

SNOW SLEUTHS



MEET A HORSE



RAT CARE

kids speaking for animals Vol. 17 • No. 1

BCSPCA

# Bark!

**HELPING  
COMMUNITY  
CATS**



# Litterbox

(letters to the editor)

Dear SPCA,

My name is Livia and I am 12 years old. I have been donating to the SPCA for about three years. The first time, me and my friend donated \$40, and the two other times we raised over \$200! I have a passion for animals, and I'm going to be a marine biologist when I grow up (as well as a BC SPCA volunteer, duh!). At school, I have been trying to raise awareness about dogs, whales and seals (my three favourite animals!). I am eager to continue to raise money and help animals.

Until next time,  
Liva Fatovic-Spurr, 12, Vancouver

# PET PALS

After a visit from a BC SPCA humane educator, the students of Division 7 at Bayview School in Nanaimo created a book about the importance of spaying and neutering our pets. Here are two pages from Moonshadow and Luna: A Cautionary Tale.



Burke, 12, Scotia, 12, and Cambria, 10, held a bottle drive over the course of five weeks. Their dedication paid off. Hundreds of bottles were returned for recycling and they raised \$115 for the West Vancouver SPCA.



Mia, Grace and Ella, from Pitt Meadows, hosted multiple bake sales to raise funds for the BC SPCA. Their efforts resulted in an impressive \$300 donation for the neediest animals in B.C.



Hey, kids!  
Send your letters, photos and artwork for Pet Pals, High Paws or Litterbox to:  
BC SPCA Kids Club  
1245 East 7th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5T 1R1



Aryana, Ava and Elissa sold lemonade and donated the proceeds - \$148.45 - to the Surrey SPCA.



Marlo held her birthday party at the SPCA and invited her friends to bring donations instead of presents. They had a blast celebrating and learning about animals, and together they raised \$300, which Marlo donated to the Vancouver shelter.



# High Paws

KIDS HELPING ANIMALS!



Finns, whose family has adopted from the SPCA, held a lemonade stand and raised an incredible \$611 for the West Vancouver SPCA. He says this is "just the beginning" and plans to do another fundraiser for the animals.



Aaron, Dylan and Filbert teamed up for a bake sale and earned \$228, which they passed on to the Victoria SPCA.



For the third year, Kaiya donated \$50 from her birthday party to the Comox SPCA!



Brooklyn showed kindness to both people and animals with her Kool-Aid stand. The sale raised \$60, which she split between a cancer charity and the Kamloops SPCA.



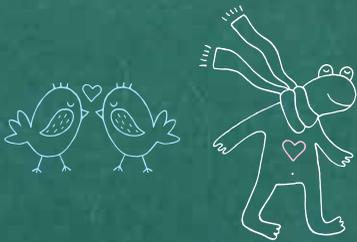
Animals in Prince George have a friend in Emma. She gave her birthday money to the North Cariboo SPCA and visited with some of the furry friends staying at the shelter.



Willow gave the proceeds from her hot chocolate stand to the Cowichan SPCA. What a sweet way to help animals!



Bamboo the cat was happy to see River, who donated \$125 to buy food and toys for the animals at the Nanaimo SPCA.



Pella and Kennedy, both 10, held a lemonade stand for the Penticton SPCA. Pella and her brother, Matthias, delivered the \$20 donation and visited with some of the animals, like Nort the cat!



Students at St. Joseph's School in Nelson ditched dissection! Instead, they used technology from the Animals in Science Policy Institute (ASPI) to study animal anatomy. With interactive tools like virtual dissection and 3D models, they learned about the insides of rats, frogs and pigs - all without needing to use the animals themselves.

# Community cats are Cold!



**D**id you know that, right here in British Columbia, there are thousands of cats living outdoors with no one to care for them? They are called community cats, and they need our help to stay warm this winter.

You can make them a simple shelter from a 36-gallon plastic storage tote. You will also need:

- ◆ a foam cooler to fit inside the tote
- ◆ a box cutter
- ◆ a marker
- ◆ duct tape
- ◆ straw



With the help of an adult, follow these steps:

**1.** With a marker, trace a hole on the tote 6 inches in diameter. The hole should be a few inches above the bottom of the tote.



