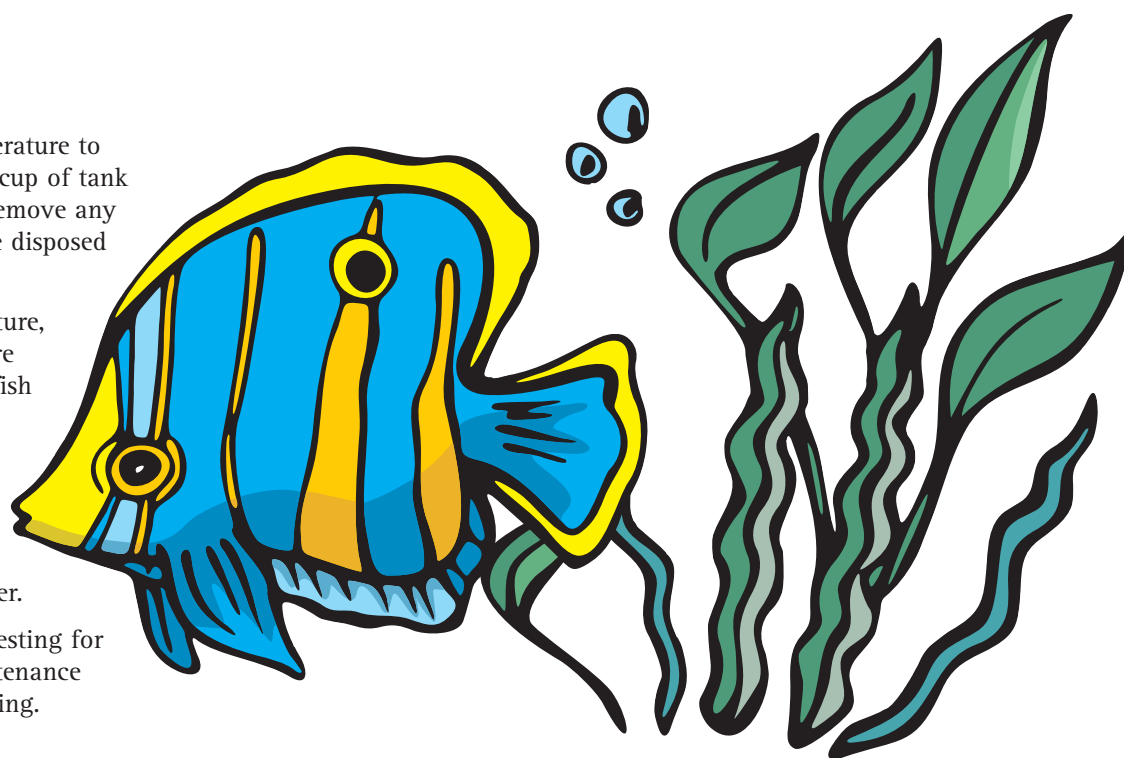


When you get the fish home set the bag in your tank, allowing the temperature to equalize and turn off the aquarium light. After a half an hour, add a 1/4 cup of tank water to the bag. Repeat this process every 15 minutes for an hour, but remove any water if the bag gets too full. Any water removed from the bag should be disposed as it may contain parasites or other nasties.

After the fish have acclimated to the tank's water chemistry and temperature, quickly net the fish from the bag and place them in the tank without store water getting in the tank. Leave the light off for several hours to let the fish adjust to the new setting.

The next issue will be what you choose, how much and how often to feed as well as testing and basic maintenance. You need to make sure you are knowledgeable and confident in how to test the water since levels of chemicals rise and fall quickly on first starting up. And you have to be aware of how to clean your gravel of waste and add or replace water.

In our February edition, we deal with the issues of food, test kits, water testing for nitrites, nitrates, ammonia, phosphates and pH, algae, cleaning and maintenance and in our May issue we'll deal with common problems and troubleshooting.



Cat's Abilities to Think & Feel

By Brad Kollus

Anthropomorphism is attributing human emotions and thoughts to animals and objects. Pet owners around the world are continuously accused of committing this as though it were a sin. Much of mainstream science still holds the view that animals including cats and dogs do not have the abilities to feel love, anger, joy, shame, fear, jealousy, or, have conscious thoughts and make decisions. However, new studies are proving what many pet owners have known for some time—our cats and dogs make decisions every day and are capable of feeling emotions like love and fear.

