

A Boat Full of Kitties

Koerienkat (Dutch for Cowcat) is always the first to greet visitors.



A Poezenboot cat soaks up some sun.

For tourists visiting Amsterdam, this canal city conjures up images of tulips, bicycles, locals in clogs, stroomwafels (Dutch spelling), matjes herring, and museums filled with artworks from Dutch masters.

But if you're a cat lover, don't forget to add a visit to the unique floating cat sanctuary called De Poezenboot to your list of Dutch delights.

What started out in 1966 as a simple act of kindness by an Amsterdam cat lover named Henriette van Weelde led to the

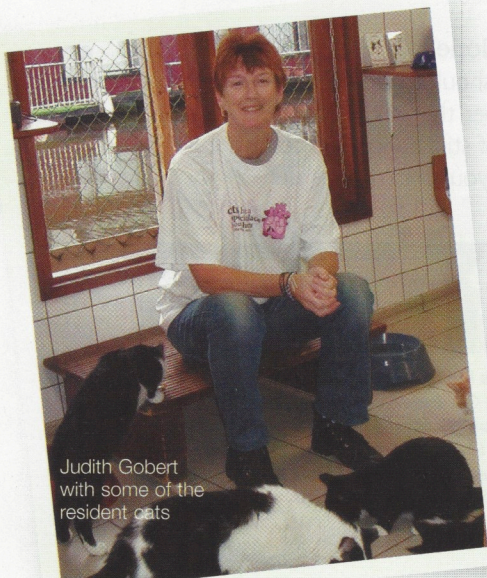
establishment of De Poezenboot — the Catboat — the world's only floating cat sanctuary, which plays a major role in the welfare of feral and stray cats found along the banks of the city's canals.

Recapping the boat's history, Judith Goberts, who now runs the sanctuary, explained how Henriette found a litter of kittens on the banks of the Herengracht canal and took them, along with their mother, into her home. She quickly earned a reputation as a cat rescuer and found herself taking in other strays that people brought to her doorstep. Taking a cue from the many houseboats that line the Dutch canals, in 1968, Henriette bought a barge and converted it into a sanctuary for her feline charges. In the 1970s, when the clowder outgrew the barge, she upgraded to a larger houseboat.

On Henriette's death in 1987, the floating sanctuary received legitimate recognition from local authorities with the formation of the Cat Boat Foundation. The current sanctuary is located on the fourth and largest houseboat to date, which in 2001 was completely overhauled to cater specifically to the needs of its feline occupants.

Some of the cats are permanent residents. However, the main goal is to find loving and forever homes for most of the felines. "This way we can keep accepting and helping newcomers," said Judith, who takes care of the sanctuary and its occupants with the help of a band of very hard-working volunteers.

"Some cats are so happy here they don't want to leave," she added. "A black-and-white cat named Kiss was placed in a home on three different occasions and each time made his way back to the houseboat. He apparently didn't want to be separated from his feline love, a cat named



Judith Gobert with some of the resident cats

Granny. Eventually, both cats were taken off the adoption list and given permanent status in the sanctuary.

While De Poezenboot has a core staff of about 21 regular volunteers, Judith said she is often approached by tourists looking for a “voluntourism” experience by helping out and working on board for a couple of days during their stay in Amsterdam. “And yes, when we can, we most certainly take advantage of such extra help,” she said.

According to Judith, there is a certain cachet to adopting a “catboat cat,” and the local adoption events held on the houseboat are very popular with cat lovers looking to find a feline soul mate. “We may operate in a relatively small space, but we have a very big name and are very successful in our adoptions,” she added.

The houseboat can accommodate up to 40 cats, and the feline population fluctuates. Anyone visiting the houseboat is likely to be met by one of the boat’s official feline greeters.

Koeienkat, Dutch for Cowcat, is always the first to greet newcomers. He got his name because of the spots on his fur that resemble the black-and-white pattern on a typical Dutch cow.

i For More Information:
 De Poezenboot
 Singel 38.G
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depoezenboot.nl/en

De Poezenboot is open to the public from 1 to 3 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. It is closed on Wednesdays and Sundays.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF POEZENBOOT



New arrivals

“He will sit on someone’s lap for hours but is not very keen to be stroked or petted. You stroke him at your own peril,” Judith said. “Even though there is a sign to warn potential petters, some simply can’t resist and leave with a feline scratch ‘souvenir.’”

And speaking of souvenirs, De Poezenboot has a gift shop that, along with donations, is a

source of revenue to help pay for the general upkeep of the feline residents along with their excellent veterinary care and diet of high-end cat food. The selection includes decorative pins, kitchen magnets, pens, posters, postcards, and T-shirts with slogans in both Dutch and English. They might be small tokens, but they’ll conjure up big memories.



Ziggy (pictured) and Fudge “work” as feline muses for Sandy Robins, an award-winning multimedia pet lifestyle expert and pet industry personality. They have helped “write” three books, including *The Original CAT FANCY Cat Bible* (I-5 Press, 2014). When he is not lying on her desk blocking the computer screen, Ziggy likes to play fetch with his toys and direct food operations in the kitchen. Learn more about Sandy at sandyrobinsonline.com.