

Exploring without sight

Blind cats are just as able to catch mice, mark their territory and need no more help than any other felines.



Suri, a blind cat. There are ways to make your home and everyday life suitable for an animal with a disability. — dpa

By MARIA BERENTZEN

BRINGING a cat into your home changes your everyday life, even more so if the animal has a disability such as being blind.

If you're considering adopting a blind animal, you're not only giving a home to one that's often overlooked, but also taking on a special responsibility.

But with a little patience, a few adjustments, and lots of love, blind cats can lead just as fulfilling a life as their sighted counterparts.

"Anyone who wants to adopt a cat with a disability should be aware of the responsibility involved and find out as much as they can about the animal and its needs," says Hester Pommerening from the German Animal Welfare Association. At the same time, however, they are just normal cats – like all others, they long for attention, love and acceptance.

Blind cats can hunt mice

It is crucial to know the demands and needs of a cat, regardless of whether it has a disability or not. Pommerening advises against overprotecting blind cats. "They don't need pity and should be given the chance

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Their hearing, sense of smell, and highly sensitive whiskers help blind cats cope without their eyesight. They are even capable of hunting mice, as they can perceive movement through air currents with their tactile hairs.

There are many causes of blindness: it can be congenital or result from an accident, poisoning, or diseases such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Vision can also slowly deteriorate with age. "Whether more frequent visits to the vet are necessary and

whether these involve high costs depends on the cause of the blindness," says Pommerening.

Animals from shelters are thoroughly examined before being rehomed. As a rule, interested people are informed about what treatments the animal will need in the future and what expenses might be involved.

Reducing sources of danger

Pet expert Sabrina Karl from the animal welfare organisation Vier Pfoten – meaning four paws – knows how to make everyday life with a blind cat as easy as possible.

"First of all, it is essential to scan the home for potential dangers from the cat's perspective," she says.

Close windows, or secure them with a net. Do the same for balconies. "There are special safety devices for tilt windows," she says.

Like with small children, pad sharp furniture edges, at least until the cat has learned to avoid them. Block off steep stairs and all areas that pose a risk of injury

to the cat using a baby gate, Karl says.

Cables, fairy lights, and cords should not become tripping hazards or tempt the cat to play with or chew on them. Details are also important when it comes to the litter box. Get one with a rim that is as low as possible, and a litter box without a flap door is best, says Karl. You can secure movable shelves and drawers with baby safety locks.

Blind cats orient themselves in the home using their hearing, sense of smell, and sense of touch. Small orientation aids make their everyday life easier.

Different floor structures or smells near food bowls and litter boxes and a splashing drinking fountain can help. Cat-friendly ramps make elevated resting places accessible.

The home should remain as unchanged as possible, as any major rearrangement causes new stress.

"Before petting the animal, you have to talk to it so that it is prepared for your touch and does not get scared, scratch or bite," says Karl. It is also helpful to talk to the cat a lot, so it always knows where you are. It is also important to keep an eye on the cat to avoid accidentally stepping on it.

Outdoor access

Blind cats do not have to completely forego outdoor access. A securely fenced garden or a cat-proof balcony offer them fresh air and variety. "Outdoor access on a leash and a cat harness is an option, but must be carefully and positively trained beforehand," says Karl. In the garden, protect your cat from thorns, sharp edges, and aggressive neighbouring cats.

Make sure that the cat does not get bored. Karl advises specifically addressing the other senses, which could mean toys with bells or crackling material can be useful to encourage the cat to play and get enough exercise. Valerian or catnip pillows appeal to the cat's sense of smell, while scent trails in the home encourage them to explore.

For their sense of touch, you can set up "discovery corners" with cat-friendly materials or hiding boxes. For the sense of taste, there are lick mats or special pastes that the cat can lick. And mental stimulation is also important. "Don't forget effective clicker training to teach small, cat-friendly tricks," says Karl. — dpa

