

LAKE PARKER ASSOCIATION, INC.

PO Box 69, West Glover, VT 05875

December 1999 Newsletter

Felines Fighting Back! - What with that dog, J.D., hogging the limelight in past editions of this newsletter, cats have united and demand equal time!! Read the following "Letter to the Editor", then catch Beryl Adam's piece on cats at the end.

Letter To The Editor: Dear Sir: As a member of the "lovablicus felinebus" family, I was a bit disappointed to see in a recent newsletter not only a picture of a dog on the front page, but also an amusing commentary by Beryl Adams which included dogs! Although I do not dislike dogs (my very favorite being Buddy Day-Williams who frequently visits us for a dog biscuit), I do feel that cats should have equal time! Cats have been proven to have greater intelligence than dogs, and we can readily see it in their independence, in their hesitancy to become loyal or obey one particular person, and in their ability to manipulate those who love them. I hope you will see fit to correct this oversight and recognize the importance of members of this great family of hunters and lovers. Sincerely, Mathilda Joy Washburn ("Tillie")

Tillie

New Faces Around The Lake - It has been great this summer to see empty camps being filled with enthusiastic new owners! The Barnes's in camp #2 (formerly LaClair), Robert Gregory in camps #11 & #12 (formerly Siegel and Monette), the Trudell's in camp #30 (formerly Chamberlain), Gene & Eleanor Lessard in camp #100 (formerly George), and the Steve Cutler in camp #110 (formerly Gardner). Wow! Did we miss any? Hope not - and a warm and sincere welcome to these folks. If you're their neighbor, you've probably already met them and made them feel at home. Share this newsletter with them, and we'll get you another copy! The rest of us look forward to getting acquainted next summer at the annual meeting, or before!

It's early, but here are some activities to watch for next Summer.

Ice Out Contest Entry Deadline - April 10, Midnight

Birding Outing with Ray & Olive Griffin - June 10th Tentative

Madeleine's Lake Protection Coffee Hour - TBD

Finish 2nd Better Back Roads Grant Project - TBD

Finish EPA 319 Grant - Shoreland Re-vegetation - October 30th 2000

Finish Walking Path - TBD

Old Stone House Exhibit on Lakes and Ponds - Spring and Summer

LPA Annual Meeting and Potluck Supper - Saturday, July 8th

Glover Day - TBD

Neil Kaman VTDEC talk on LP supplemental water testing results - August

Dixieland Band and Lake-Wide Family Picnic - TBD

Old Stone House Museum Project

Darlene Young is putting together an exhibit on lakes and ponds in Orleans County that will be shown at the Old Stone House Museum in Brownington this spring and summer. She is particularly interested in photos, stories and articles on the earliest camps on the lakes in the area. We would like to help her put together some

of this information on Lake Parker so if you have any information on the earliest camps around Lake Parker please bring it to our attention.

Grant Update

We completed our first Better Back Roads Grant this fall when we completed the final report and turned the \$1000.00 final payment over to the Town of Glover. This grant was for the work on ditches and culverts in the area where the Dewing Brook crosses West Shore Road. We have received two other grants that must be completed in 2000. One is another Better Backs Roads grant for \$1650.00 or so to inventory all of the roads in the Lake Parker Watershed. The second is a \$1500.00 EPA Section 319 Grant, thanks to Susan Warren, for shoreland re-vegetation projects.

July Business Meeting - The July 10th meeting was attended by 60+ people, who enjoyed the usual great pot-luck meal before attending to LPA business. Much was accomplished, including the election of officers for the next two years. Minutes of this meeting will be sent with the Spring 2000 newsletter. We felt that by waiting until then, the minutes would be fresher in everyone's mind for the business meeting next summer. Hope you all concur! - if not give Bob Johnson a call and a copy will be sent to you before then. While 60 folks is a good turnout, it includes family members, so that only small portion of actual property owners were represented. Your opinions and ideas are important, and the annual meeting is the only real chance for a discussion. If you did not attend this year, please try to do so next year.

