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The Social Behaviour of Cats Housed in Laboratory Cages

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Thesis Abstract

Many species in the cat family, the Felidae, are listed as vulnerable to extinction. The tiger is one species facing extinction. Studies show that tigers can live in groups in captive environments and understanding the social behaviour of tigers could help tiger conservation. It is hard to study tigers in the wild and the domestic cat may be a good model to develop research methods to study tiger social behaviour.

This study focused on the social behaviour of domestic cats, and the effects of group type, sex, relatedness, age, weight, and coat colour on social behaviour. There were significantly different behaviour patterns in established groups and newly formed groups of domestic cat. As age differences increased between pairs of cats, their agonistic behaviour decreased significantly. Affiliative behaviour increased significantly as the weight differences between pairs of cats increased. Sex, relatedness, and coat colour did not influence the social behaviour of domestic cats. In addition, weather did not significantly affect normal behaviour.

Tigers were observed in three different captive environments. There were some differences in their behaviour in the three different environments. Tigers kept individually in small cages did more pacing than tigers in groups in a playground. However, a lack of data on the differences in tiger behaviour in different environments did not allow analysis.

This study was carried to develop the observation technique for cat social behaviour.

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