

How many purrs per capita?

VETERINARY nursing is one of the remaining of true-blue bastions of native Brit culture. "What is your Christian name?" they ask new clients as medical records are prepared for new patients. The fact that in cosmopolitan London many of my clients are Muslims, Jews and Japanese is thought irrelevant.

We like to think that keeping pets is a uniquely British tradition, but statistics tell a radically different story. Australians are the world's greatest pet-owners. We have 10 dogs and 10 cats for every 100 Britons. Per capita they have two-and-a-half times as many.

OK, Australians don't count. They're just sunburnt Celts. Next on the list are Americans and Canadians. They've got more than twice as many pets per capita as we have. Gregarious Americans go in for dogs, while the more introspective, lint-picking Canadians are among the world's great cat-owners.

Right. They don't count either, especially the Canadians, whose police in most provinces until recently still pledged allegiance to the Queen.

But who is next in the pet-owning hit parade? Not New Zealanders or Scandinavians. They have about as many dogs and cats as we have. Nor the Dutch or the Germans. The Poles are continental Europe's greatest dog-owners.

Poor backward Poland. Veterinary care is primitive. Pet vaccines and food were non-existent during communist rule, but Poles remained inveterate pet-keepers.

Like the French, they keep twice as many pets as we do. But they are eliminated, too, because the root stock of their culture is similar to ours. Ask Ciapiek or Minouche's owner: "What is your Christian name?" and they'll certainly know what

their pets on the promise that the "When in Rome do as the Romans" principle is in operation. What about the Japanese in Japan?

Because some of my books have been published there, I occasionally get letters from Japanese pet-owners and received two last week, both from cat-owners. As always, they started with an apology for poor English.

Mayumi Muroki told me about her wryly named smoke-coloured American Shorthair cats, Philip and Morris.

"I love my cats very much. I didn't know that it is very happy to live with cats. They always with me. When I take bath, they are waiting me at front of door of bathroom. When I come back late from my business they are waiting me at the entrance.

"Philip can speak two words! One is *gohan* and the other *iya*. *Gohan* means meal

he says *iya* and after he run away." The second letter was from my Japanese publisher, whose cat had just died of kidney failure.

"I've been deeply in sad. Blacky died after long fighting against his sickness. He was 13 years old, the real boss in our family. We had wonderful days and he made beautiful memories. When we came back home late he was waiting for us with angry face.

"I once thought of euthanasia and this time my husband also did, but this imagination made me madly cry. Very luckily Blacky went to forever sleep, with peaceful face, in his warm own bed, at home. We hold his funeral and my mind come back slowly slow. Blacky was an animal for my mother, but for us a member of our family."

Do these Japanese pet-owners sound any different

from British ones? That last sentence is the proverbial, as well as genuine, bottom line. It holds the clue, the generation difference in cultural attitude towards animals.

Regardless of cultural traditions — and I see quite a few in London — if you live in intimate proximity with another species you can't help but care for it, give it human feelings, emotions, and recognise that each animal has its own unique identity guaranteed. As pet-ownership continues to increase in Japan, a home-grown animal welfare movement will have far more influence in saving dolphins and whales than we, as outsiders, now have.

● Bruce Fogle's '101 Questions Your Dog Would Ask Its Vet' and '101 Questions Your Cat Would Ask Its Vet' are published by Michael Joseph (£8.99 each)

CITY VET



BRUCE FOGLE

in Japanese (Indirectly meaning is cooked rice. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, they are generally called *gohan* in Japanese.) When it is 6pm, he say *go-ha-n*. Now, I live in my house with my family. I didn't talk to them about it, but they too noticed that Philip says *gohan*.

"*Iya* means no in Japanese. I have an elder sister. She likes to hold the cats but they don't like it and run away. When she holds Philip