LPA Work-Day - Designated an official "LPA Work-Day", August 14th found a gang of LPA'ers working at several erosion sites around the lake. Granite blocks were re-installed, ground was seeded, and small cedars planted, at a Stevens Brook culvert, and other ditches and culverts were seeded and mulched on roads on the west and east shores of the lake. Along with similar work done earlier in the summer, the LPA has done much already to minimize erosion of silt and nutrients into the lake. This work is a direct result of data collected during the recently completed watershed survey. More work remains, and will be accomplished, but the work crews deserve the thanks of all of us!

Matching Fund Campaign - As of this writing, the Fund now totals over \$2500, combined contributions and matching funds! THANK YOU, THANK YOU to all who have helped! What a great start to a means of establishing a capability for the LPA to help improve lake water quality in many different ways! Detailed reports of projects and use of the Fund will be provided. This Fund puts the LPA "on the map" as a real force in the eyes of the state and other water quality agencies, and demonstrates our willingness to "help ourselves", and not be totally dependent on grant funds to get the job done. Again, thanks to everyone who took the time to make a contribution. It is still possible to help - just send your check made out to the Lake Parker Association, to Joyce Croteau, Treasurer, 14 Prospect St, Orleans, VT 05860, with a memo that it is for the Matching Fund Campaign.

Eurasian Water Milfoil Getting Closer! - Found near the boat access at Willoughby Lake this summer, Eurasian Water Milfoil is a step closer to Lake Parker!! PLEASE - if you trailer your boat between Willoughby and Parker, be sure to clean your motor and prop before putting it in Lake Parker! Once it appears in a lake, it is usually impossible to eliminate and it can destroy boating and swimming by the fast and dense growth. Just trying to keep it under control in a lake can cost many thousands of dollars! Just talk to the shoreline residents of a lake where they are fighting it, and you quickly realize what a scourge it is! We need everyone's help to keep it out! Tell your neighbors and friends!

LakeFEST'99 Celebration - The LPA joined with other lakes around the state from July 17-25, and celebrated" our lake with three activities. Once again, the LPA manned a table during "Glover Day", Saturday, July 24th, where our Watershed Survey was displayed along with other association information. During the week, we sold 45 good looking T-shirts sporting the LakeFEST'99 logo and added about \$165 to the LPA treasury! Thanks to all who bought and wore them. The highlight of our celebration was the "Maple Leaf Seven Dixieland Band" concert on Sunday, July 25th, which for the second summer circled the lake twice on a pontoon boat, bringing everyone to the shoreline clapping and dancing to the great music. Then, thanks to the hospitality of Glenn & Nancy Barber, the music continued with a concert on the lakeside lawn of their camp, with over 60 folks attending! They came from the village, and other lakes, too! We seem to have a tradition started and hope it continues!

Farm Tour - The Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently conducted their annual tour of three model farms. Bob Johnson & John Washburn joined with about 15-20 others, to see how these farmers managed their land, and specifically, to see how they handled manure storage and spreading. Led by Paul Daniels, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of the NRCS, we all got a good appreciation of the work and expense that farmers have incurred to help protect water quality. They are to be highly commended for what they have done. A worthwhile and educational day!

Bird Sighting Report – Dr. Ray Griffin

Fall is such an exciting time for bird watching as our summer birds disappear one by one and more Northern species start passing through to the coast or to a warmer climate. Interesting reports that have come in include several sightings of Northern Shrike, a Bonaparte Gull, two separate sightings of Osprey with a good size fish in its talons and a Muscovy duck, apparently a domesticated escapee. This is a Mexican and further South species that can be sighted along the Rio Grande in the wild.

