

Eric J. Holcomb, Governor
Bret D. Marsh, DVM, State Veterinarian

INDIANA STATE BOARD OF ANIMAL HEALTH

Office of the State Veterinarian
Discovery Hall, Suite 100
1202 East 38th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46205-2898
Phone: 317/544-2400

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CASE NUMBER: 1560182P-01X Jackson

CASE REPORT

TO: Jackson Co. Sheriff Deputy, Detective Sergeant Jessie Hutchinson
CC: Dr. Kelli Werling, Senior Director of Operations, Board of Animal Health (BOAH), and Jennifer Price, Director of Investigations, BOAH
FROM: Jodi Lovejoy, DVM, District 8 Field Veterinarian, BOAH
CASE TYPE: Animal Welfare Investigation

DATES OF INVESTIGATION

START: 11-30-23

END: 01-08-24

OWNER NAME & ADDRESS:

The Veterinarians' Blood Bank
Manager: Debbie Sweany
Property owner: John and Amanda Wetzel
1851 W. CR 600 N.
Brownstown, IN 47220

OWNER PHONE NUMBER (if available):

COUNTY:

Jackson

LOCATION OF ANIMALS:

same as above

COUNTY ANIMALS ARE LOCATED IN:

Jackson

INITIAL INFORMATION:

Pursuant to a request from the Jackson County Sheriff's Department, I accompanied Jackson County Sheriff Detective Sergeant Hutchinson to the above listed address where the animals were located on 12-27-23. Natalie Wehmiller, cat facility manager, and Debbie Sweany, Veterinarians' Blood Bank director, were also in attendance. There were approximately 581 cats present at the time of the inspection.

This inspection was unannounced.

The cats were evaluated using the Purina cat body condition scoring system. This system is based on a 1.0 to 9.0 scale where 1.0 is emaciated, 9.0 is extremely obese; body condition 5.0 is considered ideal.

The cats' teeth were evaluated using the Feline Calculus Dental Score chart. This chart provides a score from 0 (no calculus) to 3 (calculus covering greater than 2/3 of the tooth). Preferred score is 0 or 1.

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CONDITION OF THE ANIMALS:

All cats were observed.

The majority of cats were in normal body condition.

A small percentage of cats were below normal body condition. Most of the underweight cats were located in the senior cat area. One of these cats was reported to be 16 years old.

A small percentage of cats were noted to have ocular discharge.

Cats evaluated for calculus had dental scores ranging from 0 to 2.

Prior to arriving at the above listed address, Detective Hutchinson showed veterinary records to me of two cats that were reportedly adopted from the Veterinarians' Blood Bank cat facility earlier this year. The cats were identified on the paperwork as Fox and Vivi.

Fox's veterinary records showed Fox was in normal body condition on presentation. Physical exam findings were within normal limits (WNL). No external parasites were observed. Test results showed no internal parasites.

Fox's blood work did have abnormalities, possibly indicating some type of infection. Radiograph interpretation was that the intestines were distended with gas. No obstructions were noted.

The veterinarian's diagnosis was possible Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

On a subsequent veterinary examination, Fox was still in normal body condition (BCS), but had decreased by one BCS score. Fox was euthanized at that time.

Vivi's veterinary records showed Vivi was in normal body condition on presentation. Physical exam found dental disease. No external parasites were observed. Test results showed no internal parasites. Vivi was given dental treatment. This treatment included pulling teeth.

CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE ANIMALS:

All photos included in this report were taken by Dr. Jodi Lovejoy.

John and Amanda Wetzel live on the property where this facility is located.

Veterinarians' Blood Bank owns and provides care for the cats. All cats are clinic-owned; there are no client-owned cats present at the Veterinarians' Blood Bank cat facility.

All cats had shelter, water, and food available.

The facility is an indoor-only facility. It had impermeable walls, sides, and floors. The facility was well-lit. There are a total of six rooms, plus quarantine area, containing approximately 581 cats.

The cats are group housed unless there is a specific reason to not do so. At the time of this inspection one cat was housed individually in the colony area of the facility. This cat is reported by Mrs. Wehmiller to be anti-social toward other cats. Some cats in quarantine were housed individually.

Primary Enclosures:

Most of the primary enclosures were made of chain link kennel panels. Newer primary enclosures were made of welded-wire panels. The welded-wire panels reached from the floor to the ceiling. All panels appeared to be in good condition with no rust noted. Primary enclosures contained large stuffed pet beds/blankets, plastic kiddie pools containing cat litter, food bowls, and free-choice water.

Mrs. Wehmiller reported the kennels are approximately 8 by 10 feet. There are approximately 15 cats per kennel.