A new branch of science has developed to examine animal's emotive and cognitive abilities. "The branch of science is called cognitive ethology, and it involves looking at the thoughts and feelings of the animals. Pondering questions of why they are conscious. Note I said why are they conscious, not if they are conscious," said Professor Marc Bekoff Ph.D., of the University of Colorado's Department of Biology and author of 'Minding Animals.' "I think that people are now realising that all animals, cats, dogs, fish and chimpanzees have individual personalities and they have very rich emotional lives. The reason we are so attracted to cats and dogs is because they are emotional, and they can share their feelings with us," said Dr. Bekoff.

Should I Wait For the Good Cat food?

One of the indicators of an animal's ability to think and demonstrate their consciousness is their ability to make choices between alternatives. In their forthcoming book 'Cat Culture: The Social World of a Cat Shelter,' sociology professors Janet and Steve Alger Ph.Ds, of Sienna College and the College of St. Rose in New York respectively, conducted an in depth study of cats at a shelter. "One criteria of consciousness is an animal's ability to make choices in situations and cats came up very high on their ability to make choices. In the shelter they made many choices, about what foods they liked, what foods they didn't like, how they wanted to sleep together in different places, to be friends with some cats and not others. These are all choices that suggest a sense of self in cats," said Dr. Janet Alger.

"Cats are a mysterious kind of folk. There is more passing in their minds than we are aware of."

- Sir Walter Scott

The Many Meanings of Meow

Cognitive Ethologists recognise communication is one of the essential determinants of an animal's ability to think, feel and have consciousness. Cornell Doctoral Student Nicholas Nicasastro researched cats' different meows as a method of communication for his doctoral dissertation in psychology. "I went out and recorded hundreds of cat meows in situations between cats and their owners. Then took those recordings and went into the lab and had listeners, not the owners, but unfamiliar listeners listen to the calls and give me their impressions of them," said Nicasastro. He found there are different types of meows people can identify that have different general meanings. "What I found was there are certain acoustical qualities that correlate with something sounding pleasant or urgent and I speculate that the cats can use these acoustical changes to manage our impressions of how their meows sound to get what they want out of their human caretakers," said Nicasastro.

Communicating Without Meowing

Most of a cat's ability to communicate comes from non-vocal gestures. This form of communication is another example of cats' ability to think and evidence of their being conscious. Professors Janet and Steve Alger conducted a study published in the academic journal *Society and Animals* Vol 5 No. 1, 'Beyond Mead: Symbolic Interaction between Humans and Felines'. The Algers studied 20 cat owners and their cats looking for evidence of symbolic interaction between the two. "Symbolic interaction focuses on the ability to communicate through symbols and the development of shared meanings," said Dr. Janet Alger. "What our research results have shown is that both between humans and cats and between cats themselves can develop shared meaning. This allows them to do all the things that are associated with symbolic interaction such as taking on the role of other people or other animals and develop a sense of self, and understand things from the other's perspective," said Dr. Steven Alger. They gave as an example the case of an owner who, whenever she went to a certain rug in her house, communicated to her cat it was time to play, and the cat would come over and expect to play. There was nothing inherent about the rug that meant play. However, the owner and her cat had developed a shared meaning through the rug (the symbol) that when the owner went over to this rug it communicated to the cat it was play-time (the interaction), a shared meaning between the two.