**2.** Cut out the hole using the box cutter.



**3.** Put the foam cooler inside the tote. Use the hole in the tote to trace a matching 6-inch-diameter hole on the cooler.



**4.** Cut the hole out of the cooler.



Did you know? An 18-gallon plastic storage tote can fit one cat. Larger totes allow cats to cuddle up inside together, but they also lose heat more quickly than a smaller tote. Google "winter cat shelter" for more design ideas.



## Taking action for community cats

**BRRRR!  
COMMUNITY CATS  
NEED YOUR HELP!**



Help spread the word about cold community cats! Display the poster included with this *Bark!* magazine. Hang it up (with permission) at your school, local library or community centre.

Right: Families attended a workshop in Kamloops to build winter shelters for cold outdoor cats in their community.



Contact a local cat rescue to donate your shelter for them to use. Many cat rescues help take care of community cats, and will appreciate the support!



## Community cat Q & A

### Why are there so many community cats?

Community cats often live in groups called colonies. Unfortunately, very few of them are spayed or neutered, so they can still reproduce (make more cats!).

### What is life like for a community cat?

Life can be tough for community cats, especially in the winter. They can suffer from starvation and frostbite. They are exposed to diseases and parasites such as fleas and worms. They can be injured in fights with other cats. They also face attacks from predators such as raccoons and coyotes.

### How can we help community cats?

We can help by making sure the cats are spayed or neutered and not producing any more cats. Trap-neuter-return (TNR) involves safely catching all of the cats in a colony and having them spayed, neutered and vaccinated. TNR prevents cat colonies from growing — and helps the cats themselves be healthier. People can volunteer to look after the cats in the colony by providing food, water and warm shelters.

This community cat rests easy, knowing he has a safe, warm place to sleep!

PHOTO: ALBERTA PHELAN/SURREY COMMUNITY CAT FOUNDATION

5. Add straw (not hay) in and around the cooler for extra insulation. Use as much as possible.



5

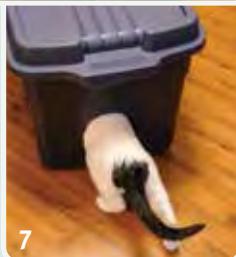
Did you know? Straw is better than hay or blankets for insulation. It stays drier and keeps cats warmer. Replace it every once in a while to keep the shelter clean and dry.



6

6. Place the lid on the cooler and secure it with duct tape.

7. Put the lid on the tote. Now your shelter is ready for some cats!



7

8. Place the shelter in a secluded spot outdoors in an area where you know some community cats live. To keep it as warm and dry as possible, the shelter should be shielded from the elements and elevated off the ground.

PHOTO: ALBERTA PHELAN/SURREY COMMUNITY CAT FOUNDATION

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# SAYING 'HEY' TO A HORSE

Meeting a horse can be a little scary. Horses are big, powerful animals. If they get spooked or upset, they can seriously hurt you. Knowing some horse body language and following safety rules will help make your meeting a happy one – for both you AND the horse.

## SAFETY FIRST! FOLLOW THESE 5 STEPS:

**1. ASK FIRST.** Only consider meeting horses who are with people! The guardian can tell you if it's ok to come close, and help introduce you.