Numerous sparrow species have been visiting feeders as they pass through or locals preparing for long flights South namely White Crown, White Throat, Song, Field, Fox, and American Tree which has come down from the North to be with us for the winter. Other birds at feeders have been Gold and Purple Finches, Juncos, Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks. This morning (October 5th 1999) a Red-wing Blackbird appeared at our feeder. One never knows.

An assortment of ducks and other water birds have appeared on the lake during migration namely Black, Mallard, Greater Scaup, Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Bufflehead, and Black Scoter. The later, a sea duck that nests in the North (Alaska) and winters on the ocean. Nineteen of these attractive ducks, black with a yellow protuberance on its bill, spent a short time with us. Two Red-neck Grebes in winter plumage appeared for a couple of days. A goodly number of Ring-billed Gulls are still with us, spending time on the newly fertilized fields during the day and then bathing in the lake.

It is estimated that two million birds are killed across the country each year by cats. As you put out your feeders for winter birds, please think about this, and see that the attracted birds are given adequate protection.

Camp Security - by Frank Daignault & Joyce Littlefield

One of the most important parts of closing up your camp in the fall is protecting it from being burglarized over the winter.

This summer, some residents experienced attempted thefts, as well as what we *hope* was only "random acts of mischief" (mailboxes and signs being stolen). Fortunately, we are only aware of one camp on the lake being

burglarized last winter, but there wasn't a week that went by without reading in *The Chronicle* of breaks all around the area.

Some measures you may want to consider are:

1. Hire a trusted individual to check around your property on a regular basis for any signs of burglary or vandalism. This individual should have a set of keys, or have access, in the event they need to get in, or to secure the camp in the event there is a break-in.
2. Make sure all windows and doors are securely locked. Install dead-bolt locks on all doors (the type where you need a key on both sides).
3. There are pros and cons to boarding up windows - some believe it is a deterrent as it takes time to remove the boards, and most burglars want quick and easy access. Others feel the criminal is more likely to do more damage and destroy more property. Also, they may think you have valuables inside. If you do board up your camp, use long wood screws instead of nails. If you don't board up your camp, it is a good idea not to close the drapes or blinds all the way - let them see there's nothing of value inside and perhaps they'll move on. Sliding glass doors are the most likely target for vandals - so it's a good idea to board these up and put a "guard" in the door - a thick dowel cut to fit in the bottom is inexpensive and works well. If you have a long driveway, it's a good idea to put a heavy chain across the driveway - or large logs, etc. - so that someone cannot drive in.
4. Never leave anything of value in your camp - take your TV, VCR, stereos, etc. home with you, or remove them and store them in a secure storage facility. It's also a wise idea to remove anything that could potentially be used to cause damage -- axes, knives, fire extinguishers, cleaning solvents, paint, tools, etc.
5. If you have motion detectors on the property, leave the electricity on.
6. Consider installing an alarm. A system can be designed to suit your needs. If you do install an alarm, make sure it is not temperature-sensitive or you will need to heat the area. Some types of alarms will not operate in sub-freezing temperatures. You would also want one that was tied into the alarm company via phone, and they would be alerted should your electricity or phone service be cut.
7. The State Police will make camp checks *when they are in the area*. Make sure you let them know how to reach you in case of a problem - and let them know if you will be returning to your camp during a time they may check in on it. They will leave a card at the door to say when they've been by. Due to their limited manpower and resources, they may only get by once during the season.
8. If you leave the electricity on during the off-season, you may want to consider putting several lights (that could be seen from the street) on timers, and have your driveway plowed after each snow fall so that it appears someone is living there and could be returning soon.
9. If someone wants to get in - they will. Make sure you carry adequate property insurance, and keep your fingers crossed.
10. If you see anything suspicious around a camp, please call the police. If you will be using, or renting, your camp during the "off-season", please let Bob Johnson know in case he gets a call - so we won't call the police!
11. If you are the victim of a crime, even if only minor, please report it to us.

