

World Cat Congress

by Lorraine Shelton

Representatives from cat associations all around the world convened in Las Vegas in April to discuss common issues of interest to the cat fancy. This conference is the continuation of a tradition that started in 1994 when CFA President Don Williams, GCCF Chairman Brenda Wolstenholme, FIFe President Alvia Uddin, and WCF President Anneliese Hackmann attended a conference in Venice called "Cats and Man" and an associated cat show held by the Italian FIFe member, ANFI. In order to learn more about each other's organizations and to foster communication and co-operation among the associations, the member organizations of the World Cat Congress take turns hosting this annual event each spring. The event typically includes an educational seminar, an open meeting where the public has the opportunity to meet and ask questions of the delegates, a cat show where delegates are invited to judge, and a business meeting. There are nine members of the World Cat Congress: CFA (US) represented by Secretary Rachel Anger, TICA (US) represented by President Fate Mays, FIFe (Europe) represented by President Annette Sjodin, WCF (Europe) represented by President Anneliese Hackmann, GCCF (UK) represented by delegate Betty Shingleton, ACF (Australia) represented by Vice-President Sandi Gemmel, CCCA (Australia) represented by International Liaison Officer Cheryle U'Ren, SACC (South Africa) represented by Treasurer Jan van Rooyen, and NZCF (New Zealand) represented by Secretary Chris Lowe. The President of the WCC is Eric Reijers from the Czech Republic, the Vice-President is Cheryle U'Ren from Australia, and the Secretary/Treasurer is Penny Bydlinski from Australia.

The delegates were greeted at the airport by Darrell Newkirk and Ellyn Honey, CFA judges and residents of Las Vegas, who made sure the international visitors had a memorable time. Their agenda included a Cirque de Soleil show, dining at popular Vegas restaurants, a tour of the Hoover Dam and the Mob Museum, and lots of shopping. Alene Tartaglia made sure every detail went smoothly and hosted a hospitality suite throughout the entire event, where delegates could mingle informally and grab a bite to eat with appropriate libations. President Mark Hannon received compliments from the delegation on CFA's exceptional generosity, with concern being expressed by the FIFe representatives that it was going to be a hard act to follow, as they will be hosting the event in Europe next year.

The Friday seminar began with an introduction of the delegates, in order of their organization's acceptance into the WCC. The delegates then provided brief updates on activities within their associations, including their National or Supreme shows (similar to our International) and Cat of the Year awards. Dr. Rick Kesler of Royal Canin gave a presentation on the importance of nutrition in the pregnant queen and kittens, with an emphasis on the challenges of the weaning process and the importance of protein in the establishment of the immune system in kittens. Dr. Vicki Thayer, Executive Director of the Winn Foundation, spoke about the Foundation's upcoming 50th Anniversary celebration, which will start at the Annual this year. She invited everyone to the Winn Seminar in

CFA Hosts Successful Meeting and Show in Las Vegas

Chicago, which will feature Dr. Neils Pedersen from UC Davis presenting recent advances in the diagnosis and treatment of FIP. Dr. Thayer gave an overview of the six million dollars of research into feline health that Winn has sponsored over the past five decades.

Dr. Heather Lorimer, genetics professor at Youngstown State University, spoke next on the subject of feline genetics. Her presentation had something of interest to everyone in the audience, from those with only a basic knowledge of the subject to advanced topics concerning feline health, population genetics and inbreeding, and immunology. A highlight of her program was the discussion of a quote from Malcolm B. Willis: "All breeders will produce defects if they breed long enough. Those who tell you that they do not produce defects have either stopped breeding, breed hardly at all, or are being economical with the truth. There is no crime in producing a defect. The crime, if any, lies in what you do about a defect. If you bury yours quickly and keep quiet about it, and I do the same with mine, then sooner or later we may ... pay the penalty for not having been honest with one another and with the breed we profess to love."



(above) Delegates to the WCC
(below) Royal Canin's presentation at the WCC



Several familiar faces in attendance at the WCC, including (right) Jennifer Redding and Lorraine Shelton (center) Karen Lawrence and Vicki Nye (right) Darrell Newkirk, Ellyn Honey, and Joan Miller.

