

# Scaredy-cat rescued after 16 hours in tree

■ Frustrated owner has trouble finding assistance.

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It's tough to get a cat out a tree.

Just ask David Berger. He spent hours of worry and work — calling the fire department, the humane society and an electrical contractor — before he finally got help getting his cat Yumi out of a 60-plus-foot tree recently.

When Yumi, who is 10 months old, first ran up the tree outside Berger's home in Ann Arbor two weeks ago, Berger and his wife, Kumiko, assumed

the kitten would climb down on her own.

They left food and water at the base of the trunk and waited patiently, but the cat wouldn't budge.

Morning found the cat still in the tree. A raccoon or some other nighttime critter had eaten the cat food, and Berger suspects the animal spooked the cat, driving her even higher into the limbs.

Attempts to use a ladder to get Yumi down also drove the cat farther up the tree. Berger estimated she was nearly 35 feet above the ground when he decided to seek outside help.

See CAT, C2



NEWS PHOTO • FRANCISCO KJOLSETH

David and Kumiko Berger hold their cat, Yumi, outside their home in Ann Arbor Township. Before the Bergers moved from their Ann Arbor home two weeks ago, Yumi spent 16 hours stuck in a tree.

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## CAT: At last, Yumi finally gets rescued by Edison

But frantic calls to the Ann Arbor Fire Department and the Huron Valley Humane Society didn't help.

"We have a policy now that we don't do that kind of thing anymore," said James Breslin, Ann Arbor fire battalion chief.

Despite the traditional image of firefighters rescuing cats, Breslin said firefighters have minimal training in animal control. In addition, he said, some animals have been

known to bite would-be rescuers.

The Humane Society also seemed like a logical place to get help, but its policy prohibits animal control workers from climbing trees or ladders or venturing onto icy lakes.

"I'm not going to put my staff in danger to help an animal," said shelter manager Lisa Konrad. The workers focus on sick or injured animals, she said.

"From my past experience, a cat will come down," Konrad said. "I've never heard of a cat dying and falling out of a tree."

The main dangers to an animal stuck in a tree are dehydration and exhaustion, said veterinarian Nancy Smaltz, of the Brookside Veterinary Hospital in Ann Arbor. On hot days the animal can also get overheated, and in winter the cold can be a danger as well, she said.

But pet owners need not worry as soon as their cat heads up the trunk.

"Frankly, they almost always come down on their own," Smaltz said. "I wouldn't send a kid up to get a cat if there's a chance the kid could fall down and break a leg."

But Yumi was not coming down. She was getting tired and hungry and was shaking with fear and exhaustion. At this point, she had been up the tree nearly 12 hours.

Berger called a commercial animal control service, which said it could send out a truck with a long ladder. But after his own experience with a ladder,

Berger knew that simply might scare the cat higher in the tree.

So he got creative. What he needed was a truck with a cherry picker basket, so he got out the Yellow Pages.

"I've got a drawing of a bucket truck on my ad, so I guess he

called me," said Dennis Bales of Bales Electric in Ypsilanti. Because the call didn't involve any electrical work, Bales said he decided to forgo charging the Bergers.

Bales came

over and began extending the bucket on a 45-foot boom. He was within reach of the frightened cat, but Yumi turned tail and went even further into the narrow top branches.

"I couldn't quite get it," said Bales. "So I called a friend at Detroit Edison."

Shortly, Mike Pierson from Detroit Edison pulled up in a truck with a 65-foot boom.

After extending to its full length, Pierson and Darcy Monier of Pet Practice of Ann Arbor used a pillowcase to entice the frightened feline into the basket. Yumi's 16-hour ordeal had ended.

"We don't get that many cat calls," said Bud Davenport, area supervisor for Detroit Edison's Ann Arbor office. "But we try to accommodate them." Again, no charge.

Davenport said as long as the boom trucks are not required for other service calls, the company is more than willing to rescue cats from trees.

"If it happened during a storm we wouldn't drop everything for a cat," he said, "but we try to be accommodating."

Since the tree incident, the Bergers have moved to a new development in Ann Arbor Township. Though the new house has a few trees in the yard, Berger said, he's not too worried about Yumi trying the tree-climbing stunt again.

"I think she learned her lesson," he said.

**'I've never heard of a cat dying and falling out of a tree.'**

— Humane Society's Lisa Konrad