

International Postal Communication and Short-Haired Selkirk Rexes (*Felis silvestris domesticus*): A Piece of the Modern Puzzle

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Abstract

This is a scientific study of postal shipping variance. Six one-week old Selkirk Rex kittens (*Felis silvestris domesticus*) were packaged in various containers and sent through international postal channels. Prices, delivery time and general temperament were observed, recorded and analysed.

Introduction

An ever-increasing intersection found within the modern world is that of domestic pets and expedited international communication. Since the dawn of the post-space-age era, in 1996, scientists have begun to study advancements in communication, and the effect increasing communication rapidity has had on domestic cats. In 1997, Tomlin's breakthrough study, entitled *CommuniCats: Felines and the Digital Age*, gave scientists their first view into cat preferences vis-à-vis fax machine brand names. Schillington's (1999) study examined the common response times of cats with email accounts, and Breckenridge and Miller (2003) made the surprising discovery that cats do not have adequate patience needed to competently edit digital video. Along a similar vein, this study examines the intersection of cats and a contemporarily and oft-neglected form

of communication—the international postal system.

Method

This study could only have been completed with the support of Muffy, my four-year-old female tan Selkirk Rex (*Felis silvestris domesticus*), and some other cat—the particulars of which I am fully unaware (apart from its sex). One week prior to the beginning of this study, Muffy—a cat of the highest order, recipient of the 2002-2003 CFA Grand Champion/Premier GC marking for Short-haired Selkirk Rexes, and direct descendant of the DePesto of Noface lineage—bore a surprise litter of six. The kittens, borne of unfortunate circumstance, were of insufficient pedigree and therefore ideal candidates for scientific devotion. Within the first week of their birth, materials required for this study were collected and all preparations for its completion were made.

Table 1. International Postal Communication and Short-Haired Selkirk Rexes Recipient Questionnaire Instrument

You are kindly requested to complete the following questions related to the gift you received today. Once completed, please insert this questionnaire into the postage-paid addressed envelope provided, moisten the seal and place in your nearest official postal receptacle.

1) Please self-declare your scientific background by circling the most appropriate response:

a) Scientist b) Science-Minded Professional

2) Please record the date and time the package containing your gift arrived at your door, and the weight of the gift inside:

a) Date: _____ b) Time: _____ c) Weight: _____g

3) Please record (on the five-point scale provided) the general temperament of the *Felis silvestris domesticus* upon arrival at your door:

poor 1 2 3 4 5 pleasant

Your participation in this groundbreaking study is very much appreciated.

In phase one, the *preparation phase*, the kittens were weaned off of their mother's milk and placed on a strict diet consisting of evaporated bovine milk and vitamin C supplements. This diet was necessary for compliance with *Post Danmark* dry-goods delivery guidelines, and would be requisite for participation in phase two. During this first phase, six final destinations/recipients were chosen from a random sampling of international telephone directories. Similarly, recipient questionnaires were compiled and photocopied, and self-addressed stamped envelopes were prepared to assist in questionnaire submissions.

The questionnaire instrument is shown in table 1.

During phase two of the study, the *delivery phase*, subjects were divided into two formal groupings, A and B (see table 2). Each group contained three feline subjects. Group A was designated the airmail group; group B the surface/slow-boat group. Within groups, subjects were divided into subclasses, 1, 2 and 3. Class 1 subjects were packaged in standard International Postal Employees and Letter Carriers Union (IPELCU) regulation sized A4, yellow, "manila" envelopes. Class 2 subjects were

Table 2. Division of Labour and Transportation Arrangements among Kittens

| <i>Subject</i> | <i>Group</i> | <i>Method</i> | <i>Class</i> | <i>Container</i> | <i>Destination</i> |
|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Mittens</i> | A | Airmail | 1 | Envelope | Gibraltar, Spain |
| <i>Murphy</i> | B | Surface/ Slow-Boat | 1 | Envelope | Newark, United States |
| <i>Minny</i> | A | Airmail | 2 | Postal Tube | Phuntsholing, Bhutan |
| <i>Mopsy</i> | B | Surface/ Slow-Boat | 2 | Postal Tube | Äkurdet, Eritrea |
| <i>Melanie</i> | A | Airmail | 3 | Shoebox | Tiraspol, Moldova |
| <i>Socksy</i> | B | Surface/ Slow-Boat | 3 | Shoebox | Valencia, Venezuela |

packaged in IPELCU Post690 (340 mm x 75 mm) spiral wound cardboard (2 mm) postal tubes. Class 3 subjects were comfortably packaged in one size-45 men's athletic shoebox, wrapped in imitation kraft brown wrapping paper and bound with 3-ply polypropylene bailer twine. Ten air holes were poked into each package using a "6 and 6/16 inch" Baltimore boring awl. Each of the six packages contained one kitten, 750 g evaporated bovine milk and vitamin C supplement "trail-mix", one recipient questionnaire and one postage-paid return envelope.

