

Case study: chronic cat flu

Katie Whitcomb
shows just how
detailed a history
it is possible to obtain
about an animal
during homeopathic
consultations



Photo courtesy of Katie Whitcomb

Tonni is a Korat, an ancient Thai breed of cat recorded there in the 14th century, mainly coming into the UK from the 1960s and being accepted as a breed here in the 1980s.

The word Korat means good fortune in Thai and it is also the name of a region. As a breed they are sensitive and affectionate like their neighbours the Burmese. They are quiet, sweet, intelligent and playful, forming strong bonds with people. Apparently they are trained from birth to accept noise.

They are upmarket cats, usually blue-coated and the hair is described as being silver-tipped. When they are stroked, the hair doesn't moult easily, so they are said to be better for people with allergies.

The rescue cat

Tonni lives with Susan, a night nurse and her husband, Peter, who has bronchiectasis which is why they got their first Korat, Ted, a year before when he was four months old. Tonni was a "rescue". She came from a North Wales breeder whose 13 cats were dispersed after her death, via a rescue cattery in Rutland where Tonni stayed just three days.

The day after she arrived at her new home, she was taken to the vet for a check up and was given a first vaccination, wormer against tape and round worm and a spot on flea control on the back of the neck. The vet noticed that she had been recently neutered.

Three days later she was back at the vets very poorly with snuffles and she had started retching. The vet noted sneezing and nasal discharge, classic signs of cat flu. The vaccination does not cause this, but in a cat that is stressed and already harbouring cat flu virus at the time of vaccination, we often see these symptoms.

At this point Susan rang Tonni's previous vet in Wales who could find no record of Tonni ever having been vaccinated although her kittens had been. She had however been treated for flu several times and had needed courses of antibiotic each time with additional anti-inflammatories to help with appetite.

To cut a long story short Tonni was yo-yoing to and from the vets over the next six months with flu signs and retching. During this time she had five courses of antibiotic, one with steroid, one with

non-steroidal anti-inflammatory and a course of anti-emetics and an injection to stop stomach bleeding. She was never well enough to have the second part of the flu vaccination course.

Homeopathic consultation

Tonni came to me to be seen for a homeopathic appraisal with a complaint of chronic flu. Susan and Peter brought me an A4 sheet of observations and information. From that and discussions with them I learned the following.

Although Tonni seemed to prefer women, she had been the favourite cat of the breeder's husband. She had been a breeding queen in an indoor cattery. She had no idea of play until introduced to Ted whom she accepted almost from the start although he hissed at her initially. Now she lets him take the lead but will grab him by the back leg and give him a nip if he pushes his luck. He is a bully but backs off when she swipes or nips. She also likes playing with a furry stick and ping pong balls but is not so keen on catnip mice.

Both cats go crazy at night when the lights go out, tearing around madly. The

cats often sleep curled up together at the top of their floor-to-ceiling climbing frame. She likes being stroked and having her tummy tickled but was reluctant to be picked up. She would sit on Susan's lap when she sat down and put her feet up. However in surgery she decided to grace Peter's lap. She sleeps on Susan's bed, under the bedspread if it's cold. She sleeps a lot more than Ted. They need to keep the bungalow warm otherwise Tonni's snuffles worsen.

She doesn't mind the noise of the vacuum cleaner and has to be removed from its path. She's not afraid of thunder whereas Ted climbs up the curtains if it as much as rains hard. She is patient with young children but moves away if they get too boisterous.

When she is ill she can't eat, gets very lifeless with a greasy coat, has rapid weight loss and last time she dribbled a lot as well. She was given anti-sickness treatment after she had brought up five lots of bile in one evening, mainly yellow but occasionally black suggesting some stomach bleeding.

There is not much discharge from the nose, it is not from either side particularly and there is never any blood in the discharge which hardly has any colour or smell. Susan had been using a eucalyptus vapour in the room, which we now needed to stop as the strong smell could spoil the homeopathic treatment.

Tonni's snuffles are worst first thing in the morning between 4.30 and 5.00. She snuffles until it warms up. She is worse when it is foggy or damp and she doesn't like draughts. Her back feels cold when she is ill. Her throat has never been recorded as very sore. We presume it is throat pain which makes her retch. Certainly when she gets anti-inflammatories she starts eating.

At one point she had had to travel to a home with a big window overlooking a churchyard because Susan was called to nurse there in an emergency. When Tonni looked out on to people gathered for a funeral she got very upset and hissed. Presumably she was not used to crowds.

In the summer when the bungalow door is left open with just a screen across, she goes and hides if people look in and talk. She is scared of some new people. She doesn't like the car. Her attitude to dogs is not known.

When Susan and Peter nip out for the paper she is quiet but Ted yowls. The couple went away for six days and their daughter stayed over except when she was out at work. Ted minded more than Tonni. He got the lid off the cat

biscuit tin and she ate biscuits then that she would normally refuse. She can be a thief.

Tonni has a good appetite when well, but if she eats too quickly she coughs and splutters and is sick; she normally can't cope with dry food. She likes wet food and has a quarter sachet four times daily: poultry, lamb or beef but not fish. When well she puts weight on easily. She licks left over muesli and likes milk which she is not allowed. She doesn't lick people or appear to crave salt. She is not thirsty (unless she has dry food) except when she is on steroid. She urinates quite often, but it is not smelly. She produces rather hard stools once or twice a day.

