behaviors and how they are affected by living with other cats.

This research will provide perhaps the most detailed analysis of the feeding behavior of cats in the home environment to date and will help all of us understand how competition may influence feeding behaviors and activity in cats.

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