



MULTIPLE STRESS LEVELS

With the season for fireworks fast approaching, Emily Fowler looks at ways to minimise distress in our feline friends, taking tips from sanctuaries and catteries for multi-cat households

With November comes Diwali and Bonfire night...and the fireworks don't always stop there, with celebrations, fireworks and the noise that comes with them continuing all the way into Christmas and New Year celebrations. Our cats have such sensitive hearing, able to hear up to about 64 kHz compared to our 20 kHz, that this can be a particularly stressful and frightening time of year for them. While some cats don't seem phased at all by the loud noises, many cats suffer from fear and anxiety caused by the sound and even sight of fireworks.

If you have outdoor cats, keeping them in during times when there are likely to be fireworks is the most sensible

option, because if they're outside when fireworks are set off, they're more likely to run off and get lost – and of course, you'll be worrying about them being outside. Because we unfortunately can't predict fireworks starting early, it's a good idea to try to keep them inside for a couple of weeks in the run up to any organised firework displays and official celebrations.

Ultimately though, this is all going to depend on individual cats and owners, as many cats that are used to having free access to the great outdoors will get stressed and anxious if they're confined indoors twenty-four hours a day. A good compromise is to start keeping them in at night, if you don't already, once firework

season starts in earnest, making sure enough litter trays are provided for them indoors (one per cat, plus one).

Minimising firework stress in multi-cat households

I've only ever had a maximum of two cats at a time, with varying levels of scaredy-cat-ness, but what if you have three, four or even more cats to deal with during firework season? I spoke to some animal sanctuaries and catteries to find out how they cope with all those cats at one time.

Nicki Christoforou from The TopCat Hotel in Alvechurch (www.thetopcathotel.co.uk) said that they don't have any big private displays near them, so luckily

they don't have too many issues when it comes to firework season: "However as a precaution I do plug in the Feliway diffusers a couple of nights before. The main part of the cattery has a cosy inside space with private runs, so we make sure all of the flaps are secured at closing time, leaving the outside lighting on. We also have a radio on all the time for the pussy cats, so I leave that on a low volume."

Similarly, Wythall Animal Sanctuary (www.wythallanimalsanctuary.org.uk) make use of plug-ins and background noise to make sure their cats and other animals looking for homes get through any noisier times of year, as Danielle Harton from the Sanctuary told me: "We have plug-ins 24/7 anyway but we're extra careful to make sure they're all full around firework season. The radio is left on for all the animals and we just make sure not to make an extra fuss of them, because that would only confirm in their mind there is actually something for them to be worried about."

The difference between the sanctuaries/catteries and your multi-cat household is that your cats won't be separated in individual pens, so any existing tension between any of the cats could be exacerbated by the stress of the fireworks and being kept inside together. It may be that they all get on peacefully with each other and will curl up together for comfort but just in case, make sure there are plenty of choices for each cat to have their own hiding place, as well as ensuring they

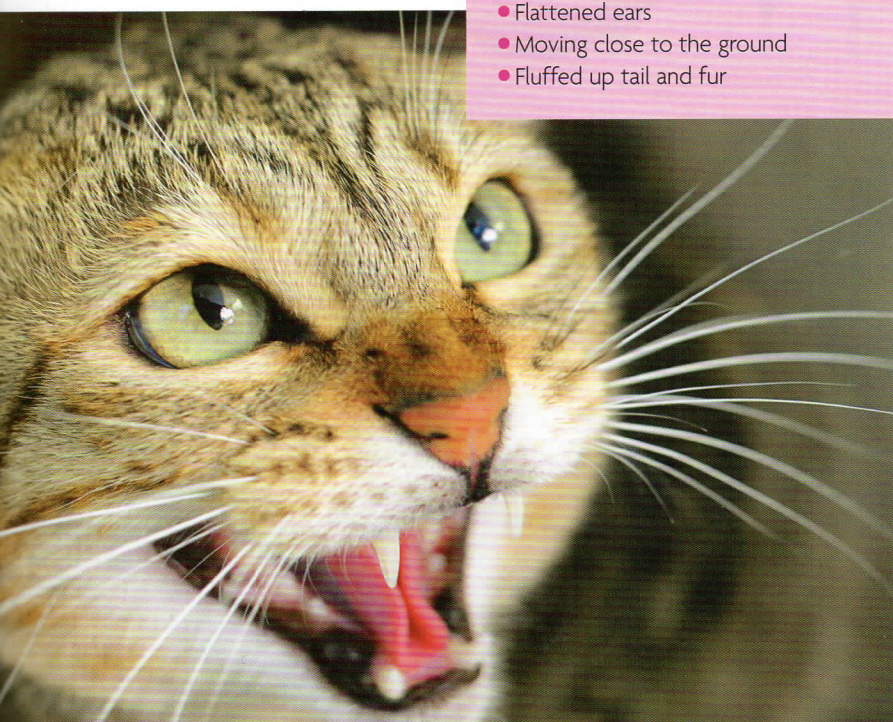


have one litter tray each, plus an extra one, in various places throughout your home.

The same calming products used by catteries and sanctuaries that are very helpful in encouraging calm and relaxed environments are equally advisable for pets, so ahead of time you could start using the plug-in diffuser versions in

Spotting the signs of anxiety in cats

- Hiding
- Hissing or growling
- Dilated pupils
- Flattened ears
- Moving close to the ground
- Fluffed up tail and fur



your home. They also come in spray versions and spraying them onto your cats' bedding or favourite hiding place is another way of boosting tranquillity.

Keeping cats calm

When it comes to keeping cats calm and minimising their anxiety while fireworks are actually going off, there are a number of things you can try. Keep windows and curtains shut to muffle the noise and block the sight, just in case that's something that might scare your cats, and turn the radio or TV on to cover up the noise as much as you can.

It's important that you act normally around a cat that's getting stressed, because if you start fussing and giving your anxious cat extra attention, it just validates the cat's sense that there's something wrong. If any of your cats are slightly disturbed by the fireworks but not in deep distress, a good distraction in the form of play time usually works. A frightened cat will want to hide, so it's important that there are suitable places around your home. Lots of cats like to 'escape' to high places but wherever your cat's preferred spot is, it will be dark, comfortable and quiet. If you know a cat has a particular 'safe place' spot, make sure that it's as comfortable as possible in advance, by putting blankets on top of a wardrobe, for example.

You may well have cats that love to sit on the windowsill watching the fireworks, but in case you don't, you should have all the tools and techniques to get through it for another year! 🐾