



CAPTAIN - our front cover cat this year
Barbara has a soft spot for Captain as he has been with us from the beginning of our work with FIVs – one of our “founder fivs” who has had virtually no health problems in all those years. His leg had to be amputated before he came to us in 1997 as a young cat found injured in a country lane nearby. Apart from needing a dental, Captain has had a very healthy life, still eats well, and looks great.

Captain was given his name at the hospital because of the person who had found him being called “Cook”. It does suit him as he commands respect from the others. He never lets anyone bother him and rarely creates any trouble. Having three legs does not seem to have affected him – he can climb and jump with the rest of them.

He has lots of friends, especially Bruce, Cecil and Tabby Percy and also our new big boy Jim.

Our front cover cats are chosen to illustrate something about FIV. With Captain we hope to show that FIV has not affected him in all these years; he has spent nearly all his adult life here and we hope to have him for a good while yet.



THE CATWORK YEAR
2007





The Ups and Downs of 2007

Beginning to sum up the Catwork year, 2007, I sit in a room festooned with cards from friends old and new, and feel very humble and very blessed that so many people from around the country have remembered us and the Catwork cats at Christmastime. Without the financial support we get from our wonderful sponsors – some of whom have never even been here – we couldn't look after the number of cats that we do; but also, so very important to us, is the moral support we get from so many of you. That's what helps us keep going when the going is tough. Sometimes what we do seems pointless, a drop in the ocean, when the message about FIV not being a big issue is still not getting across, not even to some vets; sometimes the work is hard when the weather is particularly bad or we are feeling sad over the loss of one or other of our cat family.

Despite everything, we are very driven; each life is precious and needs to be looked after, and I often repeat my mantra (cribbed from Animal Affairs Charity) "A life saved – a difference made."

It has been a very busy year, and, despite our best intentions, we seem to have added to our rescue numbers. Every new cat seems to be in urgent need of help.

Thankfully, several new sponsors have joined as well, and new friends have been made through FIV cats – a whole gang in Liverpool whom Barbara calls her "Liver Birds".

Once again throughout the year we had many visitors, almost always bearing gifts, special treats for the cats. No wonder they love it when visitors come around!

Some great fundraising was done by individuals, enabling us to add to the accommodation and acquire some mini chalets for temporary use

SPECIAL THANKS

or an introductory place for a new cat before it mixes with the gang. The sanctuary garden has now expanded to its limit. Bob hired a skip in the late spring and cleared the top end of the junk that was there, creating more areas for the cats to use. The geriatric area near the house was also expanded to give a much better facility for the five old ladies who are all still with us.

In 2007 we sadly lost six cats, including one elderly skinny FIV (Fred) who was only with us a few weeks suffering from, almost certainly, untreated overactive thyroid. He didn't stand much chance out in the big cruel world, and he came to us too late.

Nine new cats found their way to Catwork, and Spider came back to us from our rehoming days back in 1995. His owner went into care so we took Spider back.

Our friend Claire, known as the 'Catwork outpost' gave a home to an elderly deaf cat we got involved with, who had been left behind when the owners moved! He must think he is now in 'pussy heaven' living with several other cats from the Catwork rehoming days.

At the time of writing, Catwork sanctuary is home to 35 rescues funded by our sponsors and supporters.

We also have 8 household pets funded by ourselves – mostly rescues we decided to keep – making a grand total of 43 cats and 1 rescue rabbit. Amazing where they have all come from, but a very big thank you to everyone who makes it possible for us to care for them.

Our grateful thanks to everyone who has contributed in any way, financially or emotionally, throughout 2007.

Our Bristol friends have continued to visit regularly and take a very personal interest in what goes on at Catwork. (They also take Barbara out for a pub lunch each time they come!)

Our sponsor, Stuart, has once again done extra fundraising by selling lots of items he made.

Lisa did another car boot for us, and her sister and brother-in-law, Heather and Sean, organised a great raffle at work buying all the prizes themselves as well as filling a hamper of cat goodies which they brought before Christmas on a murky afternoon which certainly brightened us all up, especially the cats.

Thanks to Pat and Mike who gave us a generous cheque on top of their monthly sponsorship from an inheritance they had received.

Two fundraising ideas with a difference:

Elaine and Simon Stanton arranged one where Simon did a flying stunt and got people to sponsor him, raising a good sum for Catwork.



*Our Bristol friends Lyn, Annie, Lorna and Sara
- a rare photo
- not a cat in sight !*



*Heather and Sean with their Christmas hamper
- cats waiting patiently
- except Woody, of course !*



*Elaine and Simon give Thomas Cornwall some attention
- much to Bruce's annoyance !*

Another unusual idea came from Roger and Viv Belcher when Viv had a 'significant' birthday and held a party asking people not to give presents but to donate to Catwork and their local rescue centre in Alsager from whom they had adopted their FIV cat, Freddie. Brilliant idea and a good sum raised for both rescues (Viv must have a lot of friends!)

Our thanks to West of England and South Wales Cat Club, Bristol Cat Club, and West Country Cat Club for once again making donations to Catwork.

Thanks also to Portishead Spiritualist Group for their donation. Animal Affairs, the charity that supports small rescues through their shop sales has continued to send several cheques throughout the year – very many thanks for continuing to support us.

Many Sunday breakfasts have been provided since the friend of a new sponsor in Gloucester started giving us all the tuna pouches her cats don't like from the multipacks. An amazing number of pouches have come to us. Our lot in the Fivory don't turn their noses up at anything, but tuna is a real treat!

John Spratley, another sponsor, organised a consignment of special treats for the cats, the type that clean the teeth and make the coat shine – no wonder they all look good!

Mary brought from her rescue centre all the biscuits they had as surplus. She arrived (with a rescue) in a tiny car packed full to bursting



Ann shares out the treats - Prawns seem to have the cats' attention - can't think why!



John Spratley gives Thomas a cuddle - whether he wants one or not!



Mary with Jasper (her rescue from Wales), while Zara brushes Bruce



Roger with Tabby Percy



Gill with Bootsy (her favourite)

with boxes of cat biscuits – it was like the Tardis – the packs kept coming and we still have some for the lunchtime snack even though she came in the summer!

The Forest of Dean CP group have continued to have a collection box in their shop for Tutts (who lives at Catwork) and friends. Many thanks for the cheques that have been sent.

Ruth, one of the group, has continued to send us lovely Felix cushions. The cats really love them and they are a splendid addition to the chalet accommodation.

Combined Animal Charities, in Berkshire, who became aware of us through BT, our dramatic New Year Rescue, has sent us both donations and boxes of blankets and goodies several times throughout the year – many thanks.

Very grateful thanks to vet Rob Kellagher down in Saltash, Cornwall, who has a box on his counter for Thomas who came to us in the spring. Many generous cheques have found their way to us as a result of his and his clients' generosity.



Peter and Debby from Luton with our eldest - Tutts



Laura (vet nurse) and Mum with Jasper and Bruce



Bernie, Clare and Carol - always popular with the cats



Sue Dobbs gives Chips a game



John from Edinburgh with Fred



Dave has a laugh while Carol is busy with Thomas

T E N N E W A R R I V A L S I N 2 0 0 7

Our bus driver friend, Bob, has continued to pick up loads of sawdust from the local mill and bring them over from Taunton four times a year. This saves us ever having to buy expensive litter for the sanctuary. We are most grateful.

