**SANDY’S STORY**

Amber Times Checks in with Else, Esther and Carnia. This dedicated trio are on a mission to help our furry friends in need find new homes. They are the caregivers of our cover model, Sandy, and share her story with us below.

Sandy was found wandering at Tampines Industrial Park. She’s currently under the foster care of Esther, with Carnia providing food and other necessities while Elsie takes charge of her medical needs. The three of us believe in providing all rescued animals with an overall health check and updated vaccinations (if required) prior to re-homing. Sandy is still waiting for her forever home, as her medical treatments are not intended to replace the advice of your own veterinarian (page 7).

Amber Times is the glue that makes life truly worthwhile! Dr Brian Loon, and Dr Angelina Yang would like to reassure pet owners that responsible owners and sterilising our pets. My master, Dr Brian Loon can now offer care to our feathered friends. My master, Dr Brian Loon and Dr Angelina Yang would like to reassure pet owners that sterilisation is a safe procedure when carried out by a qualified veterinarian (page 7).

**Hayden Says**

**Love Means No Strings Attached!**

Woof! What does it mean to love someone unconditionally? Humans debate this endlessly, but we pets really live it - through countless licks and cuddles, giving warmth and comfort, protection and security. And yet I’ve seen heart-breaking cases of pets being abandoned when they can’t fit into their owners’ lifestyles. Many end up as strays or get sent to shelters, which are often already running at full capacity.

Animals that don’t get adopted (especially the sickly and impaired) usually end up being put down - a really sad but true fact. We can play our part in minimising such regrettable outcomes by being responsible owners and sterilising our pets. My master, Dr Brian Loon, and Dr Angelina Yang would like to reassure pet owners that sterilisation is a safe procedure when carried out by a qualified veterinarian (page 7).

Having seen too many cases of dumped cats and dogs, my master decided to devote this issue to them. We bring you the heart-warming story of my dear friend, Bamji who has found his new forever home (page 6). To make sure you’re ready right for a pet in your life, we also flag the points you need to pay attention to when adopting or choosing a dog; we definitely don’t want to see any animal being returned to a shelter or fosterer a second time (see page 4).

As with all dogs under our care, we look for responsible owners who keep their pets in suitable and safe environments. Adopters should also allow home visits by the re-homer both before and after adoption. They need to provide a suitable environment and seek medical help if their pet falls ill. If the dog is still a puppy, sterilisation should be carried out at about six months of age.

Sandy is still waiting for her forever home as of 31st July 2014. If you’re interested to adopt her, please contact Carnia at carnia123@hotmail.com, or call 9455 8440.

**We also extend a warm welcome to Dr Gevanda Lowe, who has a special interest in pocket pets and birds! Yes, my master’s clinic can now offer care to our feathered friends. Dr Lowe’s article guides us through the basics of looking after pet birds (page 10). Speaking of the new, we also delve into the use of acupuncture in treating pets (page 8).**

As this fourth issue puts at our heartstrings, the Amber Q&A section focuses on heart health – read the write-up on the facing page.

Till our next issue, remember that we’re always here to answer your queries. Whether it’s about your pet’s health, behaviour or anything else, just write in to us and we’ll be happy to help.

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TILL OUR NEXT ISSUE!
WHAT KIND OF DOG SHOULD YOU ADOPT?

Primarily, dogs offer companionship. Do you require an active dog that will flourish in the company of kids, or a pooch with a gentle, placid nature who can sit quietly with an older person? Some larger breeds can also make suitable watchdogs or guard dogs, but may have aggressive tendencies and cause training problems. They often end up at dog shelters because their owners failed to train them properly and were unable to control them.

There are pros and cons in considering both puppies and adult dogs. If you are considering adopting a puppy, do read up on puppy testing exercises so that you can get a sense of the puppy’s personality. There is also a wealth of information on appropriate socialisation methods to inculcate during the puppy’s first months. While great fun, puppies are more vulnerable to disease - in the confines of a shelter or pet farm/shop, parasites or viruses can easily infect a pup. Puppies should be dewormed, checked for fleas, ticks and other external parasites, and be vaccinated. Remember that puppies will grow up and up, so be sure you can cope with a full-size dog in your home.

Unlike puppies, adult dogs offer fewer surprises. What you see is usually what you get. The dog’s coat and size are fixed, and its personality fully developed. Mature dogs may be housebroken and have some degree of basic house manners. They have also outgrown the aggressions of adolescence. Be wary of dogs who panic, tremble in fear and urinate when approached – these are signs of inadequate socialisation, and may require professional behavioural training to integrate into your home.

