

The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



Cats, people and birds

I've been pondering the contradictory nature of cats and humans.

Cats are the characters, like Herbie, which settle themselves into my lap when I try to read or watch TV. Because I rarely stay in one place for more than five or 10 minutes, he constantly is discombobulated from his comfortable position, yet he never gives up. When I settle down again, so does he. Reecy, (short for Recycle, after his first home in a recycling yard) has grown large and comfortable in my home, and has discovered he too likes to play. Both cats came to my home on the pleas of daughters, who claimed in each case said homeless creature was in dire need of a warm home and cat food. To prevent guilty feelings they were allowed to remain. To prevent the guilt resulting from political incorrectness, they were surgically prevented at great expense from participation in the renewal of their species.

Because I find it demeaning to argue with cats, I find myself instead serving as a doorman for cats.

When Herbie is hungry, he tells me so, and leads me to his dish. If I ignore him, he follows me around until I do what he wants me to. When he wants out, he lets me know. When he wants in, likewise. If I open the door, the next sight in view is likely to be Reecy, 50 feet away, bounding like a charging lion to get into the door before it's closed.

The cats get along with each other for the most part. Herbie, as the senior member of the firm, gets his way most of the time, but Reecy, as the younger, larger, and sleeker cat, is obviously the crown prince with excellent future prospects.

Both get along well also with the black cat which lives next door, but the same can't be said for the gray cat on the other side. The gray eminence, his long hair making him appear more formidable than he is, is ever ready to defend his

territory when encroached upon, and as Hitler attempted to do with Czechoslovakia, expand it at any opportunity.

Though I have shortstopped more cats resulting from the two my family owns, and though they are well-fed, well-watered and well-veterinarianed as necessary, my guilt continues unabated. While I have seen little evidence these particular cats have an appetite for birds, I am well aware from conversations with Pacifica's leading bird lover, Gil West, and other authorities, that cats average one bird per cat per week, according to reliable surveys. That figure is definitely ballpark, but if Pacifica has 2,500 cats, a not-reasonable minimum average of one for each five homes, 52 x 2,500 would mean 130,000 birds died in Pacifica last year from attacks by cats. That doesn't count the toll from feral cats. Neither does it account for the possibility it is a gross underestimate.

It amounts "only" to 1.3 birds per acre per month. Multiply by 12 (months) and 8,000 (acres in Pacifica) and it sounds like it might be quite conservative. It also is an excellent argument for spaying, neutering and belling pet cats, though I haven't belled any cats lately.