Lastly, and very importantly, our thanks to all at Quantock Veterinary Hospital who once again, have provided such excellent care for the cats and moral support for ourselves.

The excellent service the hospital provides has this year been publicly recognised. They have, after a rigorous inspection, gained RCVS (Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons) accreditation, which means they have reached a very high standard in veterinary care.

Also two of the staff (vet Rhiannon, and nurse Stuart) have recently won “Cynthia” awards given by the Feline Advisory Bureau for excellence in cat care - two from the one practice - and they're our vets!

We consider ourselves extremely fortunate in the knowledge that all the Catwork cats receive the very best of veterinary care.

So many people help us in so many ways, so to all those whom we haven't mentioned individually - Thank you.



Beryl chats to Cecil...



...while Brian kisses Thomas!



Rhiannon and Stuart with their “Cynthia” awards



Ken with Cecil and Thomas (funny how Thomas always seems to be there) while Woody waits behind.



Stella with Thomas and Bootsy



Gerry visits his sponsored cat, Guy - not sure why he's holding on to his tail!

BT (FIV)

BT was the first arrival of 2007, featured in the stop press of last year's book, - a cat with FIV caught up in a vets in Berkshire over the New Year with no one willing to take him on, until the veterinary ambulance driver was given our number by someone who'd picked up one of our leaflets on holiday in Gloucestershire. Barbara got through to the vet in the nick of time – it seems the vet had already drawn up the syringe



to put him to sleep! We called him BT because of that phone call.

One year later he is fit and healthy and, hopefully, happy. He has had no health problems so has not needed to see the vet since that (nearly) fateful Christmas / New Year experience. Two ladies from Berkshire who raise money for small rescues have, because of BT, sent donations and goodies throughout the year.

THOMAS CORNWALL (FIV)

Thomas made an instant hit with all the staff when he was taken to the vets in Saltash. The farmer who had been feeding him in his barn was also very fond of him, but circumstances prevented him from taking him on.

The local CP (who couldn't help) seemed to know of Catwork and gave the vet our number. Arrangements were made that we would take him if no home materialised, which it didn't.

Thomas was neutered before he came and a sixth sense Barbara had about him made her ask if we could get him microchipped, but it was considered not necessary as he would be living in a confined sanctuary.



We met Peter, the farmer, at Taunton motorway junction one spring evening with Thomas, whom we took home and installed in his chalet. Thomas turned out to be a very “smart” cat in every sense. Not only is he quite a looker, but pretty bright as well. After only being here for one meal, Thomas was not in his chalet next morning, and we couldn’t see how he had got out. Panic set in – we had no photo, no ID, but at least he was ginger – easier to spot than a black. Posters were quickly run off to distribute round our part of the village that afternoon. How was I going to explain this to everyone who’d gone to so much trouble down in Cornwall? Barbara knew he should have been microchipped – that “feeling” had proved right!

However, before Barbara had begun to put out the posters and leaflets under doors, she went round the sanctuary with the lunchtime snack, and Thomas appeared through the hedge on the outside of the Fivory gate. He was microchipped as soon as possible, but not before he got out again, but this time he came back in time for breakfast. Smart cat!

Thomas is now a well established member of the gang. He’s very much his own person and doesn’t like mixing too much. The others have a healthy respect for him – often the case with ginger cats.

Thomas did have a nasty flu type virus which was drawn out and we had to isolate him and ply him with much medication back in the summer. He is now fighting fit and somewhat plump

It is lovely that the vets from which he came, keep in touch, and his rescuers. A “Thomas and friends” box has been set up on the vet’s counter and Catwork literature put around, and he has been extremely well funded all year.

BLACKIE (FIV)

Blackie was a stray in Weston-super-Mare, being fed when he turned up, by Stella, one of our sponsors.

He was so nervous that it was not possible to pick him up. Time went on, Stella continued to put food out for him, then Blackie appeared not to be able to walk properly. Cats



Protection were unable to take him in and Stella and Barbara became worried as he was obviously in need of veterinary attention.

We said that we would help not knowing that he was FIV positive – a death sentence if certain organisations get involved with his sort of case.

On May bank holiday, the cat was so poorly he allowed himself to be picked up and put in the ever ready basket.

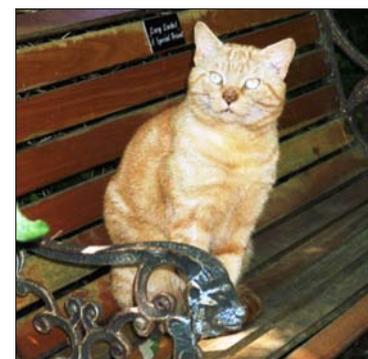
Barbara arranged to pick up the cat at a halfway point and took him straight to the hospital where he spent the next three days being x-rayed and generally sorted out, including the blood test which revealed his FIV status – no problems as to where to put him now. The poor cat’s bladder was so full that he was unable to put his back leg to the ground, making it look as though he had been injured.

Nervous at first, Blackie soon decided we meant him no harm and there was plenty of food on offer. He made an excellent recovery. Blackie was probably someone’s only pet and is a bit of a loner. He gets very grumpy if he is being cuddled and has to be turned off the lap. Blackie loves his food (don’t they all!) and always gives a little “thank you” nudge when it is being served up.

All in all a good result, and great teamwork.

WOODY (FIV)

Woody came from a large veterinary practice in Gloucester where the vet nurses try their hardest to find homes for the strays that come in (as we have found most nurses do).



Woody was going to be difficult, being FIV and a sprayer, not suited to an indoor situation. The lady who had been feeding him had taken him to the vets because he had an injury and that’s when it became known that he was FIV – a typical candidate being a stray unneutered male.

Laura, the nurse, had kept our phone number after a previous

conversation we'd had on another subject and did not know we specialised in FIV. When she phoned asking if we knew of anyone who might take on an FIV cat Barbara had to spill the beans as he would have been put to sleep. We arranged for him to be neutered and microchipped (the name "Woody" came from the "Wood Vet Group" where he was) and he was brought down to Somerset by an animal courier service.

Woody settled in quickly and it was evident from the start that he had an enormous appetite! Laura and her mum came to visit some time later and were pleasantly surprised to see how well he looked. Woody has attracted no less than four sponsors – relations and friends of Laura and her mum and the lady who fed him as a stray. An extra bonus is another friend who saves up all the fish pouches from multipacks, which her cats don't like, and they all find their way here. Most Sundays, the Catwork cats get Whiskas pouches for breakfast. Well done Woody!

FRED (FIV)

This little cat, called Bailey by Mary who rescued him, but called Fred by us, was a really sad case of an elderly cat with FIV who clearly hadn't been able to get enough to eat because of his age and size and also because he was almost certainly suffering from an untreated overactive thyroid (this condition makes cats ravenously hungry and yet they lose weight).

Fred was with us for only a few weeks, such a bright little cat with the most amazing emerald eyes.



Most of the time we had him he ate ravenously and was on the brink of having the thyroid problem confirmed when he suddenly, in the space of an afternoon, rapidly deteriorated and did not want supper. It was no surprise to find him dead in the morning laid in a warm bed. It was very distressing to see how emaciated the poor little chap was. We had done all we could, and at least for the last weeks of his life he had food, warmth and comfort and knew a little kindness.

