Lecturer: Not cute at all

Many pet owners fail to realise that overfeeding is a welfare problem

By ZORA CHAN
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KUCHING: Many pet owners do not consider overfeeding animals a welfare issue because fat animals are often seen as cute and much loved.
They fail to realise that more animals suffer from complications due to obesity rather than die from being too lean, said Dr Sumita Sugnaseelan (pic), a senior lecturer in Faculty of Agriculture (animal welfare and ethology), Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Speaking at a seminar on Animal Safety by the state Veterinary Department, she noted that pet owners apparently lacked knowledge as to the needs of animals or even how animals should look when fit could be the underlying factors of obesity problem among their pets.

About 50 people, comprising officials of the state Veterinary Department and private clinics attended the seminar, aimed at creating awareness on animal welfare, the ethics of keeping companion animals and legislation protecting animals.

According to Dr Sumita: “Most vets have had obese animals presented to them but the animals were brought in not because their clients were concerned about their pets’ weight.
“In fact, they do not recognise the obese condition as being detrimental and will frequently be very reluctant to decrease the animal’s feed intake,” she lamented.

Dr Sumita further lamented that actually some animals were obese because they mirrored their owners’ eating habits and lifestyle, saying on the whole, it reflected that the general public still lacked awareness of their pets’ diet and health.

On genetic manipulation of dogs and cats for the entertainment and enjoyment of humans, she said it was cosmetic in nature but selective breeding for fashionable traits presented serious welfare implications to the animals.

She noted that in the process, the dogs were bred with extreme deformities in order to conform to a breed standard set by purebred dog enthusiasts.

Nevertheless, she said: “I can’t say it (genetic manipulation) should be discouraged or encouraged ... It’s a matter of choice by the people between upholding animal welfare or winning prizes at dog shows.”

According to her, a total of 148 breeds of purebred dogs, recognised by the Kennel Club, collectively exhibited more than 300 genetic deformities.

Many of these breeds, she disclosed were affected by multiple inheritable problems which caused great distress, pain or even shortened the animals’ lifespan.

“Some of these genetic disorder include dental problems, injury prone ears, breathing disorders, eye problems, shortened tear ducts, cataracts, spinal problems, inwardly turned eyelids, hip dysplasia, bone and joint failures, heart problems, skin disease from skin folds, thyroid dysfunction and skull and brain deformities,” she said.

She said many breeds also suffered from behavioural problems that could be a direct consequences of breeding for function.

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Fluffy and cuddly: A pet owner waiting to present his Birman cat during a competition in this file pic. Some owners apparently lack the knowledge about the needs of their pets or even how their pets should look like when fit.