

Bill Hall Cat treats for our taste buds

Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune

I realized the other day what a scam cat treats are, not to mention what a fool I have been.

You're probably familiar with what those cat (and dog) treats are that humans give to animals - little nuggets of between-meal snacks. Pet snacks are among the ways we have found to ingratiate ourselves with the non-human creatures who share our lives. It is the way we befriend them and bribe them to like us.

It's also one of the ways lion trainers persuade their animals not to kill and eat them. The trainers are trying to avoid becoming cat treats themselves.

Pet treats are a way of fostering affection and cooperation between us and all kinds of pets. Critter snacks of one sort or another can intensify the warm bond between us and our cats and dogs and gerbils. It is similar to buying ice cream for your grandchildren. Ice cream makes the little rascals friendlier and less likely to roller skate through your house.

An industry has sprung up over the years selling treats for small animals. I am one of the many suckers who purchase those little treats to buy the affection of otherwise indifferent and frequently ungrateful cats.

Thus it was that I was giving the bedtime treat to our cats one night when I noticed something bogus about the product. They are made in ways that appeal far more to humans than to cats. For instance, the little tidbits we have been buying are made in attractive shapes.

Do cats actually care about the shapes of their treats?

The commercial treats we buy for our cats are about half the size of a dime and made into stars, hearts, fish and a three-cornered geometric shape. For good measure, they are made in two different colors.

Is there really any danger that a cat won't eat a treat because it is a star and not a heart or because it's tan but not purple?

All cats know is the treats are tuna flavored. Cats love and might even kill for tuna-flavored food.

Let's get real. Cat treats are shaped and colored in ways that appeal to humans because cat owners have something cats don't have - money. Nonetheless, cat owners actually imagine a cat will love them more if it receives little wads of dried cat food in the shape of a star.

In truth, cat owners buy those little things because of the cuteness of those pieces of cat food. But it's a waste of time. Cats don't do cute.

Cat owners enjoy pretending their cats dig that sort of thing. That's why many cat owners (and dog owners) actually do irrational things like throwing birthday parties for their pets complete with decorated cakes and birthday cards.

I warn you, my friends, we must come to our senses. It doesn't matter what the birthday card says or what is written on the birthday cake. Take control of your sanity and try to remember something:

Cats can't read!

I'm not opposed to cat or dog or grandchild treats. We all enjoy little treats of one sort or another - a cold drink when you get home from work, a lump of chocolate from your sweetie now and then, a bowl of ice cream or maybe some deep-fried catfish nuggets.

But bear in mind cat snacks are 98 percent designed for humans. Cats don't require fancy shapes. In fact, I have experimented lately, occasionally giving our cats a couple of dry pieces of their regular cat food, instead of the official cat treats. They don't know the difference.

And that's doubly true of dogs. Of course, I can't really test a dog on that premise because a dog will eat anything you put on the floor in front of it - official dog treats, ordinary dry dog food bits, a pinto bean, a cigar butt, a lump of clay, one of your socks and, of course, an occasional burglar.

I'm no different from the animals. Most evenings, I eat a couple of handfuls of peanuts. But even at my advanced age, I can still recognize a cigar butt and not gulp it down like a deranged dachshund.

When it comes to cat treats, that product is so blatantly aimed at our tastes and not at our pets that self-respect demands we either stop falling for that sales hustle or eat the cat treats ourselves.

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