Primary enclosures in the quarantine and treatment areas consisted of large cages. These enclosures contained food, water, and litter boxes. They also contained bedding.

Mrs. Wehmiller reported there is one main cleaning of the enclosures and litter boxes per day with spot cleaning as needed throughout the day, Mondays through Saturdays.

On Sundays, a volunteer goes to the facility and conducts spot checks.

The walls and floors are sanitized daily, Monday through Friday. Cats are moved to the aisleway while their enclosure is being cleaned.

The temperature in Room 3 was 66 degrees Fahrenheit and 73% humidity.

Lighting is on a timer. Lights come on at approximately 7:00 am and shut off at approximately 8:00 pm. Rooms 6 and 1 had windows, which allowed for natural lighting.

A slight ammonia odor was noted in Room 5. The level of ammonia was barely detectable. Ammonia odor was not noticed in any of the remaining rooms.



IMG 6723 VBB, 12-27-23, cat facility Room 3



IMG 6724 VBB, 12-27-23, cat facility, primary enclosure

Food:

All cats had free-choice dry food available. Senior and young cats had soft food available in addition to dry food.

Two food bowls are placed in the kennels on Saturdays.

Food bowls are washed once per week on Fridays. The bowls are spot checked the other days of the week.

Food in current use was stored in plastic containers within each section. Bagged food was stored off the floor on pallets.

Some cats were on special diets. Signs were present on their primary enclosures indicating these special diets.



IMG 6751 VBB 12-27-23, cat facility, Spencer



IMG 6752 VBB 12-27-23, cat facility, Spencer's food container

Water:

Water is provided via automatic bowl waterers mounted on the walls.

Mrs. Wehmiller reports the water bowls are emptied once a day and sanitized with a chlorhexidine and water mixture. This occurs Monday through Friday. The water bowls are spot checked on Saturdays and Sundays.

Care:

Cats are acquired by breeding in-house, from research facilities, and from owner surrender.

Mrs. Wehmiller did mention a kitten that was found as a stray by one of the employees and brought to the facility.

New cats are tested for a wide range of infectious diseases. If a cat tests positive, it will be treated until cured and tested negative prior to being added to the blood draw rotation. If a cat is positive for an untreatable condition, it will either be returned to its owner, if applicable, or euthanized.

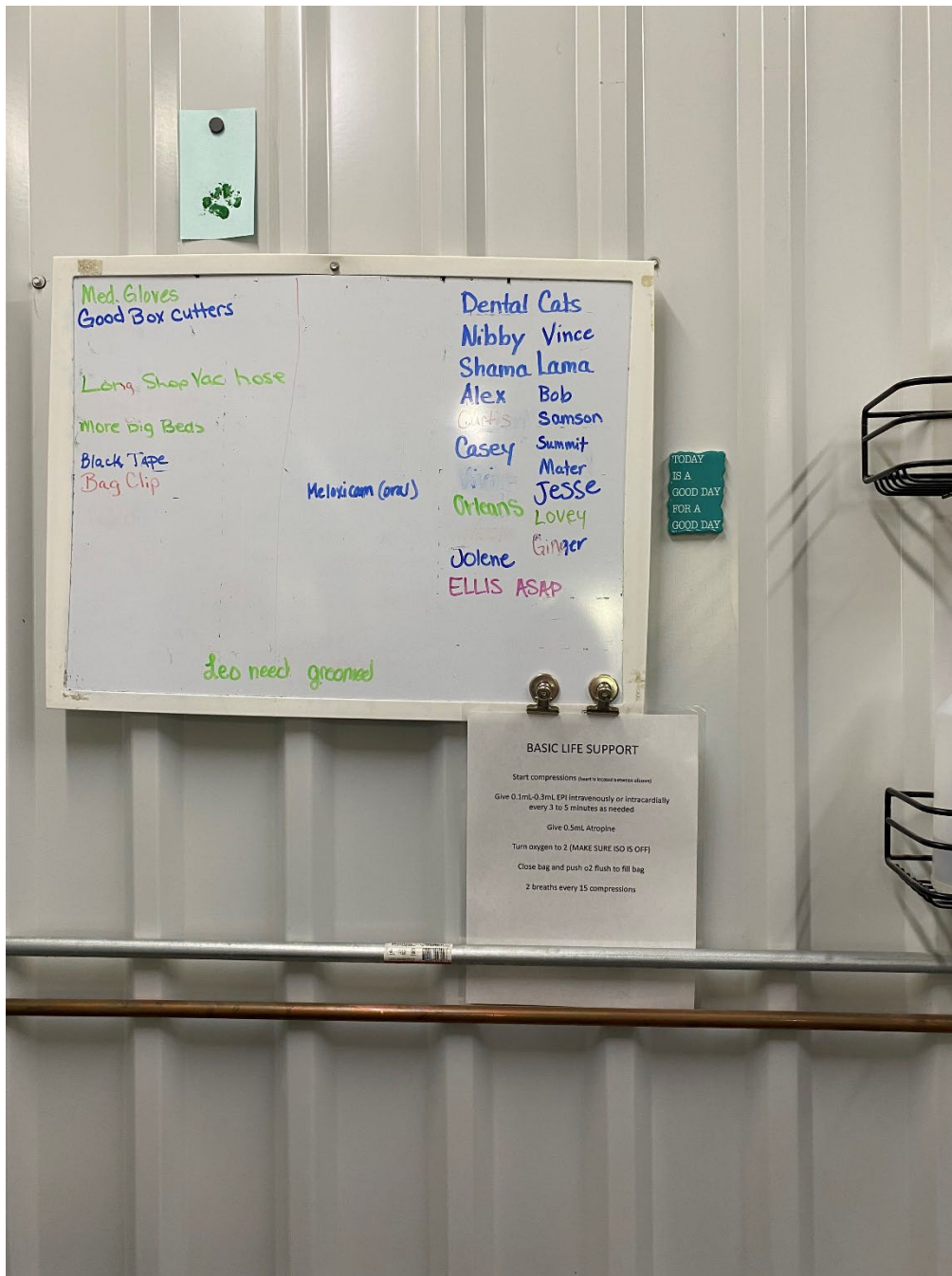
Cats are kept in a quarantine area until their test results are known and they have completed treatment protocol, if applicable.