New Water Testing to begin in the spring - Joyce Littlefield

Greg Hennemuth, a science teacher at Lake Region High School, has offered to help us set up an on-going program of water testing. With his students participation, they will check for levels of nitrate, phosphate, dissolved oxygen, bio-oxygen demand, chloride, turbidity, and fecal choliform bacteria. John Peloran, of Lyndon State College, has generously agreed to "loan" several pieces of equipment required to perform the testing. We will be looking for volunteers to help with the gathering of the samples and transporting them to the high school several times during the spring and summer.

Northern Lakes Federation Convenes - Meeting for the 27th consecutive year, the Federation of Lake Associations of Northern Vermont (FLANVT), held their annual conference at Sterling College, Craftsbury Common, on July 26, 1999. Focusing this year on "Shoreline Management and Buffer Zones", the representatives from 20 lake associations heard excellent advice on the topic presented by the states of New Hampshire and Maine. Problems of Eurasian Milfoil and Zebra Mussels were also discussed. The FLANVT is an excellent forum to exchange ideas and hear how other lakes handle these pervasive infestations. Lake Parker has been represented at every one of the 27 years of conferences and has benefited greatly from the discussions.

Walking Path Open For Business - Sort of! The route has been laid out but long pants and good hiking boots are still recommended! The dry summer has made it easier, as the streams where normally a bridge of sorts would be necessary are about dry and one can walk right through! You inveterate walkers - give it a try, and let us know what you think. Start at the orange blaze marker on the east side road just south of the end of the lake, and follow the orange markers - and have fun! More work will be done, but it is a good start to a great idea.

Boating Safety - Another great summer on Lake Parker has about come to an end! And once again, all of you boaters acted responsibly and safely and we are not aware of any accidents or careless operation of boats! In fact, personal observation of courteous performance was the norm! Just as a reminder, we repeat several key boating rules and regulations:

- 1) All persons born after January 1, 1974, must complete a boating safety course before operating a motorboat. Vermont offers one on the internet, and courses from most other states are accepted by Vermont.
- 2) A wearable life jacket (not a cushion) must be on board every boat for every person on the boat. And it must be worn by every person under 12 on the boat.
- 3) Boats towing tubers or water skiers, must carry, in addition to the boat driver, a person age 12 or over, in a position to observe the person(s) being towed.
- 4) Jet skis are not permitted on Lake Parker.

Follow these and other common sense rules and we'll continue to have a great safety record. The Vermont State Police posts have a supply of the complete book of Vermont Boating Rules & Regulations, for the asking. Stop in sometime and get your copy - or get in touch with the LPA, and we'll get one for you!

LEGISLATIVE UP-DATE - Becky Holden

It is the intent of this section to provide a summary of pending Vermont legislature that may affect Lake Parker's water quality, protection, and safety and provide references for additional information, if required.

Three bills H.239, H.356 and H.101 were introduced in the 1999 Legislature and are pending action for the upcoming 2000 session. They are:

H.239 AN ACT RELATING TO THE RESTRICTED USE OF PERSONAL WATERCRAFT.

This bill proposes to prohibit the operation of personal watercraft on the public waters of the state except on Lakes Bomosen, Champlain, Memphremagog, and Seymore.

H.356 AN ACT RELATING TO THE PROHIBITION OF PESTICIDE APPLICATION ADJACENT TO THE PUBLIC WATERS OF THE STATE.

This bill proposes to prohibit the use of any pesticide or other economic poison within 100 feet of any public waters in the state.

H.101 AN ACT RELATING TO ESTABLISHING MINIMUM WATERFRONT PROTECTION STANDARDS. This bill proposes to establish minimum protection standards that would apply to lands located within 250 feet from the mean high water mark of the navigable public waters of the state. The standards would prohibit certain activities within the protected waterfront. Due to the potential impact of H.101 on shoreland activities we asked the bill's sponsor Representative David Deen to further address the details of the proposed bill. He has provided the following chart outlining the provisions of H.101. He also provided suggestions for improving the water quality of Lake Parker in his guest article entitled "The no muss, no fuss, no cost way to protect Lake Parker".