In general, an animal should appear robust and healthy. Any discharge or foul odour from the dog’s eyes, nose or ears when approached - these are signs of inadequate socialisation, and may require professional behavioural training to integrate into your home. The dog should also enjoy human attention and surroundings, showing curiosity and enthusiasm to explore the surroundings. The dog should also enjoy human attention and affection, respond when engaged and show an eagerness to play.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PUPPY

Some positive behavioural traits include taking an interest in its surroundings, showing curiosity and enthusiasm to explore the surroundings. The dog should also enjoy human attention and affection, respond when engaged and show an eagerness to play.

Watch out for negative behavioural traits. Rough play, such as pouncing or excessive mouthing, may mean the dog is not suitable for households with young children and babies. Dogs that display separation anxiety, like excessive vocalisation (barking and/or crying) when left alone, should not be considered fit for families or individuals with busy schedules.

HEALTHY LIVING

A visit to the veterinarian is an essential first step in providing your adopted dog with the care to lead a long and healthy life. Find a veterinarian you can trust – get referrals from friends or neighbours who have pets. Bring along any health records and a stool sample. Boldly ask all questions you may have about dog care: how often should it eat, be bathed, have its nails trimmed and it’s ears cleaned?

A good veterinarian will be happy to answer your questions and give recommendations, and also plan a schedule of visits and vaccinations if needed. The dog should be checked for heartworm and other internal parasites. Obtain advice on canine first aid, and have a first aid kit prepared in your home, so you can recognise emergency situations and be prepared to handle them. It is also a good opportunity to discuss dog food with your veterinarian. Most veterinarians recommend a good quality dry kibble food appropriate for each dog’s age and activity level. Establish a meal routine and feed at the same time once or twice a day for adult dogs. Puppies usually require feeding three times a day. A regular feeding schedule is especially important as it gives the dog a sense of security, supports housing training and helps prevent obesity. Never leave food out for the dog to eat whenever it may wish, but allow free access to water. Offer the same amount of food at the same place each day. Don’t worry if he doesn’t eat the first couple of days – dogs naturally tend to overeat than starve!

Regular exercise is as important as good dietary habits. It helps prevent obesity, and keeps a dog physically and mentally stimulated and satisfied. The amount of exercise varies, but a half-hour walk twice a day is a general rule to keep most dogs in decent shape. High-energy dogs may need additional activity, like fetching games. Depending on the coat type, your veterinarian will recommend a suitable grooming regimen. Use a quality dog shampoo, and a good brush. If practiced at least twice a week, your dog will be kept looking presentable. Grooming is also part of the bonding process, with dogs responding to their owner’s touch.

REFERENCES


BEST FRIENDS FOR LIFE

ADOPTING THE RIGHT DOG – an Amber Times special in collaboration with Dr Jessica Kuek

GETTING TO KNOW A DOG

Always approach a potential dog in an easy, non-threatening manner. Try to bend down to be at eye level when approaching a dog for the first time, as approaching them from a height may be seen as threatening to some dogs.

Observe the dog’s reaction to you and its surroundings closely. Does the dog immediately try to greet you? Does the dog appear to enjoy human affection and interaction? Or does it seem rather aloof or stolid and produce some distance? This gives you some indication to the dog’s individual personality.

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REFERENCES


ALL-ROUND WELLNESS

As pets are precious members of our family, we strive to provide the best for them. We never want to see our pets suffer and as such, we offer a wide range of treatment packages for your furkids. From routine annual health assessment to blood work, urine and faecal analysis, and diagnostic imaging. Our team of veterinarians will ensure that your furkids get the best care. To provide the best diet, exercise and healthcare for them.

All pets should receive a thorough annual health assessment with their veterinarian. Together with a physical examination, diagnostic testing of blood, urine and stools will help ensure you can trust - get the best picture of your pets’ health status, ensuring that any early signs of chronic disease are detected and managed early. This is especially important for senior dogs and cats aged 7 years and above. Diagnostic imaging with abdominal ultrasound and chest x-rays in older pets also helps to detect signs of structural changes in internal organs that could otherwise be easily missed. This information helps the veterinary team to provide the most appropriate holistic recommendations regarding diet, lifestyle and/or supplements to help optimise your pet’s health.

AmberCare Wellness Plans are examples of recommended packaged wellness health testing as part of the annual health assessment.

