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The Effect of Pet Remedy on the Behaviour of the Domestic Dog

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Introduction

Stress affecting behaviour in companion animals can have an adverse effect on animal health and welfare and their relationships with humans (Fatjó *et al.*, 2006). This stress can be addressed using chemical treatments, often in conjunction with behavioural therapies. Pet Remedy, a natural valerian based stress relief product for mammals (Figure 1) is commercially available on the market but its efficacy has yet to be scientifically tested in dogs using a placebo-controlled trial. The aim of the study was to explore whether Pet Remedy lowered anxious behaviour in dogs placed in a novel environment compared to a placebo product.



Figure 1: Pet Remedy plug in diffuser.



Figure 2: Dogs behaviour was video recorded.

Materials and Methods

- 28 mixed breed dogs placed in a novel “stressful” environment.
- Repeated measures, randomized order, double blind, placebo controlled trial.
- 3m x 3m enclosed room.
- Exposed to a placebo and Pet Remedy plug-in diffuser for 30 minutes with intervening period of 7 days between treatments.
- Behaviour video recorded without the presence of the owner (Figure 2).
- Observer screened at all times.
- Behaviours categorised into anxious and relaxed behaviour categories (adapted from Tod *et al.*, 2005). Number of occurrences and durations recorded.
- Data were analysed by principal component analysis (PCA) and paired t-tests.

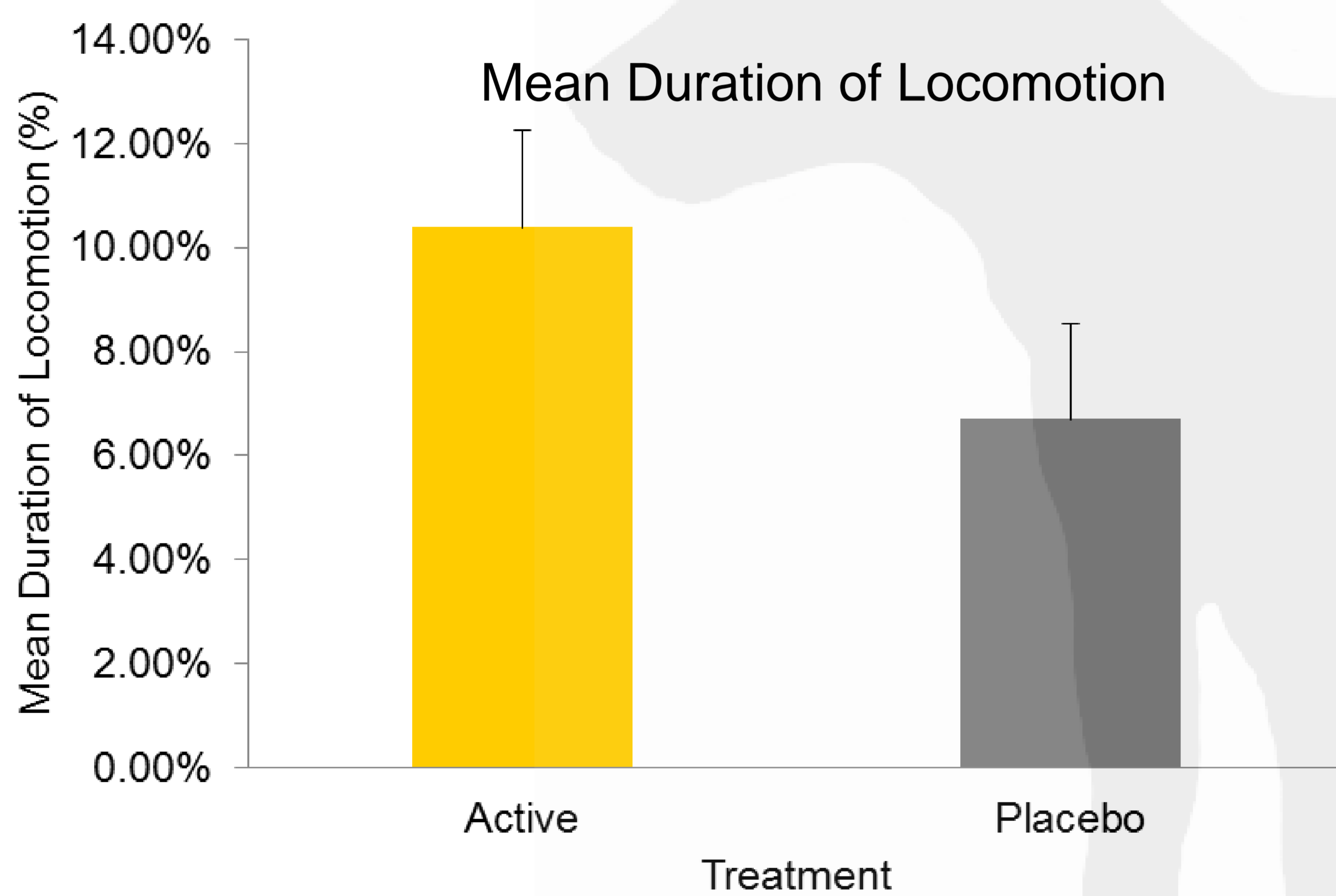


Figure 3: The mean duration of locomotion (\pm S.E.) for both the active Pet Remedy and placebo treatments across the entire 30 minute period.

