

Is Spike the oldest cat in Britain?



By BILL MOULAND

OFTEN used by women of a certain age to combat the march of time, aloe vera – a sort of cactus juice – is said to smooth out wrinkles.

Now the gel from the health-giving plant is being regarded in an even more impressive light after helping a ginger tom called Spike towards an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

At nearly 29½ of age, Spike is considered to be Britain's oldest living feline. But he still needs to keep going for another five years to match a tabby called Ma, who was 34 when she died in Devon in 1957.

Spike's owners, Dave and Mo Elkington, from Bothenhampton near Bridport, Dorset, reckon the record is as good as his. Mrs Elkington, an aromatherapist who introduced Spike to his daily dose of aloe vera, said yesterday: 'I'm going to do my best to keep him going.' The Elkingtons were given Spike when he was six years old after they had lost another cat in a car accident.

They expected him to regard it as retirement when they moved from Hornchurch, Essex. Instead he has taken on a new lease of life in their 270ft garden, climbing its trees and prowling the borders.

Mrs Elkington, who declined to give her own age, said: 'He spends every day out of doors unless it is very cold.' Her husband, who works for an engineering company, added: 'He dashes in and out like a young cat. Sometime I think he is going to outlive me.'

Spike, who shares a conservatory with a 14-year-old Blue Persian called Shah, an eight-year-old collie called Butch, and four canaries, eats three meals a day. But only the evening meal has the dose of aloe vera. Spike often gets a rub down with it on the aromatherapy table to help with a twinge of arthritis in his back legs. 'He is always right as rain afterwards,' said Mrs Elkington. 'I

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■ During his 29½ years, Spike has munched his way through 4,756 cans of pet food, at a cost of nearly £2,400 by today's prices.

■ His healthy appetite means that so far, he has consumed food weighing nearly two tons, or the same bulk as an Indian elephant.

■ The total distance clocked up on Spike's daily stroll stands at 10,585 miles – the distance between London and Melbourne.

■ Spike may be interested to know that the health-giving properties of aloe vera were first recognised by the ancient Egyptians, although there is no indication as to whether they gave it to their cats.

think it is because the aloe vera is pure and has so many vitamins in it. It has certainly given our animals a long life. We gave it to one of the canaries when we thought he was on the way out and had lost all his feathers.

'We put it in the drinking water and within a week his feathers had returned and he was fighting fit. He is now 13, which is twice as long as canaries usually live.'

A spokesman for the Guinness Book of Records said it was very rare for a cat to live as long as Spike and he was now being considered for his own entry as Britain's longest surviving cat.

Do you have a cat older than Spike?

Write to the Daily Mail, c/o The Newsdesk, Northcliffe House, 2 Derry Street, Kensington, London W8 5TT.