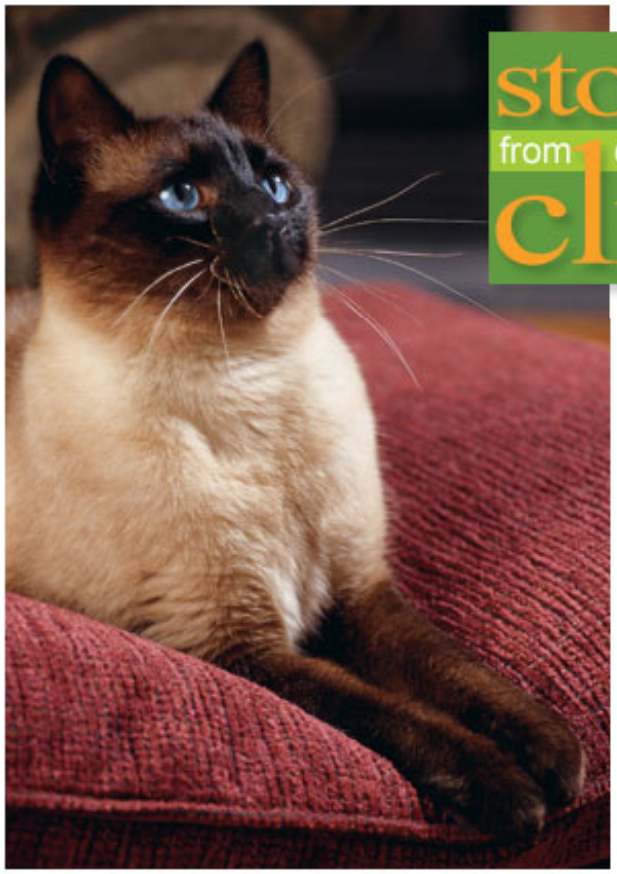
Stories From Our Clinic: The Siamese Who Fell from the Deck

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



ONE BEAUTIFUL JUNE AFTERNOON, we received a frantic phone call from Helen, a long-time client. She told us that her friend John was on the way to our clinic with Wendell, his Siamese cat, who had fallen from her cabin's second-floor deck.

John and his family were visiting Helen for the week. Helen's well-meaning children had let Wendell outdoors for a little time in the sun. However, Wendell was an indoor cat unused to outdoor stimuli; he wasted little time in lunging after a hummingbird at a nearby feeder. John told us that Wendell had fallen from the deck's railing onto the lawn below, landing on his feet, but hitting his chin.

Upon their arrival, we carefully removed Wendell from his travel carrier, not knowing whether he had broken bones. We checked vital signs, verified that he wasn't in shock, then performed a complete physical exam. X-rays revealed that Wendell had separated his lower jaw. Thankfully, this seemed to be his only injury.

Wendell required surgery to wire his separated jaw together and ensure proper healing. The surgery proved very successful, with no complications. Wendell went home the next day, after a night of observation. We instructed John to schedule an appointment with his regular veterinarian, who would remove the jaw wire in about six weeks.

John called us two months later to tell us that Wendell's jaw had healed and that he was back to his old self. Wendell's case is, unfortunately, not uncommon. Cats are naturally attracted to heights. They're also frequently – and intensely – distracted by peripheral interests such as birds. Thankfully, since Wendell is an indoor cat and John reminds guests to keep him in the house, Wendell's outdoor adventures have come to an end.

DO CATS ALWAYS LAND ON THEIR FEET?

The uniqueness of the cat's skeleton is one of the reasons they can right themselves so quickly. Cats do not have a collarbone, and the bones in their backbone have more mobility than many other animals. For these reasons, cats have free movement of their front legs and they can easily bend and rotate their bodies. This allows them to land feet first. At shorter heights, their feet and legs can usually cushion the impact although injuries can still occur. If cats fall a longer distance, such as one or more floors, even though they can right

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themselves their legs and feet can no longer absorb all of the shock. This ability of a cat to right herself while in the air appears around 5 weeks of age.

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