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BEHAVIORAL POTPOURRI: A REVIEW OF WHAT’S NEW IN THE FIELD
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OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE
In veterinary behavior, the annual veterinary behavior symposium of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (dacvb.org) and the American Veterinary Society of the Animal Behavior (AVSAB) provides insight into what’s new and in development in the field. Similarly the European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine (ecawbm.org) and the European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology (esvce.org) also meet each year to share the latest research in the field. As a member of each of these groups, and having attended both the North American and European meetings, this seminar will share some of what’s new in the specialty of veterinary behavior. By the way, if you have a special interest in behavior why not consider attending next year’s ACVB/AVSAB meeting in Chicago on July 18 (avsabonline.org) or the European meeting which will be held in conjunction with the 9th International Veterinary Behavior Meeting in Lisbon (www.ivbmportugal.org) September 26-29

WHAT’S NEW: ACVB/AVSAB BEHAVIOR SYMPOSIUM (SAN DIEGO, AUGUST 3, 2012)

Canine Coprophagia
Dr. Ben Hart, DVM, PhD, DACVB and his colleagues at University of California, Davis collected about 1500 internet surveys to learn more about coprophagia in dogs. This study found that as many as 16% of dogs at stools frequently. Most dogs (85%) ate the stools of other dogs. Intact males were less likely to eat stools than neutered males or females. Stool eaters were more likely to live in multi-dog households and were greedy eaters. There was no effect of diet and no association with compulsive disorders. Approximately 40% of Border collies and shelties were stool eaters, and no poodles were reported to eat stools (although the numbers were small). Of particular interest, 90% of stools were eaten within 2 days. Dr. Hart concluded that since dogs primarily eat the stools of other dogs while they were “fresh”, stool eating may have developed as a mechanism to keep the den clean and protect pack members from intestinal parasites, which would not yet have incubated to an infectious stage. As for treatment, while there are a wide range of products with clever names such as Nasty Habit, Deter-um, and Potty Mouth, food additives were effective from 0-2% of the time. Similarly neither punishment including yelling, chasing the dog away, or electronic collars nor reward based techniques including clicker training were effective. The best solutions; supervise and clean up after the dog or perhaps get a male poodle 😊

Effects of Oral Transmucosal Detomidine Hydrochloride Gel in Dogs
Dr. Marie Hopfensberger DVM, a resident in veterinary behavior, evaluated the effects of oral transmucosal detomidine gel in dogs to assess its efficacy and safety in handling canine patients. In a preliminary study of 6 dogs, measurable sedation, anxiolysis and improved ease of handling were seen at a dose of .35 mg/m² peaking at about 45 minutes after administration. However, further evaluation is needed to establish dose, safety and efficacy.
A New Anti-stress Product Coming from the Sea
Dr. Claude Beata, DVM, DECAWBM, presented a preliminary study by a group of French behaviorists on the anxiolytic effects of a new fish extract protein hydrolysate (Procalm) which is presently under development. In a double blind placebo controlled study of 34 dogs owners reported significantly more dogs in the Procalm group improved after two months, although there was little difference in the anxiety scoring system between treatment and placebo.

S-Adenosylmethionine (Novifit®) Improves Executive Function in the Aged Cat: Implications for Treatment of Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome
Dr. Gary Landsberg DVM, DACVB, DECAWBM, presented findings from a paper which has now recently been published in the International Journal of Applied Research in Veterinary Medicine in 2012 in which reversal learning was improved in both dogs and cats with Novifit supplementation. Cats were first taught an object discrimination task (under which of two objects is food located). Once successfully learned, the cats were tested on a reversal task where food was placed under the previously incorrect object. This task is more difficult for senior cats and dogs to learn than young or middle aged cats. In this study of 16 cats there was a trend toward improvement in reversal learning with Novifit. When examining the top and bottom half performers separately, the improvement was significant for the top half performers, indicating that SAMe might be most useful early in the disease progression.