DHARMA THE CAT by David & Ted



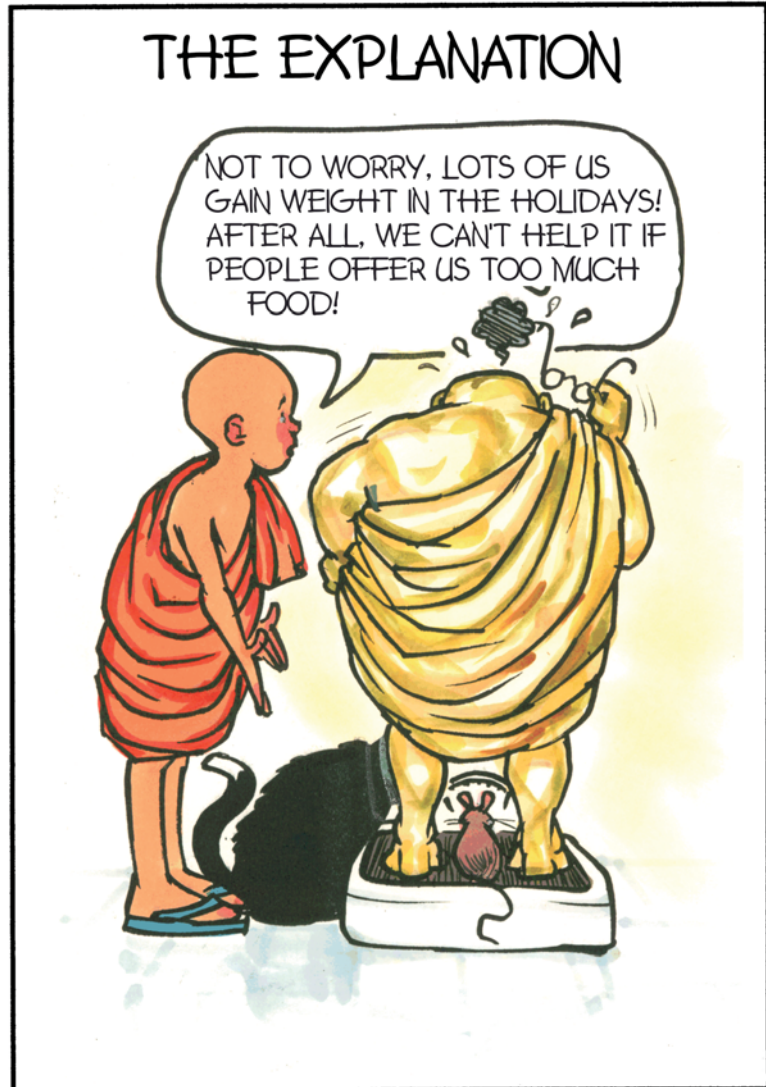
Kitty Christmas Treats

We Know Our Kitties

While people are often accused of committing anthropomorphism, one study has demonstrated that we correctly apply human feelings to our cats and dogs. Dr. Dennis Turner Ph.D., in Animal Behaviour and Professor of the Veterinary Faculty at the University of Zurich, conducted a study: 'Anthropomorphic interpretations and ethological descriptions of dog and cat behaviour by lay people,' published in the academic journal Anthrozoos Vol. 12 No. 4. In this study, Dr. Turner showed animal behaviourists, cat and dog owners and people without pets, pictures of cats and dogs in different behavioural states, as well as a sequence of images on a CD-Rom. Subjects were then asked to describe how the cat or dog was behaving and feeling. The results clearly showed statistically that people could interpret how the animals were behaving and what they were feeling. "It made a difference whether or not they had experience with animals, and it was better if they had experience with the species in question," said Dr. Turner also author of 'The Domestic Cat: The Biology of its Behaviour.' Findings also found that people with pets were just as good at interpreting cat and dog behaviour and feelings as the animal behaviourists.

The Last Meow

How is all this new information changing the way we view and treat cats in society? According to Dr. Janet Alger, "There is no doubt that cats have the ability to think and feel. They feel a lot, and they show those feelings. Every level of government and society really needs to rethink this (how we treat cats) and realise that cats do have a right to moral consideration and they can't be treated purely in terms of utility. They are complex beings and they do have consciousness."



DHARMA THE CAT SAYS: You're not required to take everything that's offered to you in life.

David Lourie, the creator of Dharma The Cat, has a new e-Book, "Dharma Diary - Reflections On A Path." It's a very personal collection of stories, articles, anecdotes, beautiful photo-poems and, of course, some Dharma The Cat cartoons. It's available only online for PC users at this early stage, at www.DharmaDiary.com.au. You can download and preview the first 20 pages for free. The eBook is 133 pages, for \$US20.

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