JIM (FIV)



Jim from Surry is a really big cat, weighing in at 7kg! Jim's reputation was such that we wondered what we had agreed to take on. He had been a semi-feral when young, and in and out of care and homes most of his life. We were told he liked to dominate, had a few behavioural problems, and needed a special diet.

Jim, on arrival, swaggered up to the gang in the top part of the Fivery who sat in a row the other side of the wire and

just looked at him, as much as to say: "What's your problem?"

Jim was nonplussed and from that first day has been no trouble at all. In fact he's a very amiable guy who talks a lot and "dances" like a baby hippo!

When he was checked out at the vets for a mouth problem, we didn't know how he'd be. It was a job heaving him up onto the table but he turned out to be a model patient and fast became a favourite with the vets.

Jim has his own special cuddly toys, of which he is very possessive.

Jim is a delightful character – really a gentle giant - and is often to be found surrounded by the other cats, who clearly have no problem with him at all.

SPIDER (Special needs)

Spider is a lovely long-haired cat who was actually the second cat we rescued back in 1995. In those days we were rescuing and rehoming in a small way and not doing the work we do now with the FIVs and FeLVs.

Spider was homed to an older lady in the village where he has been ever since until recently when his owner had to go into permanent care.



We have been involved with Spider all these years, taking him to the vet when necessary and having a neighbour we know watch out for him. When Spider's owner was taken off to hospital the neighbour alerted us. Although the lady's carers were putting food down for the cat, they didn't seem to realise that he couldn't eat it, which turned out to be due to an untreated dental abscess.

We took Spider back into care and he had a much needed dental and blood tests which revealed that for an elderly cat he is in remarkably good health still and very agile. Our problem has been where to put him.

Spider is too old to be rehomed in our opinion, so our first thought was to let him join the house gang. This proved unsuccessful, however, as he has always liked to spend much of his time outdoors. Having to keep him in for the necessary time was a logistical nightmare and some of the other cats wouldn't come in.

We next tried Spider back in his chalet where he'd been put at first to see if he would use it as a base and be in the garden like he used to be at his old home. However, that didn't work either, as the first day we let him out he found his way back to his old home, turning up at the neighbour's the next morning. We thought he might do this and had asked her to look out for him.

At the moment Spider is in the old folks' area but we can't make up our mind where is the best place for him. He will need to be restricted or he will keep going back home in the village.

However, he is looking well, eating well and the right answer will no doubt evolve.

JOSEPH (FIV)

Joseph came from the same vet centre as Woody, in Gloucester – an older stray with a massive thyroid lump; he also turned out to be FIV+;



with all these issues and Christmas looming, we offered to squeeze him in.

After our experience with Thomas Cornwall, we now like to get cats microchipped before they get here, which means coming up with a name before getting to know what might suit. Sometimes names seem “right” straightaway, sometimes it is difficult to find one that suits.

Being December, we went for Joseph – not a bad choice as it turns out since there was “no room at the inn” of the mainstream rescues. Joseph is a very amiable character and settled in very quickly.

Joseph is on thyroid tablets and in early January a blood test will be done to see if he's on the correct dosage and he will probably have the thyroid removed. In the meantime its difficult to keep up with his ravenous appetite, but he's a very sweet cat.

MARY (FIV)

A phone call came in from a Taunton vet, from whom we've taken a few cats in the past, asking if we could help with a nervous black female they'd had for several weeks and hadn't been able to home, her FIV status, once again, proving a problem. Such a shame as she's a sweet cat.

Closer to Christmas, with Joseph already in residence, this one had to be called Mary. The name turned out to suit her perfectly – a dear sweet cat who settled in straightaway and quickly overcame her nervousness. She will probably join the old ladies, as she would be the odd one out in the Fivery with all the jobs!



THE BABY (Oliver)

Yes, a hat trick in December, would you believe? Having taken in a Joseph and a Mary we would not have thought it possible that a baby would arrive, but it did! Suggestions were made for his name but “Jesus” seemed a bit irreverent!

His arrival was, however, somewhat miraculous. The phone rang several times in quick succession, but we were not there to answer it. The message left was urgent: “Oh dear, I need you now!” Then at the door appeared the mum of a local postman who’d found a tiny black kitten in the middle of a busy country road. He had put it in the hedge and rang his mum to get help.

Barbara drove to the village where the kitten had been spotted, arranging to meet the postman at the village hall where he would show her the spot he’d seen the kitten. Of course, when they got there, the kitten wasn’t there, having gone back across the road to the only house in the area where it had been seen eating bird food several days before in the coldest weather we had experienced so far this winter (hard frosts).

A plate of tuna was organised to entice it out from under the barn where it had gone, which did the trick. Once safely in the basket and the postman continuing his round, Barbara took him home. Being Tuesday, the vets had an afternoon surgery across the road where he was checked out, with nothing more serious than worms, fleas and ear mites detected – all easily dealt with. How the kitten (estimated aged 8 weeks) had survived at least five days without food in the freezing weather is amazing.

He’s still here (surprise, surprise) and has been taken on as one of our house pets. We’ve called him Oliver, as Oliver Twist was being shown that week, and the little chap has quickly learnt to ‘ask for more’. He’s as bright as a button with a little tail that sticks up like a Christmas tree, and has brightened up Christmas here at Castle Street.



THOSE WHO LEFT US IN 2007

GEORGE

George, the lovely Cheshire cat we had taken in May 2006, fell poorly that November and gradually went off his legs due to progressive and degenerative brain damage which had begun long before we knew him, in our vet’s opinion.



George was a lovely natured cat and it was very sad to see him gradually deteriorating. We brought him into the house over the Christmas period and were syringe feeding him as he had never had a good appetite. He seemed to have had a happy last summer here in the garden, and we hope

he knew some love and comfort at Christmastime 2006. When George was clearly not coping, we asked our vet to put him to sleep early in the New Year.

DOUGAL

Our lovely bright little Dougal, who looked as though he wore make-up, we lost in July. He had coped with a bad mouth and thyroid problems incredibly well, but then his kidneys failed him.

When his thyroid problem was first diagnosed, in 2004, he was operated on, but sometimes the condition returns much later, and this is what happened in Dougal’s case. Another operation was out of the question, so we had to tablet him twice a day and take him for six-monthly blood tests to check the dosage was right for the condition. Dougal did very well for a long time in this way, but kidney failure set in and the battle was lost.

Some of you may remember Dougal was once our front cover cat (2005 yearbook) as he had done so well to cope with his several problems.



CHARLIE

Charlie was one of life's characters. When he was first brought to us he was really scary and would hiss and growl and look very wild. As time went on and we got to know him, we could see what a super cat he was – he just hated being with the other cats and would rush around taking a swipe at any cat and anybody in his way.



We thought Charlie was going to die on us several months before he actually did, as one morning we found him slumped over his water bowl looking limp and lifeless. Barbara rushed him across the road to the vets who were, fortunately, still open. The vet phoned through to the hospital to get a drip set up; we thought we wouldn't see Charlie again, but he revived on the drip like a flower put in water, and he became his usual feisty self in the hospital. He had had a urinary infection it seems.

Some weeks later, Charlie had a respiratory problem, which turned out to be a tumour on the larynx. He was at the hospital for an investigative procedure when the lump was discovered; it was inoperable and growing, so we allowed him to go whilst still under the anaesthetic. Barbara later collected him to be buried in the garden with all the other past rescues.

Such a shame! Just when Charlie had conquered many of his psychological problems, physical problems came along which could not be treated.