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To find out more, please visit ambervet.com/diagnostic.html.
DON'T WE ALL LOVE HAPPY-EVER-AFTERS? AMBER TIMES BRINGS YOU THE HEART-WARMING STORY OF AN ABANDONED DOG WHO FOUND HIS FOREVER HOME. MEET KELLY LEE AND BAMJI.

TELL US HOW YOU FOUND BAMJI?
It was back in late September 2010 at Aljunied Crescent. I was walking towards my car one evening when I saw a dog wandering around the void deck looking lost and frightened. As I couldn’t bear to leave him unattended, I decided to take him with me. He did not struggle and let me carry him, but he was very smelly!

Despite my best efforts, no-one showed up to claim him. At the end of the year, I sent him for a check-up, vaccination and neutering. He had a few ailments that required medical attention: his left eye’s gland couldn’t produce enough tears to clear discharge, his left front leg was weak, which means he limps slightly, and his scrotal sac was semi-distended and required surgery to resolve. However, he has overcome all these disabilities. He went for a thorough body check-up and dental treatment at Amber Vet last year and now has a clean bill of health.

WHAT'S BAMJI LIKE?
He's a lazy boy, and can fall asleep anywhere at all! I’ve taught him a trick: when I put him and command him “sleep!” he will lay flat on my left shoulder to sleep. He’s mostly quiet, so I actually have him under my desk at workplace, which is in a warehouse.

ARE THERE ANY INTERESTING STORIES ABOUT YOUR LIFE TOGETHER?
2013 was an exciting year for us! We participated in a charity drive where we distributed red packets and supplies to homes for the aged. It was a moving and meaningful experience.

Then, we had a real scare when Bamji went missing. I’d left him with my god-brother as I was going on a holiday to Hong Kong. Upon my landing there, he called to tell me that Bamji had disappeared. I hopped on the next available flight back to Singapore. I was a complete wreck over the next two days and mounted a desperate search for Bamji. Postings were made across social media channels while I drove the streets looking everywhere and broke down in tears many times. Just when all hopes were lost, I received word via the Stomp website that Bamji had been located. Immediately, I rushed over to the address in Bishan and found Bamji being cared for by a kind family. It was a most emotional reunion as Bamji and I hugged each other very tightly. I really have to thank all my friends: Derek, Phyllis, Chak, my sister Diana and the family who found and looked after Bamji. We bought everyone who had helped a dinner and took part in the Hair for Hope (I dubbed Bamji’s cut “Fur for Hope!”) cancer-awareness movement as our way of showing gratitude.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO OTHER PET OWNERS OR THOSE WHO ARE CONSIDERING GETTING A PET?
I get upset when I hear of pets being abused and abandoned. Having a pet is a life commitment; in return, a pet will shower you with unconditional love. There are many pets like Bamji who deserve kind owners – please adopt a pet only if you are ready – but I can promise you the experience is more than worthwhile!

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY IF YOUR PET EATS SOMETHING TOXIC OR ENDURES A STRESSFUL OR DISTURBING EXPERIENCE?
I would be worried, but I would not react in a stressful manner to the pet. I would do the necessary for the pet’s well-being and stay calm so that the pet will also stay calm. It is very important for the pet owner to remain calm and act calmly.

Tell us about Heartstrings.
Heartstrings is a fiction story about the love and care of an abandoned dog named Bamji. The story follows his journey from being an abandoned dog to finding his forever home with Kelly Lee. It highlights the importance of adopting pets, and the transformative power of unconditional love. The story is a heartwarming tale that celebrates the bond between humans and their pets, and the role pets can play in our lives.
WHAT IS ACUPUNCTURE?
Acupuncture is the insertion of needles into specific points of the body to achieve a healing response. There are 14 classic acupuncture meridians along the body. The meridians can be thought of as highways where energy (Qi) flows, and usually follow the paths of nerves in the body. Several acupuncture points are located along each meridian. These points correspond with nerve endings or specific points in muscle.

IS THERE A SCIENTIFIC BASIS BEHIND ACUPUNCTURE?
It is shown that stimulation of acupuncture points results in stimulation of nerve endings. Some needles send signals to other nerves, the spinal cord and brain, and trigger the release of various hormones and other chemicals such as endorphins. The overall effects may include pain inhibition, dilation or constriction of blood vessels, and stimulation of the immune system, resulting in enhanced immunity and white blood cell activity.

