

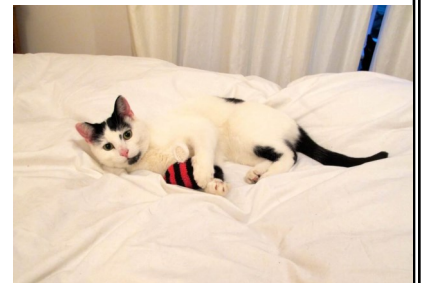
## Bristol Cats Study Newsletter - Autumn 2016

The 'Bristol Cats' study is a pioneering study of cat health, welfare and behaviour run by vets, behaviourists and epidemiologists at the University of Bristol. The aim is to improve knowledge of common diseases and behaviour problems of cats, for example (but not exclusively), unwanted elimination, obesity and hyperthyroidism. Findings from the study may be used by veterinary practitioners, cat breeders, owners and the cat community to improve the health and welfare of cats in the future.

### **Goodbye to Emma. Welcome to Jess.**

Following four years of working as the Bristol Cats study administrator, Emma Gale left the team in June 2016, for an exciting new post within the field of animal health. Emma has played such an important part in the success of the Bristol Cats Study and will be missed by the Bristol Cats Study team, and by many of the owners too. Emma will be following the progress of the study and has signed up for regular newsletters so that she can keep up-to-date with our work.

Over the summer we have been lucky enough to have Hannah Robbins and Mel Wilson working part-time for Bristol Cats. Hannah and Mel have done a tremendous job in helping Jane Murray with the study. The post of study co-ordinator was advertised, attracting many very high quality applications. Seven candidates were called for interview during which they were asked to complete a 30 minute computer based test which simulated some of the tasks they would need to complete as part of the post. The interview panel was spoilt for choice, but were very pleased when Jess Wilson accepted the post. Jess is in the process of completing her MSc on Risk factors for feline gingivitis based on the Bristol Cats Study cohort, and some of you will have met Jess—either at our Open Day in May, or during visits to assess the oral health of some of our 'Bristol Cats'.



Jess is the very proud owner of 'Tyson' - one of our study cats, and also owns rabbits and goats!

### **Call for photos for our annual Christmas card.....**

If you would like a photo of your cat(s) to be included in the 2016 'Bristol Cats' Christmas card then please email in **ONE** photo by 9am on Monday 10th October to: [cat-study@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:cat-study@bristol.ac.uk)

Please send in clear photos of a high resolution to increase the chance of your cat featuring on the card! Photos sent by post will also be considered. Thank you!



## Completed studies:

**“Risk factors for road traffic accidents”**. This study formed the basis of Jess Wilson’s BSc final year dissertation. The paper has been submitted to the Veterinary Record journal, and we are hopeful that it will be accepted by Christmas.

**“The Bristol Cats Study—cohort profile”**: A manuscript describing the Bristol Cats Study design, the cats registered with the study, data being collected and questionnaire completion rates has been submitted to the International Journal of Epidemiology. This will be a very high profile publication for us, so our fingers are firmly crossed—waiting to hear back from the reviewers and Editor!

**“Completion of the kitten vaccination course”**: Lauren Molyneaux completed her BSc dissertation and identified which factors were associated with owners starting, but not completing the kitten vaccination course. Of particular interest was the finding that cats that were reported by their owners as being difficult to handle at the vet practice were less likely to complete their vaccination course. We plan to present this work at a veterinary conference and submit the findings to a veterinary journal. We will keep you updated and share our full results with you once they are published.

## Ongoing work:

**‘Risk factors for feline gingivitis’**: This study, funded by BSAVA Petsavers, is nearing completion. Jess Wilson is currently writing up the results and is due to submit her MSc thesis at the end of September. Jess hopes to present her work at the British Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress in April 2017 and to publish her findings in a veterinary journal. Further updates will be included in the next newsletter. A copy of the poster that Jess presented at the Society for Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine in March 2016, is provided with this newsletter.

**‘Worms, Fleas & itchy cats’**: Sophie Tyler (MRCVS) has recently started work on a research project that is being supervised by two members of staff at the University of Bristol: Dr Aiden Foster (Senior Teaching Fellow in Veterinary Dermatology and Pathology) and Natalie Barnard (European Specialist in Veterinary Dermatology). Sophie will be investigating the use of products for preventing fleas and worms at registration (2-4 months) and at 18 months. Sophie will also study the frequency with which skin conditions were reported by owners of 18 months old cats.