Efficacy Evaluation of DAP Diffuser versus Placebo Diffuser for Guide Dogs Completing the Final Stage of a Training Program Leading to Graduation as a Working Dog with a Visually Impaired Person
Dr. Theresa DePorter DVM, DECAWBM, and an ACVB resident, in a double blind placebo controlled study, evaluated whether DAP (now Adaptil) would enhance training and graduation at Leader Dogs for the Blind, Rochester Hills, MI. Dogs are raised in private homes by volunteers and returned to the guide dog kennel at about 1 year of age for 4 months of formal training. In the 5th month, the dogs are assigned to a visually impaired person with whom they live 24 hours a day for a 26 day program. A DAP or placebo diffuser was placed in the dormitory room where the student and dog spend about 10-13 hours a day. Although the DAP dogs displayed a higher bond score between dog and student the results were not statistically significant. DAP graduation rate was 17/17 (100%) compared to placebo graduation of 17/21 (81%). Although the results are not statistically significant all 4 dogs failing due to behavior were in the placebo group. The number of subjects and the ceiling effect (since all dogs in the DAP group graduated) are factors in interpreting statistics.

Assessing Conspecific Aggression in Fighting Dogs
Dr. Pam Reid PhD, from the ASPCA behavior team, evaluated methodologies for assessing American Pit Bull Terriers seized from properties in the United States. Since using real dogs is both stressful and risky, they evaluated the use of simulated dogs for assessing dog to dog aggression. The pit bulls were assessed with a dog of the opposite sex, a dog of the same sex, a plush dog that resembled a Labrador retriever and a control object. Dogs that reacted with aggression toward real dogs were highly likely to display aggression toward the fake dog. Therefore assessment of fighting pit bulls with real dogs can be dramatically reduced by first assessing a fake dog, and if there is no aggression, testing with a same sex dog.
The Possible Role of Oxytocin as Stress Indicator in Puppies during First Social Isolation

Dr. Patrick Pageat PhD, DECAWBM of the IRSEA research institute in France evaluated the alterations in plasma oxytocin concentration in 5 Beagle puppies during the first session of puppy social isolation between 7 and 8 weeks of age, and compared the results to other physiologic markers of stress. Oxytocin is a neurohormone involved in attachment and stress management. After 15 minutes of separation oxytocin concentrations decreased significantly, and there was a tendency for increased plasma concentrations of cortisol. Thus oxytocin could be a parameter to assess dog's stress.

ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE ECAWBM AND ESVCE, MARTIGNY, SWITZERLAND, SEPTEMBER 7-9

Increasing the Predictability of the Owner’s Departure in the Treatment of Separation Anxiety Problems

One of the factors contributing to the anxiety response of dogs suffering from separation anxiety is their anticipation of the owner’s departure, due to a learned association between the actual departure and cues that precede it. Advice commonly given to owners of dogs with separation anxiety is to provide those same cues to the dog when departure will not follow, so that the ability of the dog to anticipate departures is reduced. Since lack of predictability is a stressor, dogs that can predict the occurrence of an aversive stimulus may be less stressed. An alternative approach was therefore suggested based on increasing predictability by using two different cues, one for actual separations and another (e.g. coloured flag on door) for training sessions.

Structurally Modified F3 & Social Facilitation in Multicat Households

This study by Alessandro Cozzi DVM of IRSEA, examined whether a modified or potentiated F3 pheromone might help to reduce social conflicts in multicat households. In 16 households with aggressive housemates, a behavior program along with either a potentiated F3 diffuser or placebo diffuser was utilized for one month. The preliminary results suggest that “Potentialised F3”, could improve social facilitation in multicat households.

Prevalence of Fearful and Anxious Behaviours in Dogs in the United States

Dr. Gary Landsberg DVM, DACVB, DECAWBM, presented the results of an internet survey commissioned by Thundershirt, to profile fear and anxiety in dogs in the United States. Of 1201 owners and 1960 dogs, fear and anxiety was reported in 29% of dogs and 41% of dog owning households. 17% reported noise fears, 13% separation anxiety, and 5% each of generalized anxiety, travel anxiety, and repetitive behaviours (spinning or licking). Of 337 cases of noise phobias, 86% were to thunderstorms, 74% fireworks and 41% vacuum cleaners. Single dog households reported significantly more problems 44% (n=663) than multi-dog households 22% (n=1297). Incidence significantly increased with age from 22.5% (n=599) for dogs 3 years and under to 36.5% (n=662) 8 years and over. There was significantly more anxiety in spayed females 46% (n=788) than intact females 23% (n=241). There was a significantly greater risk of anxiety in dogs obtained as a shelter rescue or stray, compared to a breeder, friend or pet store. Fifty four percent of respondents had not attempted correction because they felt it was unnecessary (71%); not treatable (29%); too expensive (13%); or too
time consuming (6%). Of 270 respondents that attempted correction 71% used behavior modification, 54% environmental management, 33% medication, 31% music followed by sound muting, CD recordings, natural products, visual muting, thundershirt, static capes and pheromones. The source of advice was veterinarian 67%, internet 43%, dog owners 37%, trainer 22%, TV 12%, and behaviorists 11%. Veterinarians were most helpful (30%) and TV was least helpful (3%).

