



media *release*

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LITTERS OF WHITE KITTENS NEEDED TO HELP UNDERSTAND INHERITED DEAFNESS

Veterinary charity needs more feline participants to help further knowledge of how many white cats are born deaf

Did you know that animals with a predominantly white coat are more prone to deafness? The Animal Health Trust, a leading veterinary charity based in Suffolk, was one of the first places in the country to offer Brainstem Auditory Evoked Response (BAER) hearing tests in 1992 for cats and dogs for congenital deafness; deafness that is present at birth and therefore likely to be hereditary. Since then, the Trust has pioneered the use of BAER hearing tests to routinely screen litters of kittens and puppies with predominantly white coats to detect those animals that are born deaf.

However, the genetics behind this phenomenon is still unclear. The Animal Health Trust's new study aims to better understand the prevalence of congenital deafness in white kittens and their littermates in the UK, and will be a basis to further investigate the genetic heritability and genetic defects behind the disease in white cats in the future.

The study focuses on four breeds: British shorthair, Norwegian Forest, Russian and Turkish Vankedisi and is offering breeders a FREE BAER hearing test for the entire litter of kittens, as long as at least one of the litter is completely white. The kittens must be between 9 and 13 weeks old to take part in the study. It is also desirable, but not essential, if the sire and dam's eye colour, coat colour and hearing ability can also be provided to help aid the investigation.

The test will be performed at the AHT, near Newmarket, by a fully trained neurology technician and is a simple and straightforward test which generally does not require

sedation. The test is completely safe and monitors the kitten's brain response to a series of clicks to establish whether the kitten hears normally, or is deaf in one or both ears. Each kitten will receive an official BAER hearing test certificate stating the results.

Lorenzo Mari, a neurology resident at the Animal Health Trust involved in this study, said: "It's relatively well-known that white cats are more likely to be born deaf, but there is still a lot to understand about the genetics behind this phenomenon. Currently, the best thing breeders can do is to have litters routinely hearing tested as kittens and to de-select those diagnosed as congenitally deaf from further breeding." "We want to be able to do more to combat this condition in white cats and to, hopefully, make greater steps towards breeding out the genes causing this condition altogether. It will be a very long process, but obtaining as much information as possible from this study will greatly improve our understanding of this disorder - and therefore increase the chance that fewer cats will be born deaf in the future. Ideally we need to see 30 more litters to complete the study, so we really want to hear from anyone who would be able to help us!"

For more information, or to arrange for your litter to take part in the study, please contact, lorenzo.mari@aht.org.uk or julia.freeman@aht.org.uk of the Neurology Department or call, 01638 552 700.

Ends

For further information, please contact:

Katherine Lawson, AHT press office, 01638 751 000 ext 1511

Photographs & Videos:

Photos of kittens undergoing the test, can be requested from the AHT press office by emailing katherine.lawson@aht.org.uk

Additional notes:

- The Animal Health Trust (AHT) is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit the website at www.aht.org.uk