Final destinations were inscribed on the outer packaging in indelible black-ink marker; no return address was supplied. A certified male Post Danmark customer-support technician weighed all packages and appropriate postage and a "Fragile" label was then moistened and applied. For each package, one Danish Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade export declaration sticker was

completed as follows: „Indeholder *Felis silvestris domesticus* (200 g), trykt sider og < 750 g gold gods. PRESENT. IKKE TIL KØBS" ["Contains *Felis silvestris domesticus* (200 g), print material and < 750 g dry goods. GIFT. NOT FOR RESALE."]. Postage was franked and all packages mailed in accordance with their grouping (A and B). Date and time was recorded.

Phase three, the *data-collection phase*, began five weeks following the completion of phase two. Of six questionnaires accompanying the six subjects, five were completed and returned. One pre-paid returned envelope contained a colour Polaroid photograph of subject A2. Data compiled is presented in table 3.

Results

Analysis was conducted on data drawn from all completed and returned questionnaires (n=5). At time of publication, the questionnaire accompanying subject B1 is yet to be

received by the researcher and should therefore be understood as a limitation on power within the study.

This study employed as its null hypothesis the statement that no difference would be found between the various groupings but significant differences between classes. This hypothesis is, however, obviously incorrect and therefore can be easily rejected in favour of the alternate hypothesis. More precisely, this study appears to show a difference among the various groupings but less difference among classes.

Discussion

What can be claimed as perhaps the most interesting result of this study is the vast difference found between mean hours in transit and mean temperament at destination. The mean number of hours in transit for Group B (surface/slow-boat) was 3.53 times as great as the mean number of hours in transit found for Group A (airmail); although, a perfect inverse relationship for the general temperament upon arrival at destination was not observed. Clearly, this implies that an economy of scale exists in this regard. That is to

say, because of this finding, we can be quite confident that geometrically longer transit times will not produce equally geometrically ill-tempered young Selkirk Rexes upon arrival. It is therefore more advantageous to send such kittens through common postal channels at slower and less expensive rates than at more quick and expensive ones—contrary to the advice of the Post Danmark customer-support technician assisting during phase two.

A surprise finding came by way of a small note included within the returned questionnaire package from the new owner of subject B3. The respondent, a self-declared scientist, described the content of the shoebox he received as “quite a mess” and returned, attached to his completed questionnaire, a to-scale CAD printout and slip detailing patent information for a specialized “cat”heter of his own design.

Future research in this area is clearly needed, and this groundbreaking study has generated several questions requiring further exploration. Of primary concern was the MIA status of subject B1. What happened to this subject, and what

Table 3. Results of Respondent Questionnaires

| Class | Hours in Transit | | Weight at Destination (g) | | Temperament at Destination * | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|------------|
| | A | B | A | B | A | B |
| <i>“Manila” Envelope (1)</i> | 306.0 | N/R | 210.0 | N/R | 1.0 | N/R |
| <i>Postal Tube (2)</i> | 329.0 | 1164.0 | 213.0 | 476.0 | 2.0 | 1.0 |
| <i>Shoebox (3)</i> | 377.0 | 1216.0 | 208.0 | 551.0 | 2.0 | 1.0 |
| Mean (of values available) | 337.3 | 1190.0 | 210.0 | 513.5 | 1.6 | 1.0 |

* Based on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = poor and 5 = pleasant.

stories could it tell of its misadventures, lost in the postal system? What about the experiences of different breeds of cat?

Some issues were raised among colleagues as I began to informally report results as they began to trickle in. One of these questioned the relationship between subject temperaments and inclusion of internal cushioning, such as foam or bubble wrap. This was followed in short order by a discussion of possible future research into the similar relationship with internal versus external packaging modifications—and thus, the endo-versus exo-skeletal debate rages on.

References

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