*(Photo of a flea head: copyright Aiden Foster)*



## Ongoing work (Continued):

**'Retained kitten behaviour':** Rachel Kinsman is working on the project "identifying risk factors for retained kitten behaviours in adult domestic cats using a longitudinal birth cohort study" which has been funded by a WALTHAM Foundation Grant, Rachel is using Bristol Cats data and is specifically looking at the behaviours that cats display up to 18 months of age, including:

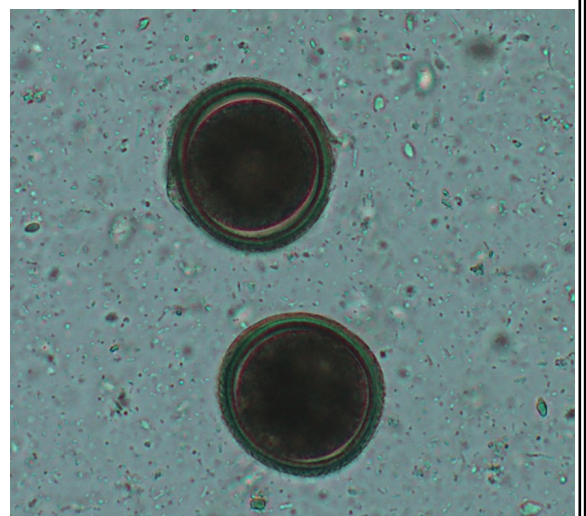
- Pica (e.g. chewing/eating non food substances such as plastic,)
- Kneading (when being stroked and not being stroked)
- Sucking (e.g. on the owner's clothes/hair or on other materials) and
- Dribbling whilst being stroked.

Rachel is being supervised by Dr Rachel Casey and Dr Jane Murray.

**'Multicat vs. single-cat households':** Claire Roberts (MRCVS) is investigating whether or not there is an association between cats living in multicat households (compared with those living alone) and the risk of a range of health and behavioural outcomes. Claire also plans to present her work at the British Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress in April 2017 and to publish her findings in a veterinary journal. Further updates will be included in the next newsletter.

**'Text mining'** Jess Wilson and Jane Murray are working with Jenny Newman (University of Liverpool) to develop ways in which the free text sections of the veterinary clinical notes we have been collecting can be searched for terms of interest (e.g. names of diseases). We now have clinical notes for more than 1000 of our Bristol Cats Study cats!!! All clinical notes will be de-identified by removing all references to names of veterinary practices, vets, owners, cats as well as contact details of vets and owners. Jenny is an expert in this area having developed this methodology for use on data collected for the SAVSNET (Small Animal Veterinary Surveillance Network) project ([www.liverpool.ac.uk/savsnet/](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/savsnet/)).

**'Faecal samples work':** Liz Maciag is a PhD student working with Dr Eric Morgan. As part of her PhD work, Liz will be testing samples of faeces from the Bristol Cats archive for parasites, including the gut roundworm *Toxocara cati* and lungworms. Levels of infection will then be compared with questionnaire data on cat characteristics such as age, and lifestyle factors such as hunting behaviour. Results will provide evidence on the risk factors for parasite infection, helping to improve health by targeting treatment to cats at greatest risk. Eggs of *Toxocara* found in the samples will further be subjected to DNA profiling, to determine how worm populations across the country are related.



(Photo of *Toxocara* eggs: copyright Eric Morgan)

## **Moving house / changed your email address / need to contact us?**

If you have changed email address, moved house or have a new contact number it is easy to update these online by visiting the website:

<https://smvsfa.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/update>  
and following the instructions.

Alternatively you can get in touch using our contact details below:

Tel/text: 07827 981412

Email: [cat-study@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:cat-study@bristol.ac.uk)

Freepost RSHR-AGRJ-UABZ

Bristol Cats, Dr Jane Murray

University of Bristol

Langford House, BRISTOL, BS40 5DU

## **Hair samples and buccal swab samples**

As you are aware, the 'Bristol Cats' study aims to collate new information to help provide insight into common diseases and behaviour problems of cats. We have gained an enormous amount of data from the completed questionnaires. We would like to add to that data by collecting samples for the cats taking part in the study. The samples are simple to take and will provide us with valuable information for our study.

The two samples we are interested in are:

**A hair sample**— this will allow us to measure factors including hormone levels within cats. For example, we are interested in a hormone called cortisol, which can be used as an indicator of stress levels in cats. By measuring this we can better understand the causes of stress in cats and how this might link to behaviour problems and disease.

**A cheek cell sample.** We can use these samples to examine DNA from the 'Bristol Cats' to investigate possible genetic components to some common feline problems.

If you are interested in providing a hair sample and/or a cheek cell sample, then please let us know either by email, phone or by completing an online form at:

<https://smvsfa.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/bristol-cats-study-sample-request-form-autumn-2016>

Instructions and everything you will need to collect and return the sample will be posted to you.

***If you have already sent us these samples, then there is no need to send us more.***

***Thank you.***

***Stay up to date with us on twitter (@UniofBristolCats),  
Facebook (www.facebook.com/bristolcats.study) or on our website,  
(www.bristol.ac.uk/vetscience/cats).***

**Thank you for your help — the Bristol Cat owners and cats are helping to make a difference to our knowledge of factors affecting feline welfare. We would also like to thank WALTHAM for funding the study administrator's post. and Cats Protection for funding Jane Murray's post.**