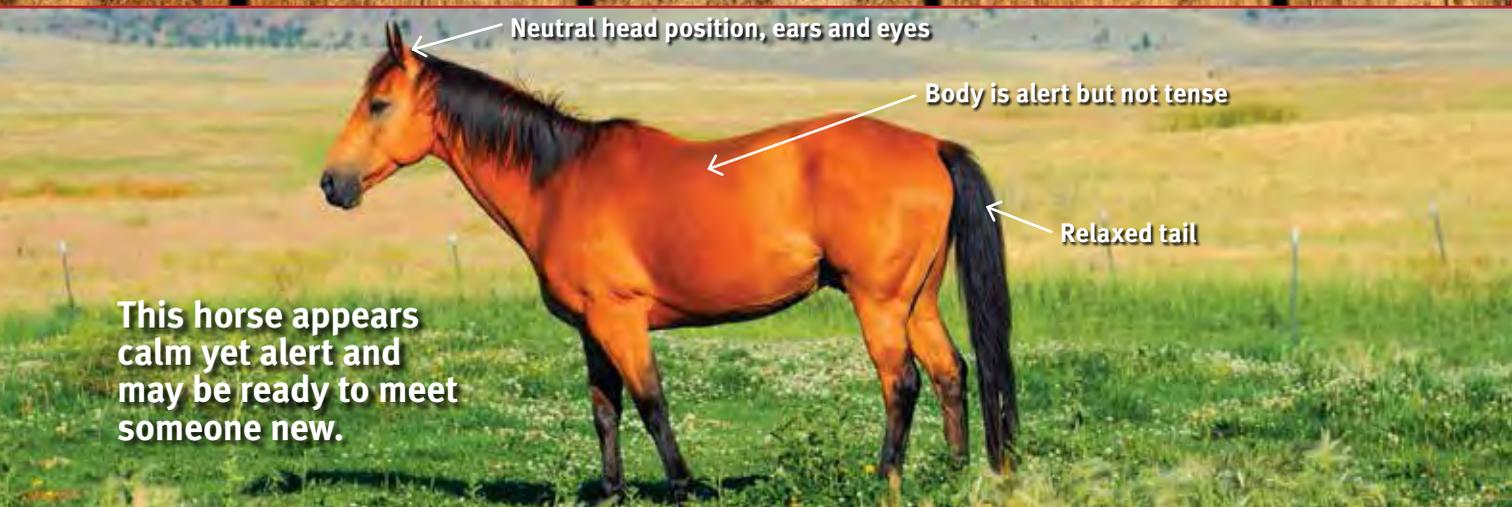
**2. STOP AND LOOK!** Before approaching, stop and pay close attention to the horse's body language. Look for clues they are calm and relaxed, yet alert.

**3. SPEAK UP!** Horses hear better than they see, so let them know you're there in a clear, soothing voice.

**4. APPROACH AT THE SHOULDER.** Horses cannot see directly in front or behind them. Always meet them at their shoulder so you won't surprise and frighten them.

**5. STAY PUT.** Once you're in position, stay there. Ask if the horse has a favourite place to be touched. Many horses enjoy being scratched at their withers – the highest point of the shoulder where their mane ends and back starts.

**REMEMBER:** like people, all horses are different. Some enjoy lots of interaction. Others just prefer people's company without being touched.



## READING A HORSE

Horses can't talk, but their bodies can tell you a lot!

- \* **Wide eyes with the whites showing:** the horse is alert and ready to flee
- \* **Hind foot cocked and ears pinned back:** the horse may be getting ready to kick
- \* **Tail clamped down tightly against buttocks:** the horse may be nervous or fearful
- \* **Ears pinned back and head sticking out:** the horse is about to bite
- \* **Ears drooping to the side:** the horse could be asleep and startle easily!



# Rats

**Rats have a pretty bad reputation.** Filthy, gross, vermin – you name it, they’ve been called it! For many people, “companion” is definitely not the first word that comes to mind when they think about rats.

**When you take a closer look, though,** we bet you’ll find that rats are amazing animals. (For those of you who are already huge rat fans, this is old news!)

**Rats have had a close relationship with people for a long time.** Our towns and cities draw them in, providing a constant supply of food and plenty of shelter. So as we moved around the globe, rats followed – and multiplied. In fact, rats outnumber humans on almost every continent in the world!

**What began as a relationship of dependence** over time became one of companionship. Fascinated by their curiosity, intelligence and resourcefulness, people began to keep tame rats. Eventually, from their wild rat cousins, a range of friendly, domesticated rats emerged – today’s pet rats.

