

Living with others' pets

Reading about dog woes in Patea reminded me why I've always been a cat person. I must be a masochist, though, because there's something I admire about the disdain cats show their employees when it suits them.

The cats that owned us never scratched or bit Lin, but I still bare the scars of their impatience.

The fact I fed them as often as she did didn't matter. Our last one never suspected it would be her with the gentle disposition who would take it to the vet on its final journey.

He clawed me frequently, possibly because I was the chauffeur of the camper-van we used to take him away in when we travelled.

He adapted well, sometimes riding in the cab with us to enjoy the views. But perhaps he sensed it was my fault he couldn't stay home in front of the heater, so he clooked me often (as the Scots say).

We don't have a cat now. That final feline tyrant cost thousands in vet fees as it survived being run over, and later when its kidneys failed.

We don't need to own a cat because our neighbourhood is overrun by them. Pretty much any night one of the little buggers will be sleeping on my chair on the deck, shedding fur, spewing under the table.

That's why I have sympathy for a woman who wrote to the Sunday paper about being inundated with cats.

She reckoned there were half a dozen coming into her garden, pooing on her lawn and paths, digging in the flower beds and chasing the birds.

She was afraid to complain in case neighbours blamed her if a cat disappeared.

If she trapped them and took them back to their owners, there was nothing to stop return visits. She didn't want to go to the council because it would record her name.

The advice person (it was that kind of column) agreed none of the approaches mentioned would do any good.

However, there were other possible solutions, she wrote, including electronic fences that deliver mild but unpleasant jolts, and a sprinkler system that detects a visiting animal and shoots out a burst of water.

She was most taken by a cat-watch device that emits a high-frequency alarm that cats can't tolerate. It senses movement in a 100-degree angle and has a range up to 18 metres.

The ultrasonic burst keeps going until the cat leaves and then you get a satisfying sort of alert to say it's been triggered. It doesn't seem to harm birds or the cats.

They work on dogs, too, and you can also get a hand-held version that would be handy on a walk.

I know from long experience that appealing to neighbouring pet owners is a waste of time. People have cats and dogs for many reasons involving the word “love”.

You notice I’ve segged into dogs.

Townie dogs are unpredictable in terms of this discussion because not all will succumb to the human will. Some can be trained, so are good neighbours. Some can’t.

They bark at their own shadow, whine from lack of attention, despair loudly at being left alone all day while their owners go to work.

I know this because I was once such an owner. We left our dog to amuse itself in a secure back yard and only later realised it was driving at-home neighbours to drink.

There should have been a clue in the fact it got out one day and tracked several blocks to Lin’s workplace.

Then came another strong hint, an awful one if it was true. We got home to find it had a broken tail, an injury that when we thought about it may have come from some desperate soul jamming its tail in the back gate.

In these COVID days of more people working at home, I suspect fewer dogs are being left alone to disturb neighbours, although some animals may be suffering even more after owners went back to work.

A friend tells me he’s been putting up with an all-day barker for more than a year. When he called the SPCA it said the owner wasn’t breaking animal cruelty laws.

He was left with ratting the dog out to NPDC, which requires a two-week “barking diary”. He's undecided if he wants to go that far.

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