

 Q&A



Keeping longhaired cats mat-free requires regular effort – and sometimes, professional help.

Matted cat may need a shave

Q: Our cat has a long, silky coat, and she is always getting mats, even though we try to stay on top of the grooming. I'm afraid they're out of hand now, with clumps in her "armpits," behind her ears and on the tops of her hind legs. I'm a little nervous about trying to cut them out. What can I do? I'm sure she's uncomfortable. — *O.F., via e-mail*

A: I hear you on the grooming front. I have two longhaired cats, Clara and Ilario. Ilario has a rougher coat texture that resists matting, but Clara has a silky coat that is always matting. I'm always looking for and grooming out those mats.

If your cat is really matted, the kindest thing is to have a groomer clip her short, into a "lion trim." Assuming she's an indoor cat, she'll be fine. If she's allowed out into the cold, you may need to work on the worst mats and leave the big trim until later.

Start with a relaxed cat, preferably after her big meal. Work a little cornstarch into the first mat, and then gently and carefully slide the bottom blade of a sharp set of scissors under the tangle, with the cutting edge facing out, and slice through the mat vertically. (Do not do this if your cat is anything other than relaxed!) Work in a direction away from the skin rather than cutting across the mat parallel to the skin. Repeat a couple of times. Then, holding the mat at the base to minimize pulling, pick apart the fur with a wide-toothed metal comb. When the mat is gone, follow with a narrower comb and brush to remove the debris that you find at the heart of the mess.

Be sure to praise and treat your pet for her patience as you go. Work in short periods, and stop before your cat has had enough. Watch her tail. If she starts flicking it in an agitated way, she's reaching the limits of her tolerance. You may spend a week or more in short sessions working out the mats, but so be it.

Once you get all the mats out, your next session can be a bath with a cat-friendly shampoo and cream rinse. With your cat clean and dematted, you should be able to keep mats from re-forming with regular attention.

But if the mats really are more than you can control, consider the services of a good groomer on a regular basis. While a severely matted longhaired cat will likely need the fresh start of a shave-down, a cat with a coat in good condition can be maintained in longhaired glory by a cat-experienced groomer.

— *Gina Spadafori*

(Do you have a pet question? Send it to petconnection@gmail.com.)

Turning the PAGE

Last year produced some must-read books for pet lovers

By **GINA SPADAFORI**
Universal Press Syndicate

While 2008 was a bad year for many (and good riddance to it), we don't want to turn the page on the year without mentioning a few books that belong on the shelves of every pet lover.

First up, Marion Nestle's "Pet Food Politics: The Chihuahua in the Coal Mine" (University of California Press, \$19). The Pet Connection team realized early during the 2007 pet-food recall that the numbers of sick and dead pets were in the thousands and that the problem of tainted Chinese ingredients went far beyond pet-food safety. And in fact, the pet-food deaths were the first of many problems with Chinese products – toys, milk products, toothpaste and more.

Dr. Nestle was also among the first to see a large problem, and she turned her attention to the "canary in the coal mine" aspect of the pet-food industry. Her "Pet Food Politics," written for an academic press, is a little dry at times, but the information and its implications are eye-opening. It's a call to action that we can all hope the new Obama administration hears before there's a repeat of the tragedy, perhaps next time with American children as the victims.

Sticking with the academic, Dr. Irene Pepperberg has long been known within the community of bird lovers, but her work became a national sensation only when her research partner, an African grey parrot named Alex, passed away at the age of 31 in 2007.

Pepperberg, a comparative psychologist, had dealt with the dismissal



of her colleagues for three decades regarding the parrot's ability to communicate, not just mimic or respond to cues. Although there certainly remain skeptics, Alex and Pepperberg convinced many that "bird brain" was not a pejorative.

"Alex & Me" (Collins, \$24) deftly blends the personal and the professional, the setbacks and the triumphs, the fight for recognition, and the bond between two souls that could be broken only by death. Alex told Pepperberg he loved her the night before he died. Anyone reading this book will love him, too.

Another lovefest has developed around Dewey Readmore Books, the library cat of Spencer, Iowa, who died of old age late in 2006. I've been a fan of Dewey's since Gary Roma's "Library Cats" documentary came out a few years back, and I'm certainly not alone.

Dewey (named for the Dewey Decimal System in a contest by the small town) became a tourist attraction. Like all good animal stories, "Dewey: The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World" (Grand Central, \$20) is really about people, especially librarian Vicki Myron, who wrote the book along with Bret Witter.

Dewey was dumped in the book-return as a kitten in the middle of winter. The throw-away kitten never wanted for anything again and gave much in return. I'm a sucker for libraries and orange kitties, but I defy anyone not to love the story of Dewey. Especially since he's one of a dying breed – between liability issues, allergies and people who just don't like cats, few libraries will ever see the likes of Dewey. And that's a shame. Public buildings may be

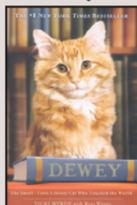
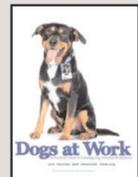


increasingly intolerant of resident pets, but workplaces have never been more pet-friendly. While people who own their own businesses have long had shop cats and taken their dogs to work with them, pet-friendly offices are a relatively new phenomenon. They seem to be most common in areas known for young workers and innovative work environments, notably those of the Silicon Valley, home to the nation's computer industry.