Minimum Shoreland Protection Standards

LIMITS WITHIN THE PROTECTED SHORELAND

250 ft

- Prohibited Uses:
 - Establishment/expansion of salt storage yards, auto junk yards, solid waste & hazardous waste facilities.
 - Use of fertilizer, except lime and/or wood ash, on lawns or areas with grass on residential properties.
- Uses Requiring State Permits:
 - Public water supply facilities
 - Public water & sewage treatment facilities
 - Public utility lines
 - Existing solid waste facilities
 - All activities regulated by the Wetlands Board per RSA 482-A

OTHER RESTRICTED USES

- All new lots, including those in excess of 5 acres, are subject to subdivision approval by DES.
- Setback requirements for all new leaching portions of new septic systems are determined by soil characteristics.
- Minimum lot size in areas dependent on septic systems determined by soil type.
- Alteration of Terrain Permit standards reduced from 100,000 ft² to 50,000 ft²
- Total number of residential units in areas dependent on on-site sewage & septic systems, not to exceed 1 unit per 150 feet of shoreland frontage.

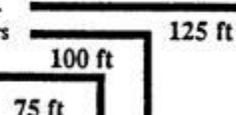
NATURAL WOODLAND BUFFER RESTRICTIONS

- Where existing, a natural woodland buffer must be maintained.
- Tree cutting limited to 50% of the basal area of trees, and 50% of the total number of saplings in a 20 year period. A healthy, well-distributed stand of trees must be maintained.
- Stumps and their root systems must remain intact in the ground within 50 feet of the reference line.

150 ft

NEW SEPTIC SYSTEM LEACHFIELD SETBACKS

- 125 feet where soil down gradient of leachfield is porous sand & gravel.
- 100 feet where soil maps indicate presence of soils with restrictive layers within 18 inches of natural soil surface.
- 75 feet where soil map indicates presence of all other soil types.
- 75 feet minimum setback from rivers.



PRIMARY BUILDING LINE*

- Primary buildings setback behind line.
- Water dependent structures allowed in front of line, only if approved by Wetlands Board.

50 ft

REFERENCE LINE

- For coastal waters = highest observable tide line
- For rivers = ordinary high water mark
- For natural fresh water bodies = natural mean high water level
- For artificially impounded fresh water bodies = water line at full pond

* If a municipality establishes a shoreland setback for primary buildings, whether greater or lesser than 50 feet, that defines the Primary Building Line for that municipality.

The no muss, no fuss, no cost way to protect Lake Parker

By State Representative David L. Deen

The Connecticut River Watershed Council's

River Steward for the Upper Connecticut River Valley

Riparian Zones, sounds like some exotic crater area on the Moon or Mars. Well they are a whole lot closer, simpler and less exotic than Moon craters. None the less, they are much more important than craters to any waterbody on this planet. Riparian zones are the areas directly adjacent to a water body. Effective riparian zones are covered with undisturbed trees, herbaceous plants or grasses.

Riparian zone functions are disproportionately large to their relatively small land area. They block the flow of overland runoff; treat water pollution including nitrates and phosphorus present in overland runoff; reduce the amount of pathogens that run from the land into the water; control over land soil erosion during high water events; and stabilize the river or lake bank thereby reducing bank erosion. Riparian zones are fertile, in fact vital, habitat areas for many species in and out of the water.

Nutrients and pathogens running from impervious surfaces such as parking lots, roadways and driveways or from sloped lawns, barnyards or crop fields that go quickly into the water without any time for absorption threaten the health of the river and human health. The threats come either directly by water contact or through consumption of fish.