Following on closely from Dougal, it was a sad two weeks at Catwork.

FRED

This poor little cat's arrival and death within three weeks is covered on page 10 in the "New Arrivals" section.

He had been fighting to survive against all odds, but did have a quick end (probably heart attack due to thyroid) in the comfort of a warm place.



BEAU

Beau was one of our FeLVs whom we'd had nearly two years; he also had a heart condition. When Barbara first saw Beau she was concerned that he seemed a youngster, as leukaemia in young cats is usually



terminal within a couple of years. Beau, had been sentenced to death on the strength of only one test (FeLV needs two tests three months apart to confirm the virus) by Cats Protection Stroud, and we got to know of him through a friend, took him on and gave him what was to be only two years of life – sadly this is common for young FeLVs.

Mercifully, leukaemia often kicks in suddenly, and there is a rapid deterioration ending in death; in Beau's case, within a week from start to finish.

When Barbara first noticed he didn't seem "right" it was hardly possible to see anything wrong, but tests at the hospital revealed severe anaemia. The results were confirmed by an outside laboratory, but over the few days before the results came back it was obvious that Beau was going to die. We took little Beau to the hospital to be put to sleep rather than go out and find him dead in the morning.

Those two years he nearly didn't have – everyone involved had to fight for the chance to give him that time. Beau was a sweet little cat who kept himself to himself in the Felvery, but loved people. He was a model patient as we had to give him a daily capsule for his heart condition which was kept in check and did not cause him problems. It is so sad when cats contract leukaemia as it is a killer virus in young cats.

Little Beau is sadly missed.

WILLIAM

In September, a couple of weeks after his seventeenth birthday, we lost our pet Burmese, William. He has left a huge gap in the household, and it is still very painful to speak of and write about him.



William had suffered from high blood pressure for well over a year and had been doing extremely well on his daily medication and six-monthly check-ups. Then he developed a respiratory problem, which seemed at first to be no more than an infection. However, it turned out subsequently to be the start of a tumour on the larynx, which was to be his downfall. William was treated to try and slow down the growth, but inevitably, it got bigger and started making his breathing difficult. When he became lethargic and not wanting to eat, we knew his time had come – our vet came to the house and put him to sleep with most of the other house pets around and about. Ben, William's brother, seems quite lost as they always used to be curled up together.

We decided to have him cremated, there being no room near the house for burials, and Willy being so much part of the household.

William had always been full of tricks – trying to open the fridge at any opportunity, and he would fall over as if shot when a finger was pointed at him like a gun!

Burmese never really grow up – thank goodness.

We had William and Benjamin from kittens before we ever rescued a single cat, so you can imagine how much we miss him.

UPDATE ON OTHER CATWORK CATS

THE FIVs

CAPTAIN (this year's front cover cat)

Captain, one of our earliest FIVs has had a vet free year and is still looking good. He has spent most of his life in the sanctuary, and despite having only three legs, has a "presence" which the others seem to respect. He was well named.



CECIL

Again, an excellent year. Cecil is a really "easy" cat – good natured, unfussy and good looking.

Cecil especially loves it when visitors come, when he puts himself up for cuddles.



MR CHIPS

Again no health problems; Chips is looking good and eats well. He's another one who keeps himself to himself, but the Fivery is big enough for the cats to get away from each other if they want to. (See '2008 update', p33)



FLUFF

No health problems for Fluff in 2007. The biggest problem is his coat, as he has the sort of fur that goes into knots very easily, not helped by spending lots of time out of doors.





TABBY PERCY

One of our older residents who, so far, has never needed to see the vet – quite remarkable. Percy is a sweet inoffensive little cat who's never any bother and is actually not as shy as he once was.



GUY

Guy has had a vet free year; his main problem is the other cats. He's very much a loner and gets picked on, especially by Jasper for some reason. Guy now lives with the quieter cats in Care for Life House. Guy is a very handsome cat, and it's such a shame he has such problems with the others.



CONNER

Conner, part Siamese, came to Catwork with his brother, but sadly Ginge was suffering from undiagnosed diabetes when we got him and was not with us long.

Conner, however, is a picture of health and looking really good, especially after his recent eye operation. Sometimes cats have a condition known as entropion, where the eyelashes rub against the eyeball, which must be very irritating. Conner had had an operation to correct this before he came to us, but it hadn't been that successful. He began to get infections during 2007 so we decided to have the operation done again. Our vet did a super job and its great to see Conner's eyes properly at last. He must feel an awful lot better as well.



JASPER

Jasper, the escape artist when he came to us in 2006, has stayed put since some tree surgery was done to prevent him getting out. He has grown into a really solid cat and, like so many ex-strays, could eat for England. Jasper has had no health issues since we took him on.



DONNY

Donny, our last year's front cover cat, has had a good year. The removal of one of his ears last year due to growths does not seem to have affected him at all.

Donny has been with us a few years now, having come to us after surviving being nearly starved to death by an owner who kept him shut up in her bathroom! He was so emaciated it was thought he wouldn't survive – he did, and these days is a really heavy cat.



BRUCE

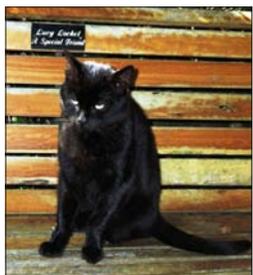
Another long-term resident who, since our vet sorted out his really bad mouth, hasn't looked back, and is these days doing really well. Bruce has a special friend in Captain and they have playfights and grooming sessions together.



NICK

Nick was featured at the back of last year's book illustrating the contrast from when we took him on and the beautiful cat he has grown into. He came from a Blue Cross centre where he was due to be killed next day – FIV again!

Nick is on the nervous side especially away from his familiar surroundings. He needed a dental in 2007 and was very scared in the hospital we're told, but apart from that, he has been fine.



BATMAN

Batty, as we call him, was our Battersea rescue who was going to be put to sleep because of being FIV, until his rescuer and Barbara pleaded for him to be allowed to come to Catwork. We made such a fuss that eventually he was allowed to come. Batty has done well here – a really “streetwise” London cat, but he has really filled out and is actually quite plump these days. At a distance it is quite easy to get him mixed up with Nick whom he now closely resembles. Batty has had a good year.



TUTTS

Tutts came to us from the Forest of Dean CP who sponsor him and also have a box in their charity shop for “Tutts and friends”. We are most grateful for the extra funding he brings with him. We also get sent super Felix cushions from Ruth who helps in their shop. Tutts is a lovely old cat who gets on well with the other cats and has never been any trouble; he also enjoys very good health.



BOOTSY

Bootsy, who has been here quite some time, has had a good year, in contrast to some other years when he seemed to have lots of problems. He is kept, for the most part, on a special diet and has, thankfully, had no recurrence of the urinary tract condition, which nearly saw the end of him some years back.

Having lost his mate Seamus, he now lives in the area with the ones we call the “lager louts”.

Bootsy's special admirer, Gill, came to see him in 2007, which was lovely, as we have known her since Catwork's earliest days.

THE OLD LADIES

The geriatric area has now been extended to link in with other adjoining areas with mini chalets, so the old ladies can, during the day, mix with special needs cats Lucky and Rani - quite a little gang - Mary (FIV) has recently joined them.

We have the Fivery and the Felvory - perhaps we should call this area the 'Oldery'?