Pat Jacobberger treated attendees to a taste of the popular CFA Breed Awareness and Orientation School with her presentation on “The Psychology of Judging.” She discussed how short-term memory works and how distractions, physical condition, and emotional states can affect it. Her observation about how decision making changes over the course of a judge’s career was particularly insightful, with judges maturing from an analytic style to a more holistic style as they gain experience.

What would a World Cat Congress be without cats? Michael Bull, Breed Council Secretary and Grace Ruga, Founder of the American Curl, brought some lovely examples for a presentation on the breed. The history was highlighted with a picture of a pregnant Grace being comforted by Shulamith, the first known American Curl, who is considered the foundation cat of the breed. Grace described how CFA Judge Jean Grimm came to her house and handled every cat and kitten and then assisted her in writing the first standard. Her description of going through all the various breed descriptions looking for “core identity words” sounds like an excellent roadmap for those developing new breeds.

Karen Lawrence followed with a presentation on the CFA Foundation Feline Historical Museum. The before and after scenes of this showcase at our Central Office in Ohio gave insight into the magnitude of the endeavor. Pictures of local children interacting with the feline “docents” were delightful and numerous treasures of the museum were shown, including some artifacts from the early years of the British cat fancy that appeared to elicit an expression of envy from the GCCF delegate. The research that was done to establish

the provenance of the famous Cosey silver collar from 1895 was a fascinating story.

Laureline Malineau gave a presentation on the continuing relationship between Royal Canin and the World Cat Congress. Royal Canin’s sponsorship of cat shows and educational events around the world has made them a valuable asset to our hobby. A new edition of their lovely Encyclopedia is upcoming, with updated content with input from all the WCC members. Royal Canin’s sponsorship of the WCC event included providing lunch for all the delegates, speakers, and attendees, as well as sending them off with generous gift bags.

The events closed with the WCC Open Meeting, an interactive session between speakers, delegates and attendees. One of the subjects that generated discussion was the relationship between the cat fancy and local government authorities. It was mentioned that in some parts of Europe, the breeder of a cat could be held legally liable for the lifetime medical costs of a cat born with a heritable disease. How registries can help breeders with tracking genetic testing was mentioned. In Australia, the cat fancy is working on having a place at the table on discussions regarding the control of feral cats, as measures have been proposed that are inhumane or would end our hobby altogether in that part of the world. A discussion on the difference in Oriental Shorthair type between the US and some parts of Europe met with an enthusiastic response.

On Saturday and Sunday a cat show was held at the Rio hotel, with Rhonda Avery doing an excellent job as entry clerk, master clerk, and show manager. The international guest judges were well received. Exhibitors noted that the guest judges verbally

shared their opinions about the cats while judging them more freely than our CFA judges usually do, instead of reserving their comments to finals presentations only. Although most of our breeds were familiar to these highly experienced judges, a couple of them had not seen, for example, a Havana Brown before and expressed how they had studied the CFA standards for breeds that are uncommon to their country and for differences between their association’s standards and those of CFA.

The World Cat Congress concluded with the business meeting of the delegates on Monday. A compilation of the various motions that had been passed in the previous two decades of the meetings was reviewed and it was a valuable reflection on the issues in the international cat fancy in recent years, including the “open doors” policy to allow exhibitors to show in other WCC member shows, reviewing a position paper on artificial insemination, and communicating when a breeder has been expelled for animal welfare violations to other WCC members. Among the many discussions was a comparison of approaches to dealing with contractual disputes between breeders. The status of Bengals as domestic vs. “hybrid” cats was mentioned, with CFA describing its newly established policy on the breed. Issues of incorrectly transferring pedigrees between registries were mentioned, with the delegates committing to looking into issues when they are brought to their attention.

After a long, fruitful, and enjoyable stay, the delegates then dispersed to the four corners of the world, back to their own cats at home, with a little more insight into American culture, CFA cats, and video slot machines. See you again in nine years!