While many aspects of acupuncture remain unexplained by western science, scientific studies have shown acupuncture to be effective in relieving the following conditions in humans and/or animals:
- Pain management
- Intervertebral disc disease / slipped disc
- Musculoskeletal disease, including arthritis
- Reproductive disorders
- Skin conditions
- Neurological disorders
- Anaesthetic emergencies

WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED DURING AN ANIMAL ACUPUNCTURE SESSION?
The veterinarian will first ask the owner some questions to establish the animal’s patterns of routine and behaviour. This is vital for arriving at an accurate TCM diagnosis so that the right treatment and acupuncture points can be prescribed. The veterinarian will then perform a physical examination on the animal. This includes typically western analyses such as assessing heart rate, gum colour and abdominal palpation, and also TCM analyses like tongue and pulse examinations, and palpation of selected acupuncture points that relate to various internal organs. Based on the information gathered, a TCM and western diagnosis is obtained. This gives a more holistic picture of any imbalances in the body. A TCM treatment principle and acupuncture points are then formulated to harmonise these imbalances. The number of points may vary from as little as one or two to as many as fifteen to twenty, depending on the imbalances to be treated.

Acupuncture needles have a rounded tip (unlike a hypodermic needle with a sharp end), so there is only a slight pricking sensation on the skin when the needle is introduced. When the needle stimulates an acupuncture point comedy, a sensation called “De Qi” is felt by both the animal and practitioner. In humans, this sensation has been described as soreness, numbness or heaviness. There should not be sharp pain. Animals experiencing De Qi may move or flinch as the needle is introduced. This is not usually a sign of pain, but an indication that the right effect has been achieved.

The needles are left in place for about 5 to 20 minutes before removal. Following an acupuncture session, responses may fall into one of these categories:
- No change in symptoms, but the animal may be “brighter”
- Symptoms improve for 1-2 days, then recur
- Symptoms worsen for 1-2 days, then improve rapidly or gradually

With repeated treatments, the animal usually improves gradually, to the point of full recovery or stabilisation of the condition.

HOW MANY SESSIONS ARE NEEDED?
The number of acupuncture sessions depends on the condition being treated, as well as the animal’s response. Acute conditions, such as viral or bacterial infections, may require two to five treatments every one to two days. Chronic conditions, such as those common in older animals, usually need once to twice weekly sessions for three to four weeks, sometimes followed by maintenance sessions once or twice a month till the condition is resolved or stable.

WHO CAN PRACTISE VETERINARY ACUPUNCTURE?
There is no specific registration required in Singapore or in most other countries for veterinary acupuncture, thus any qualified and registered veterinarian may be allowed to perform veterinary acupuncture. It does require an in-depth knowledge of TCM principles and acupuncture points and their associated effects. Veterinarians who have formal training, and ideally certification, in veterinary acupuncture will have the required knowledge, experience and skills in utilising acupuncture and TCM to safely and effectively complement western veterinary medicine.

Dr Brian Loon, Principal Veterinary Surgeon of Amber Vet, is currently undergoing an intensive one year certification in Veterinary Acupuncture by the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS), and has experienced success in treating various ailments in dogs and cats with acupuncture. Dr Loon is expected to be fully certified in early 2015.

REFERENCES
www.ivas.org/about/IVAS_international_veterinary_acupuncture_academy_544064.html
Selecting and positioning a cage

Place the cage in a sheltered area, away from rain, heat and direct sunlight. Ideally, the cage should be situated at the hub of the family’s daily activities so that the bird can bond with the family and be socially involved. Ensure that the cage is large enough for your bird to flap its wings freely and toddle around comfortably. It is recommended that your cage be large enough to accommodate the bird’s landing area, perch, and toys.

Healthcare

It is important that owners pay attention to the appearance and behaviour of their pet birds daily. As prey animals, birds are very sensitive to subtle changes in their habitat. Unfortunately, this delay in displaying symptoms poses difficulties for early detection, thus affecting timely diagnosis and treatment.

The following symptoms require immediate veterinary attention:
- Reduction in appetite
- Reduction in energy levels
- Not perching
- Not grooming itself, dirty feathers
- Bloody feathers
- Unusual droppings
- Unusual appearance, e.g. cloudiness, discharge or crust at the eye or beak
- Weight loss
- Open-mouthed breathing
- Bleeding

Do establish a relationship with an avian-friendly veterinarian. Having a veterinarian who already knows of your bird’s medical history and temperament will go a long way in reducing the stress and facilitating effective diagnosis and treatment in an emergency.