Our three elderly FIV ladies

JEMIMA

Jemima, who came with Florence, has had slight mouth trouble which was easily treatable, unlike poor Jimmy.

Recently she was diagnosed with a hyperactive thyroid and has to be given tablets twice a day. Jemima has always had a big appetite for such a small cat, and having a thyroid problem makes her hungrier than ever! Her new friend is Lucky who now lives with all the old dears.





FLORENCE

Apart from a respiratory infection, Florence has been well. Because she can be a bit feisty and difficult to medicate, she had to be taken to the vet for a course of injections. As she got better it became more difficult to handle her!

Florence is fine now and has filled out a lot since she first came.



MOLLY

Molly is quite well, though not as agile as she was.

A couple of times she seemed to hurt her leg, but it's difficult for the vet to see what she's done, as Molly has always wobbled around due to a deformity she had from birth. A painkiller jab seems to sort her out. We also give her a squirt of Arthri-aid (for joint mobility) on her food each day and it seems to help a lot.

Molly is a lovely friendly old girl with a good appetite. Her owners do work for the stray cats in Greece where FIV is the last thing people worry about! If only we could get a sense of proportion about it in this country.

THE FELVs



GILES

Giles is a lovely little cat who is very timid, although at mealtimes he can be upfront and very affectionate.

We have had him some years now, brought to us by a vet in Devon who used to work at Quantock hospital.

Giles is actually both FIV and FeLV, yet he is in lovely condition and has enjoyed good health all year.



DYLAN

Dylan from Wales has done well this year with no health issues.

Older cats with FeLV can do well for years, like Dylan and the other three, but the young ones, like Beau, whom we lost recently, are much more likely to succumb to the virus.



JORDAN

Jordan, our big black cat all the way from East Anglia, has had a good year except for a spot of mouth trouble, which soon cleared up. He is a lovely cat with a nice temperament and big appetite.

JIMMY



Where to start with Jimmy's troubles? It has been an ongoing battle, which began this time last year, to cope with his mouth problems. Barbara has been backwards and forwards to the vet with Jimmy more than any other cat, yet he'd come to us in 2002 and had no problems at all until the end of 2006.

Mouth problems (stomatitis) are extremely difficult to treat as the causes can be several. Jimmy had his teeth out as sometimes this

really can help (as when Cecil and Bruce had major dentals). In Jimmy's case, however, whatever we tried only worked for a short time, Steroid jabs would give pain relief for a while, but steroid used on a FeLV cat is not a good idea. The interval between jabs was growing shorter and Jimmy would sometimes literally scream with the pain of trying to eat.

We tried many alternative remedies, sometimes with a measure of success, but it would always end up with Jimmy being unable to eat. We were at our wits' end, Jimmy was losing weight and just could not eat; it looked as though he would have to be put to sleep.

Then we tried tissue salts – sodium phosphate is really good for over acidity as we knew from our own experience with mouth ulcers. These salts, combined with a minute dose of the pain relief drug in liquid form are the means by which we seem to be able to keep him eating. For long periods now, Jimmy has needed nothing at all, but if he starts to have problems we give him what we have worked out to be the right medication for him.

We're glad to report that at the time of writing, Jimmy is doing well, looking good and most importantly, keen to eat – what a year it's been for him!

SPECIAL NEEDS



LUCKY

We have now had Lucky for two years, despite her having a quite serious heart condition. As she used to have such a poor appetite, it was difficult to medicate her, so she only has the herbal remedy, Cataegus, for her heart problem. It seems to work! Lucky is doing well, especially now that she has moved in with the old ladies, freeing up her old place for another.

She is even eating better and has become quite the leader of the gang. Her special friend seems to be Jemima.

RANI



Rani, our smallest cat with real problems when she first came to us, is doing well and has moved to a newly created area linking up to the geriatrics with whom she now mixes amicably.

Her temper has improved no end but its still impossible to keep her properly groomed, so she had a "makeover" at the vets when they were doing tests for a suspected heart condition which turned out not to be the case. The poor little soul had been, we're told, mistreated before being rescued, so she has always been tricky to handle, but she's such a plucky little character and loves her food. We suspect she might be deaf as she shouts very loudly and often when she wants to be fed. Rani moved into her new area in the autumn and quickly explored all its facilities including the spiral staircase up to the "sun" roof. She seemed to approve!



THE HOUSE CATS



SANDY

Sandy, from her very nervous state, has continued to surprise us by getting more and more bossy, although she is nowhere to be seen when she hears strange voices. Even when her sponsors come to see her, they usually only get a glimpse of her disappearing at the end of the garden.

Sandy has the freedom to come and go as she pleases. She has her own little chalet but the gate is left open as she began objecting to being shut in at night as we used to do.

Sandy appears on the seat by the back door first thing in the morning and chivvies us up for breakfast, popping in and out of the hallway, much to the dismay of the house cats – she could join them in the house, but she prefers to do her own thing. Its good to see her well and happy.



MAY

May, our frightened feral we took on from a homing centre, since she would have been impossible to home, has, healthwise, had a good year, but still does not relate to us in any way. May has her own little area in a little house that has heat and we put hay inside as she had been taken from a farm when it was sold. She looks well and is eating well, but it's doubtful if we'll every have any sort of relationship with her.



A couple of others with 'special needs'

We found ourselves catering for a couple of hungry visitors in the autumn – a hedgehog and a squirrel seemed to think Catwork was a good place to be for a free meal!



BEN

Ben has seemed quite lost without his brother, which has made our sadness at losing him even worse. He had a full health check after his brother died but nothing amiss was found. However, he is looking frail these days though still very loudly vocal.

Ben is quite cantankerous and very demanding, but we try to make allowances for him.

Recently, Ben has found a new friend in the kitten who came into our lives at Christmas. Little Oliver often wraps himself around Ben just like his brother William used to do. The pair often stretch out on the pouffe in front of the fire on a winter evening – our oldest and youngest cats are seemingly the best of friends.

MILLIE

Millie, the original Catwork cat, has had a good year and remains the apple of Barbara's eye. She came to us as a terrified youngster in 1995, arriving at what was the beginning of Catwork. Millie is showing her age a bit and looking a bit thin on the legs furwise, but she enjoys her food and loves to toss toys around. Millie gets somewhat annoyed with



ginger Tom at mealtimes, especially when he throws his enormous weight around; neither is she too tolerant of the youngsters; Ben and Billy remain her best friends.

GINGER TOM



Ginger Tom, also dating back to Catwork's earliest days, has grown very fat. His appetite increased so much that tests were done to see if anything was causing this. However, nothing showed up, so we can only assume that he enjoys being in fashion by being "obese". Getting through the cat flap has

become something of a problem. As he has to come in and out this way, he prefers to sit by the door trying to get someone to open it for him.

Tom is very fond of Billy and will often wash him, but usually ends up giving him a nip – if ASBOs were being dished out, Tom would get one most days.

BILLY



Billy is the most nervous of the house cats and is easily scared of noises and strangers. However, it is good to see him spending more of his time indoors these days – must have something to do with his age.

We were quite worried about Billy back in the summer when he

seemed unwell and should have been taken to the vet, but we simply couldn't catch him, he's so nervous. We actually lost sight of him for a day or two and became quite worried as to what might be going on. Billy, however, turned up in his own good time having dealt by himself with whatever was ailing him. He's always had the sniffles and must have had flu as a kitten before we rescued him. He's such a "Mr Nice Guy" and loves all the other cats, and also the rabbit.

