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**The assessment of activity in  
colony-housed domestic cats  
(*Felis catus*)**

A thesis presented  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Masters of Science  
in  
Zoology

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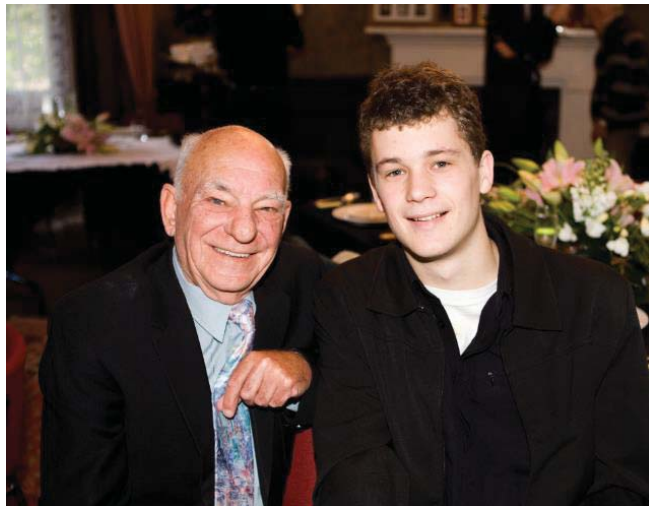
2015



# Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Dale Petersen, who passed away half-way through this work. Poppa, you taught me to live life to the full and strive for success in all aspects of my life. Your unwavering belief in me gave me, and continues to give me, the confidence and determination to pursue all of my current and future goals and ambitions. For that I am eternally grateful. You set the standards pretty high for what can be achieved in a lifetime, but I am determined to give you a run for your money. Consider this thesis an official start to our little competition!

I will forever cherish the times we spent together. Love always.



Dale Petersen (18/12/1934 – 23/05/2014) (left) and Chris Andrews - Author (right).



# Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Prof. Murray Potter and Assoc. Prof. David Thomas, for their expertise and guidance over the past two years. I am extremely grateful for your continuous support and encouragement throughout this work. I look forward to working with you both again for my PhD.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the staff at the Massey University Feline Nutrition Centre. Rachael Richardson, thank you for caring for the cats in my study and putting your arms on the line for collection of saliva and blood samples. I apologise for the scratches you incurred as a result of my research. I am also thankful to Margreet Hekman and Karin Weidgraaf for their assistance with blood sampling and for the occasional 'Feline Unit' curry lunch, which kept me at least marginally sane throughout the research component of thesis.

I am also grateful for Dr. Kay Rutherford-Markwick, who conducted preliminary investigations into a sensitive salivary oestradiol assay in cats. While we could not achieve the required sensitivity, I appreciate your extra effort in attempting to do so.

Mostly, I would like to thank all of my family and friends who have supported me throughout my time at Massey University. The past few years have been hectic and I could not have done it without you all. Special thanks to my mother, LeAnn Martin, who helped proof-read this thesis and supported me through everything. I would have never achieved what I have without your help. I also want to extend my sincere gratitude to my step father, Phillip Gleeson, who has assisted me financially throughout my time as a "broke student". I owe you one, or several actually! Lastly, I would like to thank my father (John Andrews) and step mother (Penelope Andrews) for their constant support and for putting up with my regular ranting about my research.



# Synopsis

Monitoring and quantifying the overall physical activity (OPA) of cats can provide insight into their health, wellbeing, behaviour and physiology, but the accurate quantification of OPA is difficult without labour-intensive behavioural observation. Recent advances in remote sensing technologies such as accelerometry offer an automated method for continuously assessing OPA. A single study has validated Actical® ‘MiniMitter’ accelerometers (MMAs) to assess OPA in domestic cats (*Felis catus*), but their sample size precluded investigation of inter-individual variation. The first aim of this thesis (Chapter 2) was to compare the MMA and observed activity data of a larger number of cats ( $n = 12$ ). While the MMA activity counts provided an accurate representation of observed activity for each cat, there was considerable variation between cats, so care is required when comparing the MMA activity data of different cats. Also the underlying factors affecting the OPA of individual animals need to be understood. The second aim (Chapter 3) investigated the effects of abiotic factors (day of the week, temperature, rainfall, and humidity) and one biotic factor (behavioural oestrus) on the OPA of domestic cats using MMAs. Day of the week did not appear to affect the activity of the cats despite lower levels of human interaction over weekends. This suggested that the group housing of the cats, with associated high intra-group interactions, outweighed human interactions. Temperature, rainfall and humidity all affected the OPA of the cats, but with considerable inter-cat variation. Reproductive state (anoestrus or oestrus) had a major effect on the OPA of the cats, with this study providing the first quantitative support for observations that cats are typically more active during oestrus. However, the behavioural detection of oestrus used in this thesis is challenging and may have led to the inaccurate categorisation of oestrus in some cats. Daily saliva samples were collected from all of the cats throughout the study, with the aim of using salivary oestradiol ( $E_2$ ) concentrations to monitor ovarian activity and more accurately identify periods of oestrus in the cats. An additional study (Appendix 2) was conducted to validate a liquid chromatographic (LC) assay for salivary  $E_2$ , but further development of this assay is required to improve sensitivity. It is clear that the OPA of cats is affected by ovarian cyclicity, and that this should be considered and accounted for when conducting activity-based research in cats.





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