Emergence of Behavioural Problems in Puppies Younger Than 6 Months Old
Dr. Christos Karagiannis, DVM, a behavior resident at University of Lincoln, presented results from a preliminary analysis of behavior problems in puppies. A retrospective survey of dog owners who had taken part in puppy classes was completed by 825 respondents. Three factors were identified that related to common emotional systems regulating behavior based on “Affective Neuroscience”. Factor one (Incentive seeking) consisted of i) Chewing household items ii) Play-biting iii) House training iv) Jumping up v) Digging vi) Counter surfing/food stealing vii) Chasing problems viii) Escaping problems and ix) Hyperactivity. Factor Two (aversion avoidance) consisted of: i) Aggressive behaviour towards family members, ii) towards unfamiliar people, iii) towards other dogs, iv) around food/possessive aggressive behaviour and v) Noise sensitivities with vi) Chasing problems, vii) Escaping problems and viii) Hyperactivity. Factor Three (attachment) consisted of: i) Problems when left puppy alone, ii) Separation problems and iii) Barking problems. These results suggest that management should focus on regulating emotional arousal rather than behavioural control.

Evaluating Enrichment Strategies in Kenneled Dogs
Dr. Gary Landsberg and colleagues at CanCog Technologies evaluated a variety of enrichment toys for safety, appeal, and durability in the laboratory environment where there is a particular need to standardise enrichment protocols, so as not to be a confounding variable. Toys selected for evaluation included a rigid toy Tug-a-Jug (Premier Products) and two rubber toys Squirrel Dude (Premier Products) and Kong blue (Kong Company). On the first day 10 individually housed dogs were given rubber toys and 5 run housed dogs given Tug-a-jugs. On the second day 5 of the individually housed dogs were given Tug- a-jugs and the 5 group housed dogs given rubber toys. 18/20 dogs immediately interacted with the toys. No problems were noted in the group housed dogs given tug-a-jugs; however, when given rubber food filled toys, the study was discontinued due to aggression in adjacent runs.

Next 4 dogs in each of two runs, were given food filled Kongs or Squirrel Dudes (refilled hourly). Dogs in adjacent runs were also given toys. There was greater interest in Kong toys but not significant. Due to possessive aggression in the dogs with Kong toys on the first day, one dog was removed. Finally all 4 group housed dogs were given food filled tug-a-jugs with no toys in adjacent runs. All 4 dogs interacted with the toy immediately and throughout the 5 hours. There was no aggression in the run or the adjacent runs. The tug-a-jug with rope removed and ping pong ball inserted was selected for group housed dogs.

Analysing the Behaviour of Dogs Affected and Unaffected by Separation Anxiety during a Behavioural Consultation: Preliminary Results
Dr Manual Mengoli DVM from IRSEA assessed whether during the behavior consultation the behavior displayed by dogs affected with separation anxiety, was different from unaffected
dogs. Eight dogs displayed separation anxiety and 8 dogs displayed neither signs of anxiety nor separation problems. Non-anxious dogs displayed statistically greater exploration, while anxious dogs displayed more nose licking and visual orientation to the owner. It was also observed that unsettled behaviours were displayed by a higher number and with a higher occurrence in anxious dogs, although the high inter-subjective variability did not lead to statistically significant differences.

Three Different Strategies to Improve the Success of Adoptions
Helena Negre from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona examined the effects of different strategies in order improve the success of adoptions. In the first shelter the strategy was an education programme for the owners; in the second shelter an obedience programme was planned and in the third shelter the strategy was for enrichment environment. With plan 1, behavioural problems were decreased in the treatment group, and the knowledge of the adopters about their dogs’ problems increased. Applying plan 2, unwanted behaviours decreased whereas good behaviours for the situations evaluated increased. Plan 3 resulted in animals displaying less fear and less aggressive competitive male subjects. Therefore a combination of the three programs might yield the best results.