MARMADUKE



Marmaduke as a little kitten was found on the village bypass with a damaged leg. He has grown into a very handsome cat, very fussy, quite naughty, but very affectionate. He spends a lot of time with the upstairs cat Polly, as she has the kind of biscuits he likes best.

Marmaduke enjoys playing games with Oliver, the Christmas kitten, and also with Jack.

JACK

Our beautiful Jack, also brought to us as a kitten found wandering and never claimed, was the cause of some concern last year. Barbara was having a rare weekend away when Jack developed what was subsequently thought to be bronchial pneumonia – Bob had to rush him to the vets



when he suddenly seemed to be having difficulty breathing, and spent an agonising evening fearing the worst. Jack was put into an oxygen tent and made it through the night, but was very poorly in the hospital for

several days. When we got him home, poor Jack looked like a frail old cat, and was on much medication.

Jack made a good recovery, thank goodness, and has grown into a big solid cat. He's more aloof than the others, but loving in his own way and tends to "squeak" when spoken to. His favourite pastime in summer is catching frogs! Jack too likes to climb trees and play with Marmaduke and the new kitten.



POLLY

Polly is our five-toed cat who lives upstairs. She gave us a worrying time in April when, after being with us for nearly nine months, she suddenly ventured downstairs and started exploring outside the back door closely watched by us. All of a sudden, Jack went up to her, she

took fright, as he likes to chase her in the house, and Polly shot off across the garden. We thought we would find her hiding behind a bush or somewhere, but we did not. Two weeks of searching followed in every spare moment, leaflets distributed, posters put up, every possible sighting followed up and the trap set where we thought she was. We spent as much time as we could spare looking for Polly, early mornings and after dark, but all in vain. When we were beginning to lose hope of finding her, we had a phone call from the lady who had found her as a stray to say Polly had turned up at her home, the other side of the village. Quite a feat for a little cat who'd never been outside all the time we had her!

She's fine now and playing "mum" to the new kitten, the only one she isn't worried by. She went back to living upstairs and doesn't come down even when she is able to. A strange little cat, but very sweet.



Oliver drapes himself over Ben

OLIVER (see new arrivals section)

Our "Special Delivery" kitten found by the postman settled into the Hunt family right from the beginning, not in the least perturbed by any of the cats, though at first they were frightened of him.

Having had all his parasites dealt with, Oliver seems in good health and, true to his name, quickly learnt to ask for more. 'Aunty' Polly looks after him by day in the upstairs part of the house and, after some games with Marmaduke and Jack, settles down for a cuddle with poor old Ben in front of the fire. We still can't believe how he managed to survive the bitter cold and no proper food – a real little miracle.



Barnaby approves of the organic veg box scheme

BARNABY

Our large, good-natured, rescue rabbit has had a good year, enjoying the company in the summer months of his favourite cat, Billy. Although he has some rabbit toys, the thing he likes to do best is throw his dishes out of the hutch – because of this habit, we had to give him metal crockery.

Since we have been getting locally produced organic veg, Barnaby enjoys a healthy diet, especially liking the tops of bunched carrots.

2008 UPDATE

MR CHIPS



"Goodbye Mr Chips" – except we didn't have a chance to say goodbye.

This handsome cat was treated for what everyone thought was a slight infection to which he responded well in the usual way. A day or so after seeing the vet,

Bob thought he noticed Chips looked "lopsided" but Barbara couldn't see what he meant. Chips was taken to the vet again and, sure enough, a swelling of the front leg could be detected – possibly a muscle tumour – with the worst scenario being amputation of the leg. First he needed an exploratory operation to see exactly what was going on.

First thing on Monday morning Chips was at the hospital, but the vet saw to his dismay that over the weekend the lump had dramatically increased in size, and he prepared us for the worst. The operation revealed massive muscle damage due to a fairly rare aggressive type of cancer carried round in the blood vessels. We had to let him go under the anaesthetic as the tumour would only have continued to spread throughout his body – all this within a week!

This unexpected and dramatic death hit us very hard. We had been able to give him five years here in the Fivory, but this sweet-natured cat has left a big gap in the rescue family.

WHAT WE CONTINUE TO BE UP AGAINST

The REAL problem with FIV cats

Time for the annual rant on the subject of FIV and FeLV (leukaemia virus) and we are sad to report that it is still a very depressing picture for these cats, with many being killed (not “euthanased” as most aren’t suffering), because many vets and mainstream organisations insist on doing blood tests and sometimes end up with a beautiful healthy cat nobody wants to take on. The ignorance about the two common viruses we deal with at Catwork – FIV and FeLV – is truly worrying.

We feel that, after more than ten years of dealing with FIV cats in particular, we have gained much experience and learned a great deal from the large number of FIV cats that have been here, many for several years. Because of this experience, we feel we owe it to the cats to pass on what we have learned in order to help others (both cats and people) out there dealing with the virus.

The overall problem is somewhat complex, which is partly why it is continuing.

It involves a combination of: vets, rescue organisations, lack of knowledge of the true nature of FIV and confusions between FIV and FeLV.

The fundamental complication is that there is a general lack of knowledge about FIV.

As in all things, there are good and bad, and this is true of vets too.

The rescue groups that get involved look to their vets for guidance, yet sadly, there are many vets who do not understand the virus properly, and therefore give bad advice – naturally the rescue groups listen to their vets (not knowing that it may be bad advice).

The rescue groups themselves vary enormously, and much depends on the individuals who are at the heart of each group – sometimes helped, but often hindered by “official policy”.

The areas of lack of knowledge include:

How the virus is transmitted.

The actual repercussions of a cat having the virus.

The attitude that any ailment in an FIV cat must be due to the virus.

Specific problems with the FIV tests, particularly with regard to kittens.

Confusion between FIV and FeLV.

Because of the confusions and the bad advice given by some vets, many rescue groups are unwilling to take on FIVs – partly because they fear they will be troublesome, and partly because they think they will be difficult to home, and therefore hold up valuable pen space, which in turn would slow up throughput of other cats. These groups need good information about the virus and its repercussions, and they need facilities for the slower to home cats, which include FIVs as well as others, like older cats.

The vets are the key – rescue organisations rely on their advice; the general public rely on their advice. So it is hardly surprising, when many vets are ignorant about the virus, and give bad advice, they make it unlikely that either the rescue organisations, or the general public will understand what is required for an FIV.

Fortunately, there are some very good vets, but one needs to ascertain whether a particular vet is FIV-wise, or FIV-ignorant!

So what is it that many vets get so wrong – and how do you know?

If your vet calls FIV “AIDS” – BEWARE!

Most cats with FIV are actually very healthy, they simply have a virus that is slowly weakening their immune system, and which can take several years before it has any noticeable effect at all – whereas ‘AIDS’ is when the immune system has been completely overwhelmed by multiple secondary infections, which means the cat cannot deal with it and quickly spirals towards the end of its life – most FIV cats NEVER get AIDS, they live good lives and die naturally from all the usual causes of death that any cat may suffer, including ‘old age’!

If your vet suggests that any illness an FIV has, is ‘because’ of the FIV – BEWARE!

