

Questioning Ethics of Declaw, Not to Mention Deleterious Impact on Behavior

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by: **Steve Dale, Certified Animal Behaviorist**



Steve Dale is a certified animal behavior specialist who has been a trusted voice in the world of pet health for over 20 years. You have likely heard him on the radio, read him in print and online, and seen him speaking at events all over the world. His contributions to advancing pet wellness have earned him many an award and recognition around the globe.

Why Veterinarians Declaw

According a survey of members of the American Association of Feline Practitioners, veterinary professionals don't even want to deal with declaw and won't mind public officials making the call. It's a surprising choice, but their wishes are coming true.

Downing's testimony in Denver in support of a declaw ban is arguably what moved the needle. Her words were both scientific and emotionally powerful.

"What gives veterinarians the right to amputate because of cat owner convenience?" Downing is also a national leader regarding veterinary ethics. And she doesn't beat around the bush, "Let's be honest, this is also an ethical issue," she says. Following Denver's declaw ban and similar laws in other cities, in 2019 New York became the first state to ban declaw.

Political observers expect more states to follow in 2020 and beyond. Oddly or not, in New York, the state veterinary medical association fought the ban and lost, and same thing happened in Denver as the Denver state association fought the ban and lost. In both instances, veterinary medicine appeared to the public to be "money grabbers." What other

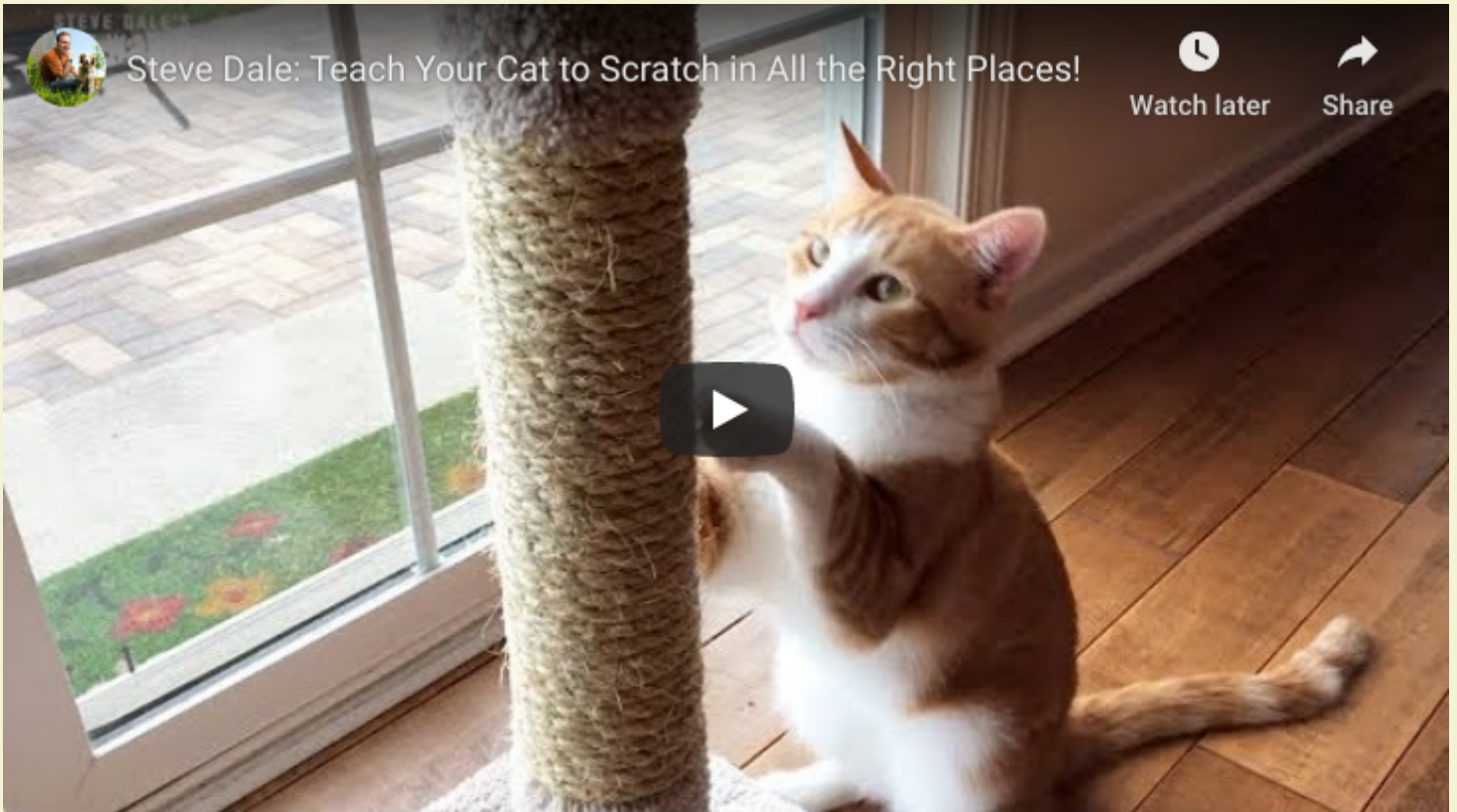
explanation may there be for declaw? How is this consistent with the veterinary oath to do no harm?

What We Know Today, And New Tools

Indeed, some studies do show that declawed cats are going to not cause behavior problems in homes. While, it's true, declawed cats don't scratch, they may be more likely to bite. That's actually a concern of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Declawed cats may also be far more likely to suffer medical affects; some may impact behavior such as urinating and/or defecating outside the litter box mostly because it hurts to get to the box and/or to use the box. And when cats begin not using the box, they are often given up – or at the very least there are cracks in the human animal bond. Also, there are new tools regarding behavior modification, to encourage appropriate scratching on posts. For example, there's now a pheromone product called Feliscratch by Feliway – which directs cats to posts. The product is inexpensive, non-invasive and natural. And it works! And works even better with the most simple behavior modification. Check out my video below!

You can contact Steve for help with your cat by calling our toll-free number: 866-554-PETS (7387).

You can also email your questions to Steve. When emailing please include your name and a number where he can reach you.



Feliscratch is my go-to scratching aid! I first learned about this from Steve Dale a few years ago when we got our first Savannah. At first, I wasn't sure I wanted to put purple liquid on our scratching posts, but it really does work! The color doesn't stay as it does fade away. Feliscratch helps redirect scratching onto the scratching post and is clinically proven to help reduce or stop unwanted scratching in the home.

When applied on the scratching surface, FELISCRATCH sends a message to the cat, visually (blue lines) and invisibly ("territory messages") to direct the cat to scratch there.

For some reason, Amazon and PetSmart both have inflated pricing and it's often hard to find. You can get it now at Chewy.com for \$5.99!

Declawing linked to aggression and other abnormal behaviors in cats

by SAGE ~ May 23, 2017 (used with permission)



The surgery, which involves removing the distal bone of the toes, is banned in many countries.

Declaw surgery (onychectomy) is illegal in many countries but is still a surprisingly common practice in some. It is performed electively to stop cats from damaging furniture, or as a means of avoiding scratches. Previous research has focused on short-term issues following surgery, such as lameness, chewing of toes and infection, but the long-term health effects of this procedure have not to date been investigated.

According to research published today in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, declawing increases the risk of long-term or persistent pain, manifesting as unwanted behaviors such as inappropriate elimination (soiling/urinating outside of the litter box) and aggression/biting. This is not only detrimental to the cat (pain is a major welfare issue and these behaviors are common reasons for relinquishment of cats to shelters), but also has health implications for their human companions, as cat bites can be serious.

For the study, the author group, based in North America, investigated a total of 137 non-declawed cats and 137 declawed cats, of which 33 were declawed on all four feet. All 274 cats were physically examined for signs of pain and barbering (excessive licking or chewing of fur) and their medical history was reviewed for unwanted behaviors. They found that inappropriate toileting, biting, aggression and overgrooming occurred significantly more often in the declawed cats than the non-declawed cats (roughly 7, 4, 3 and 3 times more often, respectively, based on the calculated odds ratio). A declawed cat was also almost 3 times more likely to be diagnosed with back pain than a non-declawed cat (potentially due to shortening of the declawed limb and altered gait, and/or chronic pain at the site of the surgery causing compensatory weight shift to the pelvic limbs).

The surgical guideline for performing declawing, as recommended by Diplomates of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons, is to remove the entire third phalanx (P3), which is the most distal bone of the toe. Despite this, P3 fragments were found in 63% of the declawed cats in this study, reflecting poor or inappropriate surgical technique. While the occurrence of back pain and abnormal behaviors was increased in these cats, the authors emphasize that even optimal surgical technique does not eliminate the risks. They explain that removal of the distal phalanges forces the cat to bear weight on the soft cartilaginous ends of the middle phalanges (P2) that were previously shielded within joint spaces. Pain in these declawed phalanges prompts cats to choose a soft surface, such as carpet, in preference to the gravel-type substrate in the litter box; additionally, a painful declawed cat may react to being touched by resorting to biting as it has few or no claws left to defend itself with.

Lead author of the paper Nicole Martell-Moran, a veterinary practitioner in a cat-only clinic in Houston, Texas, USA, comments: 'The result of this research reinforces my opinion that declawed cats with unwanted behaviors may not be "bad cats", they may simply need pain management. We now have scientific evidence that declawing is more detrimental to our feline patients than we originally thought and I hope this study becomes one of many that will lead veterinarians to reconsider declawing cats.'