Undisturbed riparian zones that exist between any of these types of surfaces and any waterbodies slow down the flow of the overland water. The sediment and pollution in the water also slow down. The slow down gives the water a chance to be absorbed where microbes in the soil treat the pollutants. The sediment has a chance to settle on the land before it reaches the waterbody.

Each of these functions requires minimum widths of undisturbed plant growth if the river and wildlife are to benefit from the riparian zone. Some researchers offer formulas that define the minimum width of a riparian zone as a function of the width of the river, but for ease, the scientific literature indicates that a waterbody receives minimal or no benefit from riparian buffer zones under 30 meters (98 feet) in width. The most effective buffer zones are larger. Site specific conditions may indicate the need for larger buffers, such as lands that slope steeply toward the water or totally impervious surfaces like parking lots near to the water.

The major remaining threat to water quality in Lake Parker, and in fact all the waters of Vermont and the rest of the nation, is no longer direct discharges of pollution but from overland pollution, sometimes called runoff or non-point source pollution. Whatever it is called, it is water running over the land to a waterbody unimpeded carrying with it pollution, nutrients and sediment. None of these are good for the water, all of which are reduced or eliminated by a healthy riparian zone.

Having said all of this, what does it mean to the Lake Parker Association? Riparian zones are the number one, no cost way to protect your lake. No cost in that there is no expensive equipment that must be purchased, installed and maintained. There is no new infrastructure the town/s must purchase, install or maintain. All that is needed is to leave natural buffers in place and the plants will grow themselves - no muss, no fuss, no cost. Think of how much pollution or nutrient loading you might reduce with appropriate buffers along the lake and all of its tributaries.

There is one situation where some costs might accrue from leaving a buffer in place and that is along the edge of agricultural land. Leaving a buffer strip of land untilled is great for the water but does have a cost to the farmer. Later in the article we will talk about a way to assist the farmer in meeting any costs associated with being a good neighbor to the water, a way that already exists in Vermont law.

There are several public initiatives that you should know about that address the costs associated with protecting riparian zones. One exists in state statute, one exists in federal statute but is not funded and the other is on the drawing boards but has been introduced as possible legislation here in Vermont. The initiative that already exists is how you could help farmers become better neighbors to the waters of Lake Parker.

zoning. The towns are Averill, Avery's Gore, Barton, Brunswick, Concord, Coventry, Danville, Derby, Ferdinand, Granby, Greensboro, Groton, Guildhall, Hardwick, Jay and Kirby, Lewis, Maidstone, Morgan, Newport, Barton, Peacham, Ryegate, Warner's Grant, Warren Gore. It seems a number of your neighboring towns think shoreline protection is important to them. You might talk with members of your local planning commission to see if they would take up shoreline zoning by laws. The state law allows towns to adopt shoreline zoning on their own.

1999 Membership Dues - The 1999 fiscal year of the LPA is 7/1/99 to 6/30/00, so if you haven't already joined, you can still send in your 1999 membership dues by using the form included in this newsletter. You'll then be an active supporter of LPA activities and you'll feel good about it!

....AND FINALLY! - Have a good winter, wherever your paths take you! Thanks again to each and every one for your part in keeping the Lake Parker Association alive, active, and in the forefront of Vermont's efforts to keep our lakes, ponds and streams clean and beautiful! Quoting from Garrison Keillor, "be well, do good work and keep in touch!" See you all back here next spring!

A FLATLANDER'S VIEW

By Beryl Adams

Some interesting things turned up in my mail this week.

I actually mailed a bill payment back to myself by absentmindedly inserting the remit-slip upside down so that *my* name and address peeked out through the envelope window instead of theirs. Since I try to time my bills in such a way that payments arrive at 11:59 p.m. on the very last day they're due, it means that a late charge will be added, my correspondence will repeatedly cross theirs in the mail, and we will each spend more than \$12 in postage over the next two months trying to straighten out 18 cents in over or under payments.