IMG 6759 VBB, 12-27-23, cat facility, treatment area primary enclosures

Mrs. Wehmiller stated the cats have their nails trimmed, ears cleaned, and are brushed when the cats are sedated for blood draws.

The cats' teeth are checked while sedated for blood draws. Personnel grade the gums. If a cat needs minor dental care, it is treated with ZydaClin, a clindamycin hydrochloride liquid. If a cat has severe gum issues, it is scheduled for a dental with Dr. Bryant. A list of cats needing dental care was present in a blood draw room.



IMG 6765 VBB, 12-27-23, cat facility, dental care list

Long-haired cats may be trimmed.

Cats not being used for blood draws, such as young and senior cats, are weighed monthly.

Capacity for Care:

There are 8 employees working 8 hours per day, Monday through Friday.
Saturdays one to two employees provide care.
Sundays a volunteer conducts a spot check.

A standard of 15 minutes per animal per day may be used to estimate the amount of time needed for cleaning and feeding in a shelter. This does not consider other factors, such as facility design, or time for providing enrichment and training of personnel. Reference: Journal of Shelter Medicine and Community Animal Health, page 8.

8 employees working 8 hours per day equates to 3,840 minutes per day. This presumes employee breaks are not counted in the 8 hours worked.

581 cats, at 15 minutes per cat, if housed individually, could be expected to take approximately 8715 minutes per day.

VBB co-houses cats, with most enclosures holding around fifteen (15) cats. Cats are group fed, have automatic water cups, and have group litter containers. The amount of time required to clean and provide food can reasonably be expected to be significantly less than 15 minutes per cat.

At the time of this unannounced inspection, litter containers contained minimal feces, all feeders had clean food, water was available to all cats, and the cats' environment was free of excessive debris accumulation.

Blood draws:

Blood is collected from cats every 21 days. The cats are sedated/anesthetized during this procedure. 50 ml of blood is collected. Packed cell volume is checked prior to blood draws.

Blood work is conducted on the cats if there appears to be a health issue, for first time donors, or at least once per year.

Cats are used for blood draws from the time they reach 8 lbs. in body weight until they reach 10 to 11 years of age. Individual cats may be retired sooner. Male cats may reach 8 lbs., and be used for blood draws, around 9 months of age.

DISCUSSION:

Please refer to the included *Cat Welfare Case Report Addendum* for information on cat needs and care.

Please refer to the *California Animal Blood Banking Guidance Resource*, dated 02-23-23, for detailed information on pages 8 through 10 about cat donor recommendations.

Specific information from this publication includes: minimum weight of 8 lbs., age range from 1 year to 8 years, blood collection no closer together than every 8 weeks.

These guidelines are the only state-based guidelines found during multiple internet searches for state guidelines for animal blood banks.

Please refer to the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* (2021) 23, 410 – 432, “2021 ISFM [International Society of Feline Medicine] Consensus Guidelines on the Collection and Administration of Blood and Blood Products in Cats”; specifically pages 417 and 424 for information on cat donor qualifications.

