

Our Pampered Pets



Domestic animals thrive on tender care, and Americans are giving it to them—at the rate of \$3 billion a year!

by Anthony and Marietta Marcia

WHEN A PAIR of California cocker spaniels recently celebrated their birthday at a swank Hollywood restaurant, 21 dachshund guests came to the party. They were waited on by 42 people—two attendants for each underslung guest—and were served a feast of chopped liver and duck, topped off with champagne.

Although this particular party was given in Hollywood, it might have happened anywhere. For example, a New York baseball fan insists on buying a ticket for her cat so he can have a seat of his own. An Oklahoma airedale named Roger has a private fireplug in the front yard. In Clearwater, Fla., a black-and-white Boston bull terrier named Dusty lives like a king on interest from a

\$50,000 bequest left by his doting owner. A Wisconsin terrier, Lady Pooh, recently was named beneficiary of a \$100,000 estate. And in Framingham, Mass., an animal philanthropist not long ago willed the bulk of his million-dollar fortune to the horses, dogs, and other animals on his 220-acre estate.

These are outstanding examples of pampering among a vast pet population that embraces more than 25 million dogs, 20 million cats, 20 million tropical fish, and 15 million parakeets, to name a few. The nation's 5,000 pet shops think nothing of filling requests for deodorized skunks, monkeys (an estimated 100,000 are now pets), goats, snakes, ocelots, alligators, raccoons, and lion cubs. One pet lion has grown to a hefty 325 pounds, has his own room, and attracts about 150 visitors to his

owner's residence each week end.

Americans spend \$3 billion a year to purchase and provide for their pets. The dog food market alone runs over \$200 million a year—approximately twice what the public spends on books! As one nutritionist says, "The dogs of this country are probably better fed than the children."

Pets have beauty shops where they may be trimmed, dyed (one Milwaukee woman's poodle is dyed pink to match the decor of her home), shampooed, and pedicured. Several psychologists specializing in pet emotional problems enjoy booming businesses; as do stores that specialize in jeweled pet harnesses, tiny paw boots, and custom-made spectacles for myopic mongrels.

The owners of a specialty store which calls itself the "Hattie Carnegie of Dogdom" recently an-

nounced, "We can get your dog a hearing aid if he needs one, or a tuxedo for formal occasions."

While owners used to pat sluggish pets on the head, saying, "Poor Rover must be sick," they now rush their ailing pets to one of the nation's 18,000 veterinarians.

Advances in veterinary medicine have made canine Caesareans and plaster casts for broken limbs commonplace. Vaccines, antibiotics, and other wonder drugs are saving animals from many diseases that once killed them. During the past three years, one diabetic cat, Nickey, has been restored to health through daily shots of insulin; and a dog blinded by cataracts can see again, thanks to a delicate operation and insertion of a plastic lens in one eye.

Thriving on this tender care, the life expectancy of the average dog has been boosted to 11-13 years, as compared with 8-10 years in the mid-1930s. One vet tells of seeing lots of dogs over 16, including a 21-year-old "youngster" who still likes to romp with his master.

Sometimes our pet pampering can be carried too far. Then it does the recipient no good. One woman, projecting her own ailments, fed her cocker spaniel digitalis whenever he panted. In a few months, the dog developed serious heart trouble.

Many owners feed dogs human food—potato chips, canapes, baby foods—instead of raw meat or dog food. Veterinarians estimate 50 percent of dog ailments can be traced to such improper feeding.

Another sizeable percentage of pet problems can be traced to "do-it-yourself" medication (with human, not animal, remedies) on the part of owners whose pets show signs of illness—or so the owners think.

How can families be sure they'll "pamper," not harm their pets?

Humane society officers suggest: "Make the owning of the pet a family affair, not the bright idea of one member." They advise feeding pets proper food recommended by pet-shop owners or veterinarians, not "fancy foods" that may cause malnutrition and serious illness.

Don't let your pet become a neighborhood nomad, say these experts, but give him the exercise he requires. Be sure he is inoculated against diseases to which he is most susceptible (distemper, the greatest dog killer, almost always kills the uninoculated dog who is allowed to roam). Finally, if your community requires pet licensing, be sure you buy a license, even if your pet is "never let out of the house."

Your precautions may pay off in bigger dividends than you realize. In New Orleans, recently, police found a man suffering from amnesia. He didn't even recognize the small dog he led on a leash. However, the dog wore a San Francisco license tag. Authorities there traced the number on the dog tag and thus were able to identify the man and restore him to his family.