But even in those rule-averse offices, problems come up. Unruly dogs, accidents and other challenges can push a pet-friendly office to banning all animals. That's why I was so glad to see "Dogs at Work: A Practical Guide To Creating Dog-Friendly Workplaces" (Humane Society Press, \$22), written by experienced dog-trainer and author Liz Palika, and one of the bright young stars of the Humane Society of the United States, their chief economist Jennifer Fearing.

Together, the two have produced a can't-miss guide to creating a pet-friendly workplace that even those who don't like animals can tolerate.

Other books worth noting for 2008 include "The Story of Edgar Sawtelle," a novel by David Wroblewski (Ecco, \$26), and "Saved: Rescued Animals and the Lives They Transform" by Karin Winegar with photographs by Judy Olausen (Da Capo Press, \$26).



Read an interview with Marion Nestle

Dr. Marion Nestle's extensive background in human nutrition and food policy served her well when she decided to take on the issues with pet food.

As the Paulette Goddard professor in the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health at New York University, she was already familiar with the regulations, the marketing and the companies involved in products for feeding both people and pets. She soon discovered even more parallels, with trends from the fatuous to the potentially dangerous in both markets.

When the pet-food recall of 2007 became the first wave of product-safety issues with Chinese imports, Nestle dug in to the story.

On our Web site, PetConnection.com, Christie Keith interviews Nestle about the 2007 pet-food recall, the production of food and what it means for us all, two-legged and four-legged both.



'Pet Food Politics' author Dr. Marion Nestle is best known for her writing on human food issues.

pet buzz

AVMA calls for end to cropping



The AVMA has gone on record in opposing the surgical altering of ears and tails, and is encouraging breed clubs to do the same.

- Will the United States follow other countries in making cosmetic surgery for dogs a thing of the past? The American Veterinary Medical Association is now on the record as opposing ear-cropping and tail-docking when performed for cosmetic reasons. The AVMA has gone further, calling on breed clubs to remove mention of the procedures from its standards for show dogs. Veterinarians say the procedures have no medical benefit for the animals.

- Fireflies are rapidly diminishing in many parts of the world because of light pollution. Male fireflies flash to attract females, and when a female winks back, the two meet and mate. *The New York Times* reports that light from buildings or other urban development, or even reflected light off low-lying clouds on a dark night, can blind or distract them, preventing mating.

- The legendary game guru behind Nintendo's products finds inspiration in his life – including his dogs. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that the popular Nintendogs game started with Shigeru Miyamoto's love of dogs, especially his Shetland sheepdog, Pick. — *Dr. Marty Becker and Mikkel Becker Shannon*



About Pet Connection

Pet Connection is produced by a team of pet-care experts headed by "Good Morning America" veterinarian Dr. Marty Becker and award-winning journalist Gina Spadafori. The two are also the authors of several best-selling pet-care books.

On PetConnection.com there's more information on pets and their care, reviews of products, books and "dog cars," and a monthly drawing for more than \$1,000 in pet-care prizes. Contact Pet Connection in care of this newspaper by sending e-mail to petconnection@gmail.com or by visiting PetConnection.com.

THE SCOOP

Washable covers key to fighting smells, fur

Winter is the time when you really notice pet smells, since the house is shut up tight and you and the pets are inside. While a certain amount of tolerance is called for when you live with pets, there are a few tried and true tips for keeping messes and smell to a minimum:

- Stop mud at the door, with thirsty mats both inside and outside the threshold. Keep a towel at hand, and train pets to wait on the indoor mat for a quick paw-wipe.
- Get on pet stains right away, with as much gusto as you can. A stain delayed is a stain set for good. Use an enzyme-based cleaner, such as Nature's Miracle or Anti-Icky-Poo. Steam cleaners are great for neutralizing smell as well.
- Choose flooring that's easy to keep clean. Carpets are not that surface. Think easy-clean surfaces – tile, hardwoods or



Smooth flooring is easier to keep clean than carpets when you have pets.

laminates or even linoleum. Cover with washable throw rugs or indoor-outdoor area rugs that can be cleaned easily.

— When buying or re-upholstering furniture, consider high-quality leather, which wipes clean and stands up well to pets. If leather isn't in your plans, find attractive washable covers or throws to protect your furniture. These will catch the fur and smell,

and frequent washing will remove both.

- For fur you can't catch on a throw or washable cover, choose a powerful vacuum with attachments designed to lift pet hair. Several companies now market such appliances directly to pet lovers. For quick fur pickup, use masking tape wrapped sticky-side-out around your palm, or run a clean, slightly damp sponge across the fur-marked surface. — *Gina Spadafori*

BY THE NUMBERS

We're so square

Although new materials such as acrylic make all kinds of aquarium shapes possible, most fish-keepers still choose the traditional rectangular shape.



A rectangular aquarium remains the most popular.

Aquarium shapes chosen

(multiple answers allowed):

Rectangular	76 percent
Bubble/round	15 percent
Hexagonal	9 percent
Bow-front	4 percent
Coffee table	2 percent

Source: American Pet Products Association

PET TIP

Walking the cat? Some people do

Many indoor cats can learn to enjoy an outdoor outing on leash. Choose a light leash and a harness designed for cats, not for dogs, since a cat will easily give a dog harness the slip.

Walking a cat isn't about heading out as with a dog, but rather consists of encouraging your pet to explore, with you following. Treats and praise can make a kitty more tolerant of the restrictions of harness and leash.

Never leave your cat tethered and unattended. This leaves him vulnerable to attack or to a terrifying time of hanging suspended from his harness should he try to get over a fence.

If your cat doesn't like the outings after you've given him time to warm up to the harness and leash, don't force him out. Instead, use toys and cat furniture to enrich his indoor environment.

— *Gina Spadafori*