**Rats make excellent companions.** They are smart and affectionate, not to mention entertaining to watch and hang out with. They each have their own unique personality and are fun to get to know.

**So give rats a chance!  
They just might surprise you.**



PHOTO: OLEG KOZLOV/ISTOCK

## Rat Stats

- Origin:** Asia
- Status:** Began to be domesticated nearly 200 years ago
- Life Span:** Usually 2 to 3 years
- Size:** Weigh up to about 650 g and measure 23 to 28 cm in length (plus an 18 to 23 cm tail)
- Coat:** Comes in a few “styles,” from smooth to curly
- Colour:** Many different colours and patterns, like cinnamon or “Dalmatian” (coloured spots on white)

# Be a rat-tastic guardian!

Rats make great companions for guardians who can give them plenty of attention.

Here are just some of the care and welfare needs of rats. The pet care section of the BC SPCA website - [sPCA.bc.ca](http://sPCA.bc.ca) - has more rat care tips.



## Healthy, happy rats

Spending time with your rats will show you how they normally look and behave. When you notice something unusual - like breathing problems or loss of appetite - you'll know to take them to the veterinarian right away.

## Snack time

Rats love treats! Foods such as unsweetened cereals, seeds, plain popcorn, nuts and dried pasta make great snacks. Just don't feed them too many or you'll end up with fat, unhealthy rats.



PHOTO: ASHLEY DARLING

## Hit or miss

Some rats can be trained to use a litter box, while others may never use one consistently. But it's worth a try! A plastic cat litter pan works well. You can also use a corner litter pan designed for small animals.

## Please don't squeeze!

Rats love attention, but they must be handled gently and carefully. Always pick up your rat with two hands: one hand under his hind end and the other around his chest. Never pick a rat up by his tail.

## On the menu

Being omnivores, rats eat both plant and animal foods. Feed your rats a staple diet of rat pellets or blocks. Rat pellets are a complete, balanced diet and should be available to them all the time. Provide a small amount of vegetables and fruits every day, too. Rats crave variety!



## Interior decorating

Adding small houses, ropes, hanging toys, plastic cat toys, hammocks, ladders and tubes provides stimulation and places to hide and sleep. Swap items in and out to keep your rats' cage interesting. Scatter or hang nesting material - like shredded paper - for your rats to gather.

## Keeping fit

Rats require daily exercise and will happily romp around a room that has been cleared of hazards such as electrical cords, cats or dogs, and poisonous plants. Keep in mind, a rat can squeeze through any opening she can get her head through! Rat-proofing is key. Always supervise playtime.



PHOTO: ASHLEY DARLING



## Rat palace

Rats are active animals requiring a large habitat. The more space, the better! Rats like to climb so a tall enclosure with multiple levels is best. A cage measuring three feet long by two feet wide by four feet high (pictured here) works well for a pair or small group of rats. Be sure the bar spacing is no larger than half an inch apart for young rats and an inch apart for adult rats to prevent escape. Habitat bottoms should be solid, not mesh or wire, which can hurt rat feet. Wire shelves should be covered to prevent injuries, too.

## Rapidly reproducing rats

Never keep male and female rats together, even for a short period (unless they are neutered or spayed). Rats multiply at an amazing rate. Females can have up to 12 litters in just one year, with anywhere from six to 12 young per litter.



## A clean, comfy home

Bedding made from recycled paper or fleece fabric works well for rats. Do not use cedar, pine or aspen wood shavings because they can cause health problems. Clean the cage several times a week to keep your rats healthy. Ammonia from urine can irritate their lungs and lead to illness. Keep the cage in an area protected from cold drafts and direct sunlight, as well as loud noises and bright lights. Rats like darkness!



## Who are you calling a dirty rat?

Rats are actually great groomers. They spend lots of time each day carefully cleaning themselves - and each other - all over.

## Social life

Rats should not be kept alone! Two or more can live together provided they are the same sex and have a large habitat. For all those hours people are at work or school (or asleep), think how happy your rat will be having a rat friend around! They'll eat, play and sleep together, and groom each other.