As mentioned above, FIV cats have a gradually weakening immune system, so when they are affected by any of the usual cat ailments, they may not be able to deal with it quite as efficiently as they might, so may take longer to recover, or need stronger medication. There are very few ailments that can be attributed to the FIV itself, so any vet who suggests otherwise should be questioned carefully; usually the

treatment of ailments in an FIV cat is just the same as it would be for any other cat, it just may need a longer course of treatment.

If your vet suggests that a cat with FIV (that is otherwise reasonably healthy) is going to die because of the FIV – BEWARE!

This is covered in the first two items in this section – basically the only FIV cat that will die because of being FIV is one that has been a long-term stray, uncared for and having a poor diet, that has already succumbed to multiple secondary infections. This will not be the case with an FIV cat that is otherwise healthy, cared for and has a good diet. Cared-for FIV cats invariably die from exactly the same causes as non-FIV cats – FIV cats die with the virus, not from the virus.

If your vet suggests testing a kitten for FIV with the in-house test – BEWARE!

Testing a kitten for FIV with the in-house test is a complete waste of time and money – the reason is that the test looks for FIV antibodies which are produced by the body in response to the virus – this is fine in adult cats, but not for kittens, because a kitten born from an FIV mother will inherit the antibodies from its mother but very rarely the virus – so although it would test positive for FIV, it would not actually have the virus. The kitten will, over several months, lose its mother's antibodies, and would then test negative for FIV. If it is important to know whether a kitten is actually FIV or not, there is a different test known as a PCR which looks for the DNA of the virus itself. This test is not widely available (Langford Lab, Bristol is one that does it).

If your vet suggests that an FIV cat in your household will inevitably pass the virus to others in the household – BEWARE!

FIV is NOT contagious – it is transmitted almost always via a serious bite. The virus is present in the saliva, but is very short-lived once out of the body (seconds), so it is only when it is actually injected (by a bite) directly into contact with blood that it is transferred to another cat.

If your vet suggests that FIV will be transmitted by sharing food bowls – BEWARE!

This is a confusion with FeLV (leukaemia virus). FIV is not transmitted by the normal sharing of food bowls and mutual grooming. Although the virus is present in the saliva, it very quickly dies when out of the body.

Secondly, even if another cat was to take the virus in by mouth, it still has to cross the mucous membrane in order to get into the blood stream. A good example of how efficient the mucous membrane is at preventing the FIV from crossing, is with kittens born to an FIV mother. As stated earlier, the kitten will not inherit the FIV from its mother, but the virus is present in the mother's milk, which obviously the kittens will consume for several weeks, yet it is extremely unusual for a kitten to contract the virus this way. So if a kitten with that much exposure to the virus through its stomach does not become infected, how much less likely is it that an adult sharing a food bowl with an FIV would do so?

If your vet suggests that an FIV cat must be kept away from other cats – BEWARE!

As has been illustrated above, FIV will not be transmitted casually, but only through a serious bite, so the question of mixing FIV and non-FIV cats is more a question of the nature of the cats. Basically, will they have a serious fight? Most cats, once neutered and given regular food and a place to live, will not fight. – a good example is our own Fivery, which has been home to around 20 male cats living communally for several years, with new ones joining fairly regularly. If the cats were to fight, it would be bedlam, but in the years since we have had the Fivery, we have never had a serious fight! Careful introduction of new ones is all that is needed.

If your vet suggests that an FIV cat (that is generally healthy) should be 'euthanased' because of the FIV – CHANGE VETS!

This is the extreme, but sadly does happen. All the foregoing should explain why putting an otherwise healthy FIV down just because it is FIV is, in our view, unpardonable (the politest word we can come up with). The only reason to end an FIV's life is if it is suffering too much from secondary infections or other ailments that have proved to be untreatable – just like any other cat.

Those vets who are ignorant about FIV have in some ways made rods for their own backs by making out FIV to be something really terrible and calling it AIDS – no wonder the rescues are reluctant to deal with them; their experience of FIVs is probably limited, they see them as a problem and either turn a blind eye or allow them to be put down.

Luckily, there are also some vets who would go to much trouble to place an FIV cat when it ends up at their practice (like the one in Cornwall who helped Thomas – see new arrivals section) and also the Deane Vets in Taunton, from whom we have taken several cats over the years; but in the main rescues are reluctant to take them; so what are the vets to do?

Some examples

In last year's book we mentioned some kittens, supposedly FIV - a vet suggested putting them down. The owners refused and contacted us. During the year we had a lovely 'thank you' email with pictures showing them now grown cats enjoying a happy and healthy life.

On the subject of kittens and FIV, the first example we heard of via the Forest of Dean Cats Protection group, was 18 farm kittens all testing positive for FIV on the in-house test; subsequent DNA tests proved that only one of the 18 actually had the virus. Organisations who need a turnover can get an accurate result through the DNA test and stop wasting money on pointless in-house tests. This was clearly demonstrated recently by another CP group thinking they had 3 FIV kittens after an in-house test, and the vet nurse was worried they would be asked to put them down. We told her to pass on the information about DNA testing – we were all thrilled (but not surprised) when all three came back negative.



Our contact in the States with three kittens (now adult) two of which were negative and one positive, tells us that the FIV one has never even had the sniffles - unlike his siblings!

RJ (centre) the one FIV of three kittens born to a stray - nearly three years later, with no health problems

One notable cat we have heard about is Paxi, a Greek cat rescued from the island of Paxos and looked after while the formalities were being dealt with, by the Pascoes, whose elderly cat Molly lives at Catwork. Paxi had damaged his eye which, it was decided, should be removed when he arrived in England. This was done, but the owner's vet terrified her by saying he should be put down or sent back to Greece as he was FIV positive! Luckily, the Pascoes put the owner on

to us and we were able to allay her fears about FIV. Paxi was not put down and is a really sweet natured cat and has become an ambassador for the "Friends of the Strays of Greece", being used in their fundraising efforts on this year's Christmas card. Another life saved from the advice of an ignorant vet! Well done Delphine!



Paxi, as he was on Paxos (above) ... and as he became, posing for the Christmas card to support the "Friends of the Strays of Greece" (right)



We often get phone calls or emails from people who've found our website or via someone who knows us. A typical call goes like this: "I took my cat to the vet as he's been a bit unwell, the vet has done a blood test and found its got FIV and should be put to sleep!!"

We get very angry and try to put these people's minds at rest with the facts. Vets should know that FIV is a very long way down the list of possible reasons for a cat being unwell; the fact that many will test for FIV as a 'first call' and then, on a positive result, blame the virus for any illness the cat may be suffering from is laziness at best, and incompetence at worst. When they then recommend putting to sleep instead of treating the symptoms, this, in our view, is negligence!

This scenario described happens so often it is most disturbing to think how many cats are being killed through ignorance and misunderstanding.

Thank goodness we have enlightened vets for the Catwork cats.

One of our vets told us recently that he had read in a vet paper that current thinking was that vets should not even consider putting down an FIV cat – a bit belated, but welcome all the same – if only all vets would read that and take notice!

As with vets, rescue groups vary as well; some will not touch any "problem" cat with a bargepole even when it is at their vet's with

nowhere to go – knowing the only outcome if they will not help is death.

Cats Protection, the main cat rescue charity, ought, in our view, to be making an effort to set up facilities for the more difficult to home cats which could include FIV, since it is understandable that a small group might not want to tie up a pen for a long time until the right home is found.

Money should stop being wasted on all this testing if they are not going to make provision for the long-stay rescues which result. The act of testing, in our view, creates a responsibility to deal properly with the results of those tests and not, as we suspect, use them as an excuse to put some cats down.

