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## Introducing the Cat *~*

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**T**he domestic cat is a familiar face in the modern world and, for many people, a comforting household presence. In numerous countries it is now the pet of choice, whether a “moggy” of unknown background or one of the pedigreed pure breeds now available. As pets, some cats enjoy pampered lives of luxury with everything they could desire, while others are simply provided with a bowl of food at the end of the day and a place to curl up. Not all domestic cats are pets, however. Despite 10,000 years of association between cats and people, countless domestic cats still live much more independently of humans, hunting for survival just like their wildcat ancestors.

Alloof, affectionate, serene, endearing, exasperating, elegant, enigmatic, and even savage—the cat has been described in many ways throughout its shared history with humankind. It is most notorious, however, for its independence, a quality that some may scorn but others truly admire. And yet it is partly this independence that has enabled the cat to become one of the most popular pets today, in some countries outranking even the dog as the favorite companion animal. People look for a pet that is easy to care for, ideally one that can adapt to living in more confined spaces, keep itself clean, and remain relatively undemanding, while still providing companionship. A tall order, but the domestic cat has most definitely risen to the challenge.

The very first cats befriended by humans were true wildcats—opportunists—that gradually found their way into our homes and hearts, then, over countless generations, evolved to become domesticated. As the domestic cat slowly but surely colonized the world, it was both worshipped and persecuted before reaching the heights of popularity the species enjoys today. It hasn't been an easy journey, and cats still face challenges, with many of them leading unnecessarily stressful lives. On the face of it, modern-day pet cats might appear to lead charmed lives, with warm homes, nutritious food, and medical care. In return, their owners are often (though by no means always) rewarded with affection, company, and, in some cases, a deep and lasting bond. However, taking cats into

**Right:** *Now one of the world's most popular pets, many—but by no means all—domestic cats have learned to trust humans.*



our homes and fitting them into our busy lifestyles can sometimes be a lot more straightforward for the owners than for their cats, a relationship that is explored in Chapter 4.

Cats are masters of adaptability—if they can find food and shelter they will carve out a niche, with or without the company of other cats or people. This adaptability has been the secret to their successful spread; today domestic cats can be found worldwide in locations as disparate as the Australian outback and high-rise city apartments.

In the relatively short time that cats and humans have lived together, cats have learned to communicate with us, adapting their own species' signals for us to understand. We humans have worked less hard at the relationship, assuming that cats will simply adjust to whatever constraints we impose on them, from restricting their movements to expecting their peaceful cohabitation and interaction with other pets, including other cats, as well as with us. When Paul Leyhausen wrote the first scientific book on cat behavior in 1956, people began to think more about the social needs of cats. Since then, science has revealed much more about the behavior and social organization of cats, but much of this knowledge still needs to be put to practical use. Learning about cats, recognizing their needs, and adapting our lifestyles and homes accordingly provides these pets with the best chances for a stress-free life, and gives their owners the opportunity to understand and enjoy their cats to the full.

**Right:** *It is harder to find homes for black cats and kittens than for cats of other colors—sadly, partly because it is more difficult to see their features in photographs and “selfies.”*

**Below:** *Far from their wildcat origins, many domestic cats today live in relatively small spaces, and most can adapt to this, given enough stimulation and enrichment (see Chapter 5).*





## CATS BY DESIGN

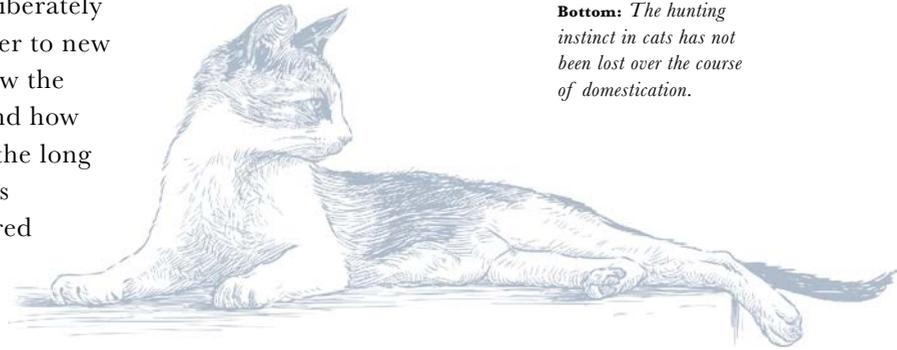
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Compared to our ancestors, we now appreciate cats for very different reasons. Valued for their hunting skills, with their companionship a welcome bonus, appearance was probably relatively unimportant to those humans who first welcomed cats into their lives. Nowadays the reverse is true—many cats are deliberately bred for their looks, and people are prepared to pay a high price for a cat with an impressive pedigree. Even non-pedigree housecats are often selected more for their appearance than their personality—rescue shelters, for example, report that black cats are harder to rehome than those with other coat colors.

Cat breeding has grown enormously in popularity, aided by advances in scientific knowledge of genetics and inheritance. Breeders are now able