## My, what big teeth you have!

To help wear down their ever-growing front teeth, provide your rats with chewing items such as cardboard, wooden toys and apple branches. Make sure the branches come from trees that haven't been treated with any chemicals.

## Hoarders

Rats often hoard their food, so be sure to look for hidden stashes. Take away any uneaten fresh food the next day so it doesn't spoil and make them sick.

## Drink up!

Rats need water available to them all the time. Fill your rats' sipper bottle or heavy ceramic dish with clean, fresh water every day. Use soap and water to clean them out - once a week for bottles and daily for dishes.





Ian hasta have his pasta!

## RECIPES FOR RATS

Rats are fun to feed because they clearly take such pleasure in eating! Things like cooked rice, plain oatmeal, scrambled egg and cooked pasta are easy to make and bound to be a hit with your rats. (Just be sure to feed these foods in small amounts. They're not meant to be a replacement for a well-balanced diet.)

## GAME TIME!

Rats love to have fun – with each other and with their guardian. Plus, they always seem to have energy to burn! Try challenging your rats with these games:

### Bobbing for peas

Fill a shallow dish or bowl with about an inch of water. Pour in some peas. It won't take long for your rats to figure out how to fish for them!



### Obstacle course

Create a jungle gym for your rats. Use PVC pipes, cardboard boxes, wooden ladders, the legs cut off an old pair of jeans – pretty much anything you can think of that your rats will want to explore. Then let 'em loose and watch your rats climb all over!

### Piñata party

Make a "piñata" for your rats by wrapping a spoonful of treats in several layers of paper towel. Tie the bundle closed with some string. Hang it high enough in their cage so that it can swing freely and your rats can just reach it by standing up on their hind legs.



### Tunnelling for treats

Rats are natural burrowers. Fill a large plastic container with plain potting soil from a garden store. Be sure to place the container on a towel – this is one messy game! Sprinkle and bury some treats around the container. Then sit back and watch your rats have a blast digging for the goodies.



David makes bobbing for peas look easy peasy!

## Resourceful rats

This booklet provides basic care information. Please visit [spca.bc.ca/petcare](http://spca.bc.ca/petcare) for more rat care tips. You can also sniff out these other great rat resources:

**The Dapper Rat**  
[dapper.com.au](http://dapper.com.au)

**Rats Rule**  
[ratsrule.com](http://ratsrule.com)

**Rat Behavior and Biology**  
[ratbehavior.org](http://ratbehavior.org)



## The rat guardian pledge

As their guardian, you are responsible for your rats' health and well-being. You should make sure:

1. They never go hungry or thirsty;
2. They are taken to the vet when they are sick or injured;
3. They are not scared, frustrated, bored or depressed;
4. They are comfortable in their surroundings;
5. They are free to behave like rats!

For more information on providing these "Five Freedoms," check out [spca.bc.ca/petcare](http://spca.bc.ca/petcare).



Make the **BCSPCA** your first adoption option! Visit [spca.bc.ca](http://spca.bc.ca) to view all adoptable rats.

# MAKE A FORTUNE TELLER

Have you ever made a paper fortune teller? It's a game that predicts your future! Now you can make an animal-themed fortune teller for you and your friends. Fill it with just-for-fun fortunes, or use it to teach others about caring for animals.



## FIVE FREEDOMS FORTUNES

A Five Freedoms fortune teller may not predict the future, but is a fun way to share what you know about caring for animals.

To make one, come up with **eight examples** of an animal and something that they need, with a matching "Freedom" (listed below). Play with your friends and

take the chance to tell them what each Freedom means.

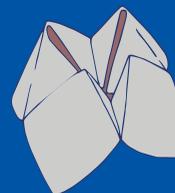
Flip through the pages of this and other issues of *Bark!* for ideas. Here are a few to get you started:

- **Cats need a warm, dry place to sleep** (Freedom #4)
- **Gerbils need a gerbil friend to hang out with** (Freedom #5)
- **Chickens need veterinary care when they get sick** (Freedom #2)

To be happy and healthy, animals should be given all of the **Five Freedoms**.