On the subject of routine testing, why select FIV to test for, and not run tests for all the other possible problems a cat may have which would affect their homing selections – kidney, liver, heart, thyroid etc etc?

Part of the problem is that the in-house test tests for both FIV and FeLV (Leukaemia), and when challenged, rescue groups will say that it is important to identify those that have the FeLV virus. This may be so, but having tested and found that a cat is only FIV, why do some of them then end the cat's life?

On the subject of FeLV, another problem is that if the cat tests positive, it needs a second test later to diagnose with certainty. This, again, is an area where there is so much ignorance by those who should know better. Within a three month period of a cat testing positive for the leukaemia virus, it can effectively 'deal' with the virus and shake it off, yet so many are killed without the chance of the second test, and therefore without knowing whether the cat truly has the virus. Little Beau who came to Catwork narrowly escaped a death sentence given by a CP group on the strength of one test. Even if a cat does have the FeLV virus, when older, cats can live for many years without the virus affecting them, as in the case of Giles, Jimmy, Jordan and Dylan at Catwork.

The good news is that there are some who are very knowledgeable, like the Forest of Dean CP, with whom we have had dealings through Tutts; they try to home whatever comes along – it all seems to depend on the attitude of the individuals who are in a group.

Most FIV cats, we believe, should be homed normally, since very few are aggressive once neutered, and as it is only through a serious bite that the virus is passed on, it seems an unnecessary restriction to

home them away from other cats. We know of many households who have mixed positive and negative cats living together without fighting, and hence, without passing on the virus. As long as the new cat is introduced carefully, there is no problem – just as with any new cat joining an existing household.

We all only get one "go" at life, so why should a cat's life be determined by people with, on the whole, a misguided idea of what FIV really is?

Many of the FIV and FeLV cats at Catwork have escaped an untimely and unnecessary end through people knowing or hearing of us and who have gone to great lengths to save them – cats rescued from RSPCA, Blue Cross, Battersea Cats and Dogs Home, and rescued when Cats Protection groups have refused to take them on, knowing full well the outcome.

Most others have come to us via sympathetic and educated vets who did not want to put them down and found that we were their only chance of a life.

[On the health front generally](#)

FIV cats, when cared for, have no more problems than any other cat and usually (in our experience at Catwork) die from the sort of problems that any cat dies from, nothing specific to FIV. (Note: the important part of that sentence is "when cared for" – those that are long-term strays and have untreated problems are the ones that suffer – at Catwork we have had a few over the years that got to us too late to be helped). Even mouth problems, a common symptom, are quite rare here at Catwork.

When visitors come to Catwork, they nearly always comment how healthy the cats look – that's because they are!

We have noticed, particularly when in contact with other FIV-owners across the world, that our FIVs seem to be even more healthy than most – far fewer incidents of gingivitis/stomatitis (inflamed gums and back of the mouth) as an obvious example – the stated 'average' for FIVs is that 50% will suffer from severe mouth problems, yet here in the sanctuary, apart from a few bad teeth that needed removal, we have only had two cases of stomatitis in the past ten years! On reflection, it seems the main difference with the cats here is that they live a mainly outdoor life, albeit with constant access to numerous heated chalets. We wonder whether this could be a factor, seeing that most FIVs that

are homed by others, are subsequently kept as indoor only cats - many organisations making that a requirement of homing. As most FIVs would not have become infected had they not been outdoor cats, subsequently keeping them inside could, we believe, have a detrimental effect due to the extra stress they feel from being prevented from going outside - quite apart from the direct benefits of constant fresh air.

One more example this year is Alfie -

A phone call from worried owner – Traci in Yorkshire

Traci rescued poor Alfie who was left tied up in a box at her local supermarket. Apart from being hungry, there appeared to be little wrong with him. However, he was checked out at the vets and found to be FIV positive. The vet painted such a grim picture, despite the fact that Alfie wasn't even ill, that poor Traci felt too ill to go to work that day. As it happened, Traci lives next door to someone who's been a sponsor of Catwork for years, and she told her to ring Barbara for



a chat. We're glad to say that we managed to allay Traci's fears and tell her the real facts about FIV.

Alfie thrives, and has settled into his wonderful home where he reigns supreme and is now very much wanted and loved.

To conclude this section - we recently saw two quotes about FIV that we would like to repeat:

1. The very name "FIV" is far more dangerous to a cat than the virus itself – ie cats are killed because of the misunderstandings about FIV, not because of or by the virus.
2. Cats with FIV will die with the virus, but rarely from the virus – ie most cats with FIV will eventually die from the same ailments that non-FIV cats suffer and die from, rarely, in a cared-for FIV cat, is the virus the cause of death.

Postscript

As we were preparing this yearbook, we received an email from a lady who had contacted us a while back wanting advice as to whether to let an FIV cat join her existing four non-FIV cats. We copy the email here (with her permission) as it illustrates extremely well a number of points when dealing with FIVs:

"It is nearly three years since I contacted you asking for advice about my FIV+ cat, Bertie, I thought you might like an update on the situation.

I can hardly tell you how grateful I am for all that you said. Over the weeks following our correspondence I gradually introduced Bertie to the rest of my feline family. I brought him into the house permanently from the pen (all my cats are house cats) and he blossomed into the most loving cat we've ever had (and we've had a few)! His health has never deteriorated (touching wood here) and he still shows no signs of the FIV becoming anything worse. None of my other cats has shown any sign of having contracted the virus. Bertie is a fun-loving, happy, healthy boy. The others accepted him very well and only my tortie girl gives him the occasional dirty look.



Something I didn't tell you in our original correspondence was that when I first rescued Bertie he tested positive for Feline Leukaemia as well as FIV. I was devastated but refused to agree with the vet's advice that I have him put to sleep. Even then I could see he looked

well, with a glossy coat. I refused to believe he could be victim to such a dreadful disease and look so healthy. I brought him home (the vet refused to neuter him, although I later insisted). At that time he was still totally wild and very difficult to get into a basket. I let him settle for three more weeks, observing him constantly, and then took him to a vet who specialises in handling ferals. He tested him for both diseases again and sent the results to a lab rather than doing in-house tests. The FIV was confirmed but the

Leukaemia test came back negative. I informed the original vet who refused to believe me. A bit of a "situation" ensued with my vet phoning not only the other one but also the laboratory. Finally my vet conceded. It horrified me that a different owner would not have been as tenacious as I and might have had their cat put to sleep. I can't bear to think of these years that we would have missed out on with Bert.

He has just padded into my office to remind me I haven't given him his breakfast yet, so I will close now. Thank you once again for giving me advice that enhanced the happiness of my feline family. I'm so glad I found you on the Internet."

You will see that this example shows that:

1. FIV cats usually remain healthy
2. FIV-positive and FIV-negative cats can live happily and safely together, as long as they are introduced carefully.
3. Some vets are ignorant about the nature of the virus
4. The in-house tests for FeLV are not reliable, yet many vets are not aware of that fact (how many cats have been put down after a false positive in-house test – we dread to think).

We have little doubt that in this particular case, the owner would have done the same even without our opinions, but it does illustrate well the danger that innocent cats can be in if the owner is reliant on the advice of one of the not-so-good vets.



Catwork is a sanctuary for cats with special needs, particularly those who test positive for FIV or FeLV

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