Ensure that your bird is taken to the veterinarian in a calm manner. Do not move it abruptly and avoid sudden bright lights and loud noises during transportation as birds which are severely ill can collapse from stress. If possible, take your bird to the veterinarian in the cage if it is already living in it. This reduces unnecessary handling. This also gives the veterinarian access to its droppings and analyses of its living environment. Cover the cage with a large towel to create a dark environment. You may cut out small holes to ensure that the cage is still ventilated. Stay away from cold winds and air-conditioning. Upon arrival at the clinic, inform the staff that you have a bird with you so that you can be directed to a quieter waiting area if there are boisterous or barking canine patients in the common waiting area.

Hygiene Issues

You should bathe your pet bird using only clean, plain water. Bathing is part of their grooming routine in the wild. However, domestic pet birds who have never bathed in their lives need a gentle and gradual introduction to the idea of bathing. You can offer your bird a large dish filled to the brim with water. Some birds love rolling in such baths. Other birds may prefer that you mist them gently.

Wing clipping

The practice of wing clipping is controversial. It involves the trimming of six to eight of the bird’s flight feathers to prevent it from taking flight, yet allowing it enough lift to land safely. The reflex instinct for a bird in flight is to take flight. Even though owners are usually mindful about not letting their pet birds escape, accidents can happen and some prefer to avoid the risk of having it fly away for good. A pet bird also risks being hurt in the process of getting away - there have been escapes who have taken flight and ended up being caught and severely injured in falling fans, doorways, window grilles and so on. Birds that have been in captivity all their lives lack the skills to survive in the wild, and end up being maimed, exposed to the harsh elements, or becoming prey to predators or bigger birds. For these reasons, wing clipping might be a good idea.

Cutting flight also allows for safe handling outside the cage, thus increasing the ease with which you can train and bond with your pet. Still, some birds do manage to fly with their wings clipped, while others have been known to sustain injuries by falling from height because of a poorly clipped wing. You should take your bird to an experienced veterinarian for its wing clip.

It is recommended that young birds are allowed to learn how to fly, grow their flight muscles and learn how to land safely before their wings are clipped. We acknowledge that birds in captivity are not able to express some of their natural behaviour. Flying provides exercise and mental stimulation. Once you are confident of the training and bonding with your pet bird, you may consider allowing its feathers to grow out (i.e. not clipping the wings of the new molt). There are bird flight interest groups like Flight Masters which you can join to learn how to train your bird to fly in a safe and supervised manner.

Determining Gender

Some breeds of birds are sexually dimorphic. This means that you can tell their gender from the appearance. For example, male budgies have blue centers while female budgies have brown centers.

On the other hand, many other birds like macaws, loros and conures are monomorphic, which means you cannot tell their gender from their appearance. These birds can be sexed via DNA testing, which involves either a feather or blood sample. Do contact a trusted avian veterinarian should you want to find out the gender of your bird.

Tampering and Bonding

Tampering or bonding with a poorly socialised bird requires some patience, gentleness and consistency. Bonding with a bird is like forming a friendship with another human being; the more time you spend with them, the more they will feel comfortable with you and the more cooperative they will be with handling.

Winging off with just “hanging out” with it by its cage daily. Do not take it out of the cage if it panics, flies crazily or tries to bite the moment you approach it. Birds are very auditory and can sense the tones of our voices, so use this to your advantage by talking to it in a reassuring manner.

The first step towards handling your bird is to get it to “stop up” onto your fingers on hand. This involves just petting your bird and making sure that it knows that it is safe to be on your hand. This is best done with a bowl of fresh fruit that you can eat in front of it, offer it time after time.

Some birds may need a little gentle nudging against their abdomen. A bird may “bash” or bite at your hand while stepping up; do not be alarmed as it is just testing the stability of your hand, and has no intention to actually bite. When your bird has successfully stepped up, praise it and reward it with a treat.

Birds respond very well to positive reinforcement, so praise it and offer it rewards to let it know that it is responding in the right manner.

Feather-Plucking Behaviour

Some birds pluck their own feathers to make their nests during breeding season. However, feather plucking as a home environment may indicate a health or behavioural problem. Any health problem that is causing discomfort or physical distress can cause feather plucking. Poliomyelitis, Beak and Feather Disease can also cause feather problems. Many birds pluck their feathers out of boredom, stress or frustration. Feather plucking pet birds should be brought to a veterinarian to rule out any health issues.

Check out Dr Lowe’s profile at ambervet.com/team.html.
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