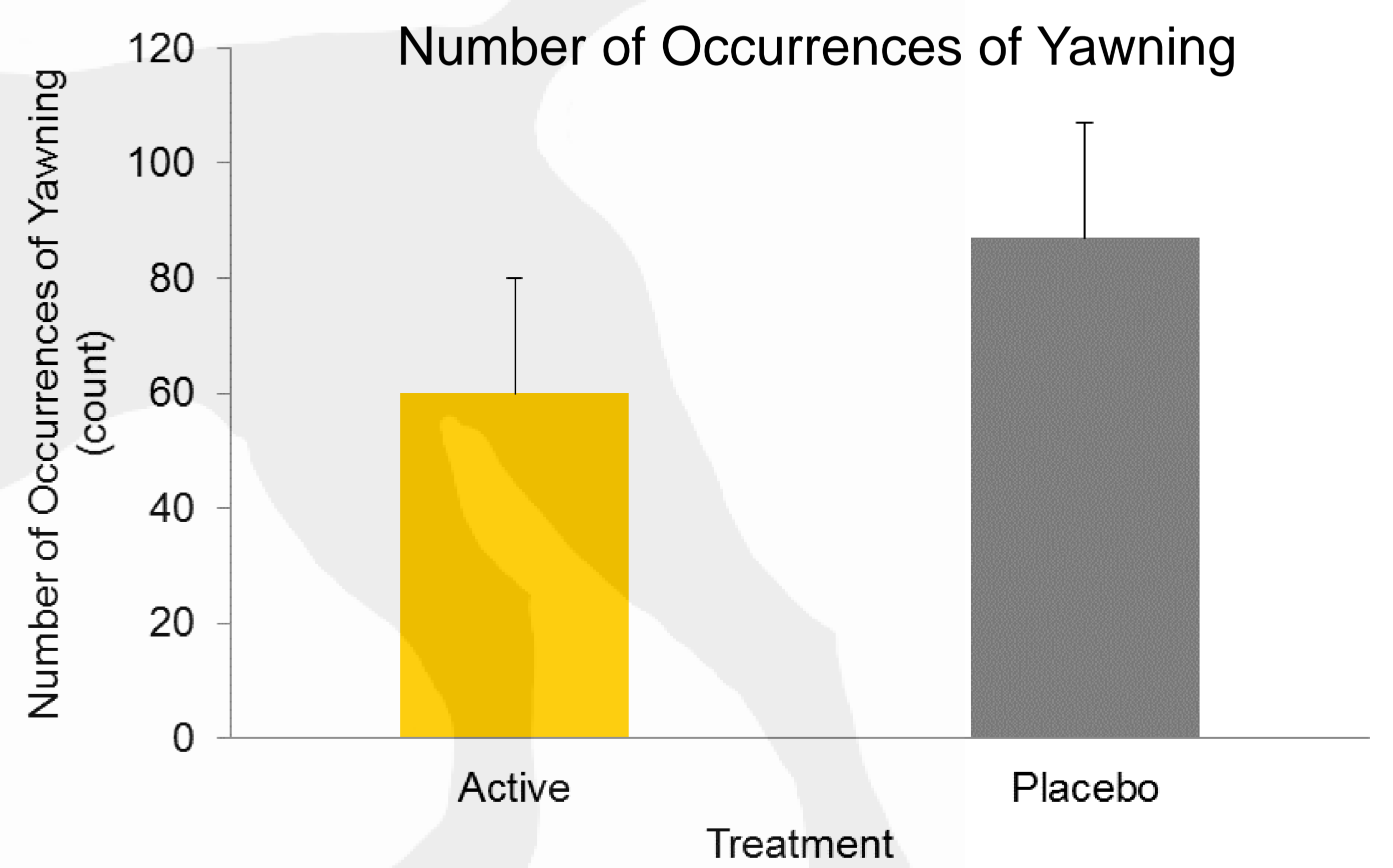


Figure 4: The number of occurrences of yawning (\pm S.E.) for both the active Pet Remedy and placebo treatments across the entire 30 minute period.

Results

Dogs exposed to Pet Remedy exhibited significantly higher overall levels of a composite measure of locomotory activity ($M=0.18$, $SD=0.98$) including locomotion (Figure 3), standing hind paws, rear and wall bounce than when exposed to the placebo across the entire 30 minute period; $t(27) = 2.16$, $P = 0.041$. Significantly lower occurrences of event-based yawning behaviour (Figure 4) ($M=0.03$, $SD=0.06$) were also exhibited in the Pet Remedy condition in comparison to the placebo; $t(27) = 2.44$, $P = 0.021$. No test order effects were observed.

Discussion

Dogs that display suppressed behaviour when exposed to acute novel environments may in particular benefit from Pet Remedy with the product stimulating locomotory activity whilst also reducing anxious yawning behaviour. However, it is particularly important that treatment choice is selected on a case by case basis depending on how individual dogs react to stressful situations. In cases where stress manifests itself in lethargy, Pet Remedy may provide a useful tool for reducing the occurrence of some behaviours associated with anxiety.

References

- Fatjó, J., Ruiz-de-la-Torre, J. L., & Manteca, X. (2006) The epidemiology of behavioural problems in dogs and cats: A survey of veterinary practitioners. *Animal Welfare*, 15, pp. 179-185.
- Tod, E., Brander, D., & Waran, N. (2005) Efficacy of dog appeasing pheromone in reducing stress and fear related behaviour in shelter dogs. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 93, pp. 295-308.

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