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
3. Freedom from distress
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being

Check out [YouTube](#) for video instructions on how to make and play with your fortune teller.



## PET PREDICTIONS

Make multiple fortune tellers and fill them with fun animal-themed predictions!

### Meet your match:

Choose eight different pets. See which one the fortune teller says is the perfect animal for you!

**Dog breeds:** This one has many possibilities! Which breed will be the one for you?

**Jobs with animals:** Will you be a veterinarian? A dog walker? A marine biologist? Ask the fortune teller and find out!

# Snow Sleuths

Winter is the perfect season to get outside and explore a local park, field, ravine or shoreline. Snow – especially freshly fallen snow – makes it easier to spot the signs that wildlife is nearby.

We're going to take this trail, Mom. Let's meet back up at the big rock.

One sign you might spot are tracks. Wildlife tracks can tell you what animals have passed by, and even how quickly they were moving. Tracks are best seen after a snowfall. They show up especially well when there is a thin layer of fresh snow over older, hard-packed snow.

I bet this fresh snow will help us track down some wildlife!

Make some observations about the track. How many toes do you see? Are there any claw marks? How big is each footprint? Is there much space between the footprints?

Here's a deer track, Fin!

How can you tell? All I see are two lines in the snow.

That's because deer leave drag marks.



Deer have distinctive heart-shaped hoof prints. When walking in deeper snow, though, they barely lift their feet off the ground. So they leave behind parallel drag marks.

Fast-hopping rabbits and hares land with their long hind feet in front and their smaller front feet behind, one after the other. Squirrels bound along in a similar way, only their front feet land side by side. If the tracks end at a tree, chances are you are looking at squirrel prints (because squirrels can climb!).

This one looks backwards, Kat. How can the hind feet come before the front feet?

It must be from a rabbit or a hare. That's how they hop.



Rabbits, hares and deer poop roundish pellets. Hare droppings tend to be slightly bigger and flatter than rabbit droppings. Deer scat is more oval-shaped. If you find the pellets in a large pile, the animals were probably stopped to feed.



Hmm... based on the tracks we just saw, this is either deer poop or rabbit poop.

I'm looking it up now, Kat. Small and round? It's probably from a rabbit.

That's definitely not candy, Fin! It's poop.

Who left this? It almost looks like a snow angel!

Good question, Fin! I'm stumped. Let me take a photo for later.

Looks like someone dropped some M+Ms.

Another sign you might spot is poop. Wildlife poop, called scat, can give you clues about what kind of animal it came from, and even what that animal was eating.



Identifying tracks and scat takes practise – and patience. Bringing along a field guide or using your phone can help. Photos are also a great way to record what you saw to look up later. You can even post your photos on Instagram, and tag your local park to get a parks official to help you with identification. Happy tracking!

Look at the size, shape and colour of the scat (no touching!). Check for bits of undigested items. Can you see things like fur, bones, feathers, fish scales, seeds, leaves or wood fibres?

There were signs of wildlife everywhere, Mom!

Can you help us figure out this print?

Where you find the scat can also tell you something about the animal.

Let's ask someone who works at the park. I bet they'd know.

GREAT BLUE HERON: OKKE J. KOEDOODER



MOOSE: ELLE AMBROSI

# Winter wildlife trek tips

**E**xploring in the cold can be challenging. But the snow makes everything look so magical! Here are some tips to keep your winter wildlife trek safe, warm and fun.

**Buddy up.** There's safety in numbers, so always bring a friend along. Make sure your parents know exactly where you're going and when you plan to be home. Better yet, go as a group!

**Be prepared.** Pack enough supplies for your trip, including snacks, a fully charged cell phone and a thermos of something hot to drink. Yum!

**Bundle up.** Check the weather forecast before you leave. Wear layers and keep your feet warm and dry. Don't forget sunglasses and sunscreen for sun glare off the snow, too.



BEAVER: DONNA PEET

**Watch the clock.** Remember, winter days are short! Start early in the morning. Stick to easy trails you know well. Travelling in the snow can take longer than you think.