Specific information from this publication includes: minimum weight of 9.9 lbs., age range from 1 year to 8 years, blood collection no closer together than every 4 weeks.

The ISFM guidelines differentiates client-owned cats (8-week collection interval) to clinic-owned cats (4-week collection interval). The ISFM guidelines suggest that every 8-week collection negates the need to provide iron supplementation.

Additional animal blood donor resources include:

Blood banking (Proceedings), DVM360.com: minimum weight of 10 lbs., age range from 1 to 7 years (retired at 8 years), blood collection every 3-4 weeks for clinic-owned cats, every 3-4 months for client-owned cats. [Blood banking \(Proceedings\) \(dvm360.com\)](#)

The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center: minimum weight of 10 lbs., age range from 1 to 6 years, blood collection every 8 weeks at most. [Eligibility and Blood Types | OSU Veterinary Medical Center](#)

Blue Pearl Pet Hospitals: minimum weight of 10 lbs., age range from 1 to 8 years (some exceptions may apply based on the discretion of a licensed veterinarian), blood collection schedule not listed. [Blood Bank - BluePearl Pet Hospital \(bluepearlvet.com\)](#)

IndyVet: minimum weight of 8.5 lbs., age range from 1 to 6 years, blood collection every 8 weeks. [Feline Blood Donor Program - IndyVet - Save the lives of felines today!](#)
[Blood Donation Center - IndyVet - Help Save an Animal's Life Today!](#)

Cat blood regeneration time:

14 days

[Anemia, Regenerative in Cats | PetMD](#)

Biological product definition (9 CFR 101.2) [eCFR :: 9 CFR Part 101 -- Definitions](#)

The term *biological products*, also referred to in this subchapter as biologics, biologicals, or products, shall mean all viruses, serums, toxins (excluding substances that are selectively toxic to microorganisms, e.g., antibiotics), or analogous products at any stage of production, shipment, distribution, or sale, which are intended for use in the treatment of animals and which act primarily through the direct stimulation, supplementation, enhancement, or modulation of the immune system or immune response. The term “biological products” includes but is not limited to vaccines, bacterins, allergens, antibodies, antitoxins, toxoids, immunostimulants, certain cytokines, antigenic or immunizing components of live organisms, and diagnostic components, that are of natural or synthetic origin, or that are derived from synthesizing or altering various substances or components of substances such as microorganisms, genes or genetic sequences, carbohydrates, proteins, antigens, allergens, or antibodies.

An animal biological product is defined as a product that produces, or claims to produce, an immunological effect. Blood from a blood bank is not considered an animal biological product.

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), APHIS Agreement # 04-9100-0859-MU and FDA Serial # 225-05-7000, delineating which agency has jurisdiction over specific items.

The FDA appears to have jurisdiction over animal blood products for transfusions per this MOU.

[USDA APHIS | Memo of Understanding between CVB and FDA](#)

On 01-08-24 I sent an email to FDA at: AskCVM@fda.hhs.gov, requesting information on where I might send information on this case for FDA’s consideration.

On 01-08-24 I sent an email to USDA requesting information on whether this facility should be licensed with USDA Animal Care.

CONCLUSION & OUTCOME:

General Care:

No unattended injuries or illnesses were noted.

The majority of cats were very social, approaching on their own for attention.

The cats under the ownership and/or care of The Veterinarians' Blood Bank appear to be receiving care sufficient to provide for their health. No immediate jeopardy issues were noted.

I discussed with Mrs. Wehmiller using a standardized cat dental scoring system. I provided a hard copy of the cat calculus scoring system BOAH uses.

Blood Collection:

The VBB blood collection schedule of every 21 days (three weeks) is shorter than the industry standard of 8 weeks between blood collections for client-owned donors.

It is also shorter than the ISFM guidelines of 4 weeks between blood collections for clinic-owned cats. It is in line with the Blood Banking Proceedings in DVM 360.

The VBB age range of 9 months to 11 years is significantly longer than the industry standard of 1 year to 8 years (most guidelines).

Some clinics (not listed) list collecting from cats up to 10 years of age.

I discussed in person with Dr. Harrison on 12-27-23 about extending the time span between blood collections in cats owned by VBB.

Conclusion:

The cats owned and cared for by VBB do not appear to be in jeopardy.

When/if responses are received from FDA and/or USDA Animal Care, this information will be added to the case file.

Respectfully submitted on 01-08-24 by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jodi Lovejoy, DVM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jodi Lovejoy, DVM
District 8 Field Veterinarian
Animal Care and Well-being Specialist
Director, Commercial Dog Breeder Broker Program
Resident, American College of Animal Welfare
IN BOAH