

Reasons for Relinquishment and Return of Domestic Cats (*Felis Silvestris Catus*) to Rescue Shelters in the UK

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Abstract:

Significant numbers of cats enter rescue and re-homing facilities each year, over half of which are relinquished directly by owners. Identifying the reasons why owners decide to give up their pet is an important step in the development of education strategies to encourage retention of cats by their owners. In addition, identifying why adopting owners fail to retain their new cats is important in the refinement of homing policies. Characteristics of 6,089 cats relinquished and returned to 11 rescue facilities in the UK were recorded over a year. In addition, information was collected on the reason why owners gave up, or brought back, their pet. Sixty percent of cats and kittens entering shelters were relinquished by owners, with 19% being due to owner circumstances, such as moving to rented accommodation or changes in family circumstances. Seven percent were for behavioral reasons, and 5% because of the occurrence of allergy or asthma in owners. Returned cats were significantly more likely to be older (Mann Whitney U , $Z = -9.167$, $p < 0.001$) and neutered (Pearson $\chi^2 = 110.0$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$) than the general relinquished population. The reasons for original relinquishment and return of owned cats were also significantly different (Pearson $\chi^2 = 84.4$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.001$), with 38% of cats being returned for behavioral reasons, and 18% because of allergy or asthma. The commonest behavioral reason for both relinquishment and return was aggression between cats in the household.

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