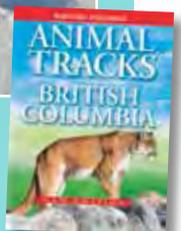


BOBCAT: JAMES GAGNON

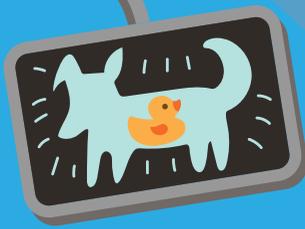
## CONTEST ALERT: A PUZZLING PRINT!

Take a look at Kat's photo. This print sure had her and Fin stumped! Do you know what kind of animal it belongs to?

Send us your best guess, and we'll enter you in a draw to win a copy of *Animal Tracks of British Columbia* to help you track down wildlife any time of year. Email your entry to [kids@spca.bc.ca](mailto:kids@spca.bc.ca) using the subject line "Snow Sleuths."



This contest is open until **March 15, 2020** to all *Bark!* readers ages 13 and under. Remember to include your name, age and address in your email, too.



# Your pet ate **WHAT?!?!**



Ask any veterinarian, and they're sure to have a **story** or **two** of a cat or dog who ate something **really unusual**. Check out the x-rays below of some of the **weirdest objects** they've found inside people's pets.



This Chihuahua managed to gulp down a whole spray bottle.



This young cat gobbled up 30 hair ties.



Bella is feeling much better after surgery to remove seven rubber duckies from her stomach and intestines.

## SAFETY FIRST

Vets know firsthand just how dangerous it can be for pets to eat items they shouldn't. Here are some ways you can help protect your own pets:

1. Choose safe pet toys. Old, worn-out toys and toys with small parts that can be swallowed are especially dangerous.
2. Keep garbage bins out of reach. Lots of pets like to rummage in the trash for a snack when you're not looking.
3. Tidy your room. Picking up after yourself and putting your toys away mean your pets won't be tempted to chew on your stuff.
4. Keep a close eye on your pets when they're playing with toys or out on a walk. That way, you can stop them before they eat something inappropriate.
5. Take your pets to the vet when they're not feeling well. The sooner you can get to a vet, the sooner they can get the treatment they need.



## X-RAY MYSTERY

Can you tell us what this pet swallowed? Send us your best guess! You'll be entered in a draw to win a set of three *Be the Vet* books, perfect for practising for vet school. Email your entry to [kids@spca.bc.ca](mailto:kids@spca.bc.ca) using the subject line "X-ray Mystery."

This contest is open until **March 15, 2020** to all *Bark!* readers ages 13 and under. Remember to include your name, age and address in your email, too.



# BC SPCA TREAT WEEK

Are you looking for a SWEET way to help animals?  
Join the BC SPCA's Treat Week™!

**Who:** Animal lovers – like YOU!

**What:** Anything tasty that you can give in exchange for donations. Bake cupcakes or cookies, make mini pizzas, pop popcorn . . . the list goes on!

**Where:** At home, school, or anywhere you and your friends or family gather.

**When:** February 24-March 1, 2020. Pick a day or dole out treats the whole week.

**Why:** To help animals in need! Donations go towards caring for our four-legged friends across B.C.

**How:** Go to [TreatWeek.ca](http://TreatWeek.ca) for all the delicious details.

Thanks to our sweet sponsors:



Love animals? Join the BC SPCA Kids Club today! Fill out this form and mail it to:

BC SPCA Kids Club 1245 East 7th Avenue Vancouver, BC V5T 1R1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

- Yes, you can email me e-Kids Mews!letter and other BC SPCA Kids Club updates
- Savings!** Two-year membership (\$25)  One-year membership (\$15)  Cheque payable to BC SPCA

Or by credit card  Amex  Visa  Mastercard Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

High Paws to  
you for printing  
neatly!



Sign up online at  
[spca.bc.ca/kidsclub](http://spca.bc.ca/kidsclub).

## BCSPCA



### Who ate treats to help animals while writing this issue:

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