In the next day's mail, I got a large envelope, with official-looking stickers and some serious exclamation points, alerting me that I have almost certainly already won, once again. However, in order to verify my multi-millionaire status, I have to return *something*, which is hidden *somewhere* in a 24-page packet of simulated stock certificates, perforated magazine stamps, and letters with genuine imitation personal handwriting on them. There's a special early-bird prize that I probably also have already won, but only if I can

figure the whole thing out, lick and stick the right stamps in the right places, stuff it all in an impossibly small envelope, and get it back to them within *some* unspecified time period. And, of course, if I put the address-slip in upside down, and the wrong thing peeks out through the envelope window, I lose all rights to the money and can probably be sued for negligence.

But the most curious piece of mail I received this week was a letter from Lynn Washburn's cat, Tilly. I thought this was particularly odd, since Tilly lives just a few cabins down the road, and could have easily delivered a message in person. We've always been on good terms, so the formality of a delivered letter gave me a chill, like there might be a hidden legal agenda or something.

Anyway, eloquent as ever, Tilly referenced the Lake Parker Association Newsletter and noted that I had written a rather extensive piece about Labrador Retrievers some time back. And, she politely wondered, would I consider featuring cats in a future article, discussing them in a "positive light." Another chill. Cats are hard people to satisfy, and I'm not too sure I even know what a cat might consider "positive," given our philosophical differences about leaving random rodent parts on the kitchen floor.

Bob patiently listened to my suspicions and sighed a big, diplomatic sigh and tried to put "crazy paranoia" in the most delicate terms, because he knows if it isn't worded right, I make him read another chapter from "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus."

But still, the letter had come by certified mail, and I had to sign for it under oath. It just didn't sit right.

So, after extensive research, I have some startling, and I hope positive, things to say about cats.

Cats are not from our universe. They come from a parallel cosmos that operates according to a very different physics than ours. That is why cats who ordinarily weigh 7 pounds during the day can compact themselves to 35 pounds at 3:00 a.m., and then concentrate it all in one foot, when they unerringly step on your bladder. This is also why cats can sleep in a sunbeam, follow its movement across the bed by changing their nap space several times, and finally end up asleep in a 90-degree antigravity position on the wall as the sun sets. And of course, this is why, from a casual, at-rest stance, cats can shoot straight up and land exactly on the 2 square inches of clear space on the top of the refrigerator. But only if they're not allowed there.

Cats are master travelers through the space-time continuum. They regularly slip through fourth-dimensional portals without making any noise, taking with them scissors, pens, car keys, and single socks.

Cats have a weird sense of humor, randomly returning scissors, pens, car keys, and single socks in obvious, under-your-nose places so you'll think you're going nuts.

Cats can hold a grudge. If you ever release a robin from your porch after your cat has gone to a lot of work dragging it through the cat-door backwards, she will get back at you by stepping on various vital organs every night for 3 1/2 months.

Cats are gifted writers. A two-cat collaborative team actually wrote "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus," based on their travels and experiences there. According to Bob, this accomplishment may also fit into other categories - probably weird sense of humor and laughing at us, but I don't understand what he means by that.

Cats have no bones. They're held together by an inorganic matter-antimatter gel. When you pick up a cat, it either bursts away from you, like a spring released from one of those pens you can't find, or it drapes over your arm like pizza dough. Cats also sleep with their heads in positions that are impossible for any form of earth-life more rigid than an amoeba.

Cats do not have hidden legal agendas. They don't need them. They live by their own set of other-universe standards, which make perfect sense to them. Cats get together with other cats at night and talk about us. They all have a good laugh, kick back a couple of Margaritas, and then go home to step on us.

Cats are aloof because they are independently wealthy. They make lots of money designing and writing eligibility packages for Publisher's Clearing House.

Cats are soft and warm. If you hold a cat up to your heart, you can hear two universes rumble together, softly and rhythmically, and all the troubles of your day are sucked away through a time-space portal. Backwards