



Newsletter

Spring 2021

Issue 19



**Barnstaple & District
Cats Protection**



A guide to our new hands-free homing process

We're keen to help as many cats as possible, both during the current crisis and beyond. Offering our cats a home will help to free up more space to take in emergency cases.

We have put in extensive procedures to make sure that our homing process is in line with the current government guidance, without putting adoptees or volunteers at risk.

Here is our guide to adopting a cat using hands-free homing.

- **Check you are within a reasonable distance of your chosen branch.** You can find your nearest branch by typing in your postcode at www.cats.org.uk/find-us
- **Enquire.** If you've found a cat on our website that you're interested in homing, send an enquiry through using our form.
- **Reserve your cat.** If you're found to be a match for your chosen cat, you'll be contacted by one of our volunteers. You may be asked for proof of consent from your landlord, to have a cat (if you live in a rented property).
- **Adopt.** Once you have reserved your cat, you'll be sent paperwork to sign and you will make a further telephone appointment with our team. In this call, you'll have a chance to discuss everything you need to know about your cat. You'll then pay an adoption fee, usually by bank transfer.

Bringing your cat home. Once this is finalised, we'll arrange for a driver to bring your cat safely to your home

Tilly the blind kitten.

Early in the morning on 28 October 2020, Carol was alerted to plaintive cries coming from outside her back door. When Carol opened it, she discovered a tiny tortoiseshell kitten. Probably rejected by its mother and deposited away from a litter on the farm, the kitten must have found its way down the steps on its own, no mean feat for one so small. Carol contacted CP Coordinator, Nikki, who collected the tiny bundle.

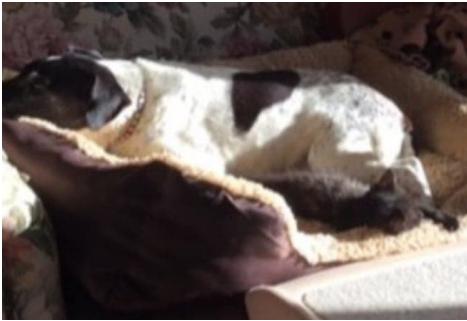


Nikki was worried that the kitten was dehydrated and the eyes did not look right, so she took it straight to Market Vets in Barnstaple. The vet thought that the three and a half week old kitten only had one eyeball but could not see out of it, otherwise the kitten appeared to be in good health. Nikki took the kitten round to fosterer Sue to look after. Sue named the kitten Tilly, and fed her milk

formula using a syringe. Very soon, Tilly was able to lap milk from a saucer. She wasn't quite so keen to use the litter tray at first, seeming to think that the small granules were things to eat. Fortunately, two other kittens in Sue's care had just left for their new home, so a small scattering of their litter alerted Tilly to the real purpose of the tray.

Tilly was soon anxious to venture outside her cage. At first she crawled to a corner of the room and started to climb the wall, obviously, Tilly was used to being much higher! She needed a lot of reassurance and gentle guiding as she explored her new surroundings. Tilly soon learned to climb up the armchair and on to Sue's lap, and did this at every opportunity. Her favourite position was splayed out under Sue's chin or curled up on her shoulder. Tilly would frequently want to be lifted down though, heading towards the cage, feeling along the side to the entrance, and going straight for her food bowl. It seemed she needed constant reassurance that there would always be food available.

Tilly had no other kitten to play with, so Sue made sure that there were plenty of wand toys positioned for Tilly to reach



up and swipe the dangling feathers and mice. It seemed that Tilly might have some awareness of movement and shadow, as she was able to follow or sense the direction of the wand toys and also mice when they were

tossed. She also liked to

pat a ball dangling from a scratchpad tower and loved playing with a three-level tower tracks roller toy. She also loved flicking round the tiny mouse toys and would give the larger ones a good pummel with her back legs. Sight proved unlikely though; Tilly was unable to follow a red dot from a laser pointer. Additionally, she sometimes bumped into things when she scampered about.

During the day, Sue often looked after a Jack Russell Terrier named Squidge, and Tilly soon became curious and wanted to know more about the dog. She clearly wanted to interact. Squidge, ever patient and tolerant with all kittens, would be careful not to trample on Tilly as the kitten wove between her legs. Squidge had a furry bed on the sofa with steps to help her climb up, and Tilly managed to find her way up and join her there for a snooze.

Tilly proved very adventurous and soon learned to climb furniture. Clearly it was not so easy getting down and Sue had to keep a constant eye on her to make sure she didn't get stuck. In addition, Tilly would take every opportunity to dash out of the door when it was opened, and learned that there was room to bomb down the passageway. Whenever she needed retrieving, it was important to set her down in exactly the same spot, near a long flat scratchpad with slots containing balls she could hear being flicked. Tilly made up for her lack of sight by honing her other senses, especially hearing and smell.

She could tell, in a flash, if Sue was about to tuck into some food, and would immediately scramble up hoping to join in the feast.

Tilly seemed to like being scooped up and cupped in the hand, and felt comfortable and quite secure being held up high. She also liked to climb the cat tree and would cry out if unsure how to get down. When Tilly was taken for her health check and first inoculations, the vet confirmed that she had no eyeballs so was entirely reliant upon her heightened other senses. Although completely blind, no other health concerns were identified. Fortunately for Tilly, Squidge's owner Liz had fallen in love with her. Liz felt confident that she could provide Tilly with a safe environment; her back garden is secure and self-contained, and she offered to adopt Tilly. Her application was accepted and Liz booked 14 days leave to be at home and get Tilly settled in. As well as Squidge, the dog, there were two other cats in the household. At first they hissed and spat a bit at Tilly, but she acted submissively. Because Tilly did not pose a threat, she was soon accepted, and the other cats would play with Tilly when they thought Liz wasn't looking. The older cats seemed to sense there was something different about her.

Liz discovered that Tilly was terrified of falling down the stairs. She would shriek loudly when feeling vulnerable, and Liz had to rack her brains to come up with a solution. On inspiration, Liz retrieved a stack of small cardboard boxes and carefully positioned a box on each stair. She then spent numerous sessions patiently encouraging Tilly to take small steps down. Finally, on Christmas Day, Tilly managed to come down the staircase all on her own.

It didn't take Tilly long to map out the whole of the cottage. She easily learned to climb on to the bed, but was too frightened to climb down. Liz positioned a scratch-post to form a ladder at the foot of the bed, and Tilly only needed to be shown once. No longer restricted to the kitchen at night, she was able to join the other pets on Liz's bed. She now sleeps between Squidge and Liz's head, and gets under the covers like the other cats when she feels cold.



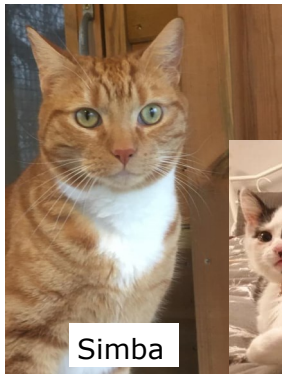
Tilly continues to be obsessed with food and will even try to take pieces away from Liz's fork as she is putting them into her mouth. Liz pretends to blame this on Sue, but they both know she has learned bad habits from Squidge and has simply jumped the queue because of her size.

In the New Year, Liz took Tilly to Market Vets for her second inoculations. During examination, the vet was concerned about Tilly's heart. She consulted with another

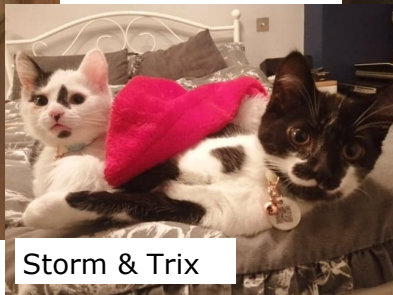
vet, and the consensus was that Tilly might have a hole in the heart or perhaps had developed some other heart complication. This was not apparent previously, so Liz was quite shocked. She was advised to arrange for Tilly to have a heart scan at Market Vets in South Molton. A few days later a scan revealed that Tilly's heart was very large and the ventricles were thickened. Liz was saddened to hear that Tilly's quality of life was likely to deteriorate fairly soon and that putting her to sleep would be the best option when this happened. In the meantime, vets are checking to see if there is anything else that can be done. Tilly may need to take Clopidogrel to help thin her blood.

At the moment Tilly still enjoys a good quality of life. Both Sue and Liz have discovered that caring for a blind cat is a wonderfully rewarding experience. Blind kittens, in particular, depend upon and put their complete trust in you. In their world, physical contact is very reassuring and this leads inevitably to a strong bond which is very special.

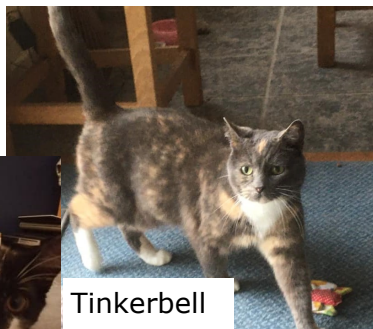
All these cats are now settling into their new homes.



Simba



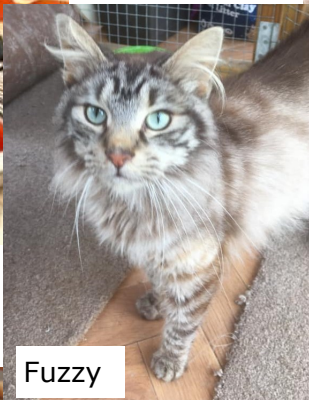
Storm & Trix



Tinkerbelle



Cleo



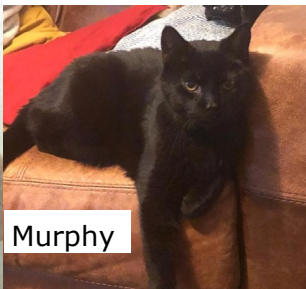
Fuzzy



Suki



Socks



Murphy



Zimba

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If you prefer to receive a paper copy of the newsletter, we would appreciate an annual donation towards the cost of postage, cheques payable to Cats Protection. Donations and help towards the cost of our work for cats are, of course, welcome at any time.'

I enclose a donation of £.....

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