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Swedish cat shelters: a descriptive survey of husbandry practices, routines and management

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Abstract

*Animal shelters rescue and care for society's unwanted companion animals. Nonetheless, several studies have shown that ending up in a shelter can be stressful, and that shelter husbandry can amplify and spread certain diseases. The aim of the present study was to investigate and describe husbandry policy, practices and routines as well as occurrence and prevention of diseases in Swedish cat shelters. A survey was sent to 64 potential shelters of which 39 (61%) responded. Thirty-two shelters (82%) housed cats (*Felis silvestris catus*) in groups; one shelter provided only solitary housing. Thirty-one shelters provided single, pair and group housing. The most common group size was 3–5 cats (59%). Ninety-two percent of responding shelters had routines and/or protocol(s) for the management of the cats, 35 had healthcare routines and 30 shelters had routines for the admission of cats. All shelters with the exception of one had quarantine, and 22 shelters (58%) vaccinated cats prior to admittance. There was a significant positive correlation between shelter size and number of reported diseases. The most common reported disease was cat 'flu/cold, although altogether, shelters reported a low occurrence of disease. Practices differ between shelters relating to management, eg use of quarantine and vaccination routines. In Sweden, group housing is common and shelters provide cats with plenty of resources, eg hides and climbing structures, often providing outdoor access and a more 'home-like' environment. The possibility that providing a more 'enriched home-like' environment can help cats cope with the shelter environment is discussed, thereby decreasing the occurrence and transmission of infectious diseases.*

Keywords: animal welfare, disease, domestic cat, husbandry, routines, shelter