



Trudi Atkinson
RVN, Dip.As(CABC), CCAB

Indoor marking (spraying)



Urine marking (often referred to as 'spraying') is a normal part of feline communication (for more information see the article on 'Cat Communication') (?Link) But when it occurs indoors, not only is it unpleasant and unacceptable for us, it can also be a sign that the cat is feeling stressed and insecure.

The main observable difference between a cat that is spraying and one that is urinating to relieve pressure on its bladder is the position that the cat adopts. A cat that is urinating will squat down on its hind quarters and hold its tail horizontally. Whereas a spraying cat will adopt a standing position, holding the tail vertically and will 'squirt' urine backwards, usually onto a vertical surface.

Entire (unneutered) males, and females in season use urine marking as a way of advertising their 'fitness' and availability to mate; therefore, neutering can greatly reduce the incidence of feline urine marking (Bradshaw et al 2012; Hart & Cooper 1984). However, neutered males and females do also 'spray', but this appears to be for a very different reason.

Why do neutered cats urine mark indoors?

Cats who are feeling insecure within their own homes are most likely to spray indoors (Amat et al, 2015). But it is not, as yet, completely understood exactly what message these cats are communicating. However, there are a few theories:

1. As a signal to warn others to keep away. But this seems unlikely because cats do not avoid a spray mark left by another cat, in fact they are more likely to spend a long time investigating it (Bradshaw and Cameron-Beaumont, 2000).
2. Like an entire tom cat, a neutered cat that is feeling threatened might be advertising how fit and strong he is. So rather than saying 'keep away' it could be the cat saying "I am here, I am fit and strong,



Fellowship of Animal Behaviour Clinicians



Where can I find help?

Contact your vet who will be able to advise you or for a list of qualified clinical animal behaviourists in your area visit our web site (fabclinicians.org) or the **ABTC CAB** register.

so don't take what is mine, because if we fight, I will win."

3. Another theory is that the cat is leaving a message for himself, either to increase confidence by increasing his scent profile, or to provide information as to where extra vigilance may be needed (Bowen & Heath, 2005; Bradshaw et al 2012).

But whatever the intention we do know that when a neutered cat sprays in its own home it is usually a sign that he or she is feeling stressed and insecure. An essential part of treatment therefore is to discover exactly why the cat feels stressed or insecure and then correctly address the underlying cause.

How to clean urine

1. Wash with plain water, and pat dry with kitchen paper
2. Wash with a proprietary odour eliminator (e.g. Simple Solution) or a 10-20% solution of a biological (enzymatic) washing detergent, then rinse and pat dry.
3. Wipe or spray over with surgical spirit and allow to dry naturally (this can take up to 30 minutes depending on the surface).

So what to do?

Spraying, especially if it is also accompanied by urinating 'normally' indoors away from the litter tray, can sometimes be linked to a medical problem, therefore if your cat has started urine marking indoors, **it is essential to get him or her checked by your vet.**

Try to find out why your cat has started to spray indoors. There may be more than one reason and **a visit from a qualified and experienced feline behaviourist** may be necessary to help you discover and effectively address the underlying causes.

NEVER SHOUT AT OR ATTEMPT TO PUNISH THE CAT EVEN IF 'CAUGHT IN THE ACT'.

Anger or attempts at punishment are more likely to increase the cat's feeling of insecurity and so make matters worse.

If you think other cats may be coming in through the cat flap it can be a good idea (if your cat is microchipped) to install a microchip activated cat flap that only your cat can use.

If there is a newcomer to the household e.g. another cat, dog, baby, or house guest provide your cat with a warm, comfortable area that he can escape to without being disturbed. This may be a

ABTC

ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR & TRAINING COUNCIL

www.abtc.org.uk

separate room or just access to high places where he can feel safe.

Cats will often 'over-mark' areas where they can smell urine that has been used for scent marking, so cleaning is very important.

REFERENCES

- **Amat, M., Camps, T. and Mantecu, X. (2015)** Stress in owned cats, behavioural changes and welfare applications. *J Feline Medicine & Surgery* 18, 577-586
- **Bowen, J. and Heath, S. (2005)** *Behaviour Problems in Small Animals: Practical Advice for the Veterinary Team.* Saunders Ltd. Elsevier, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- **Bradshaw, J.W.S. and Cameron-Beaumont, C., (2000)** The signalling repertoire of the domestic cat and its undomesticated relatives. In: Turner, D.C. and Bateson, P. (eds) *The Domestic Cat the Biology of its Behaviour* 2nd edn. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK
- **Bradshaw, J.W.S., Casey, R.A. and Brown, S.L. 2012** *The Behaviour of the Domestic Cat* 2nd Edition. CAB International, Wallingford, UK.
- **Hart and Cooper (1984)** Factors relating to urine spraying and fighting in prepubertally gonadectomized cats. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 184(10), 1255-8