We don't really know her attitude to bathing as she has never had a bath but the default setting for cats is dislike. Asked if she liked music I was told it had no effect on her.

Summing up

Homeopathic vets tend to ask people to sum up their animal's character in a few words, as their actual choice of words can be quite revealing. Asked to do this Susan replied, Tonni is a lady, gentle and polite, laid back, sweet-natured.

During the consultation she came out of her box to explore, rubbing up against us all, scent marking us. She went behind the desk to explore but came out of her own accord. She only sneezed once in that hour. I had her on my knee and she made minimal fuss, but I had to put her on the table to examine her

throat, which after all that, was unremarkable. Her mouth was fine, there was nasal congestion but no discharge, eyes clear, conjunctivae a bit pale. No gingivitis or halitosis. There was upper respiratory noise but the chest was clear. Coat was good and she was a little overweight.

The treatment

I wanted to give Tonni something so I dispensed Silica 30c, one twice daily for five days and said I would repertorise the case and be in touch.

My thought was that Silica suited such a ladylike cat with a chronic sinus problem.

Silica is a remedy to consider in chronic infection/sinusitis, a condition we often see in Persian cats who have very flat faces and small nostril openings and thus can't throw off flu.

Although not anywhere near as disadvantaged as Persians, Korats do have a flat forehead and a short nose as breed characteristics. This can become an obstacle to cure. Also she was chilly, heat loving, draught hating. Susceptible to draughts on the back comes up in Silica and Susan mentioned how cold her back felt when she wasn't well. Then she had had an ailment from vaccination, though arguably the condition was Never Well Since Flu.

I tend to think of Nat mur as the constitutional remedy for cats as they are not pack animals, tend to be loners and are very sensitive, particularly to grief involving the one person to whom



Photo: istockphoto.com/Sam Highley



Silica was formerly made from quartz or flint but is now prepared chemically

they have formed an attachment. But the Thai Korat is obviously a cut above the UK moggie, and my questioning anyway really ruled out Nat mur. Looking up some rubrics, which were no doubt biased by my intuition and my limited knowledge I still agreed with myself.

Silica fits the totality of symptoms and is also the constitutional remedy of the patient, and although not Ted's remedy, I expect it is the constitutional remedy of a lot of Korats.

Later I talked to Susan as promised: she told me Tonni had really hated the return car journey and this made her breathing much worse. She had responded well to the Silica but had started to snuffle when they stopped it. I feel this is a strong indication that the remedy was working as I had not instigated management or dietary changes. I suggested that we put her back on Silica twice daily and reduced it to once daily as soon as she seemed okay.

When she was really better I wanted to start her on the Cat Flu nosode and Chlamydia nosode 30c, twice daily for three days, weekly for six weeks and then fortnightly.

Nosodes should always be given under the supervision of a vet.

The follow-up

It became obvious that Tonni was still tending to snuffle a bit whenever it was wet or windy. We were never getting her well enough to dispense with the Silica.

So I suggested we try the nosode while she was still on Silica. Because of the reaction she had to vaccination the owners were wary of the nosode, so we agreed to give just one dose and watch the response, and this was okay, but we have not got the nosode regime going as well as I had hoped.

Now I have clouded the issue of a remedy cure with additional isopathy. This is a chronic case – not only is the flu chronic, there has been suppression with steroid, antibiotics and non-steroidals which some homeopathic vets think are more suppressive than steroids. This cat was also relieved of most of her genital system, a further suppression probably being spayed around the time of her owner's death. Think grief. Then she was separated from 13 cats she knew and sent away from home. Further grief. As if that stress were insufficient she was then hit with wormer, spot on flea treatment and flu and enteritis vaccination by a strange vet all in one day. Chronically suppressed cases like this often need more than one remedy to unravel them fully, let alone cure them.

A sceptical organic farmer I know complained to me saying that when his cows got better it didn't mean the remedies worked. At least this case had been having a rocky ride for a long while, and has much improved in the six months following the remedy. Anyway, we don't claim remedies heal, we only say they help the body to heal itself.

Tonni has needed only two short courses of antibiotics since we started homeopathy, no other supportive anti-inflammatories were needed on these occasions.

One relapse followed a repeat visit to the sick lady living by the churchyard, an unavoidable but known stressor. The argument against the remedy being the helping hand to the healing process would be that the stressors regressed considerably anyway and this is true. She got over the spay, the move and she no longer had to make kittens and kitten food from her body's resources.

However, this effect was of gradually gathering momentum. Despite the respiratory distress on the way home, she started to pick up in a few days. Then when the remedy stopped she regressed and improved again when it was recommenced. Reasonable proof of remedy action.

There is as yet no full cure. The anatomy of the nose may pose some obstacle to recovery. Anyway Susan and Peter are delighted, Tonni is more confident and even went outside during the summer and she is less affected by bad weather. All three of us know that the Silica has helped.

The therapeutic effect of the consultation was also marked. Before when their cats were unwell Susan and Peter were just transporters – "have to take the cat to the vet" – now they are part of the "cat get well and stay well" team. They have come to appreciate that they do know a lot about their cats, and can now take responsibility for decision-making, albeit with advice from vets. This has given them confidence, and they in turn have made me more confident of my homeopathy. So the dynamic was shifted by the holistic effect of both the conversation and the remedy.



Katie Whitcomb BVSc MRCVS VETMFHom is a Bristol graduate who has always worked with companion animal patients. She now takes homeopathy referrals in Suffolk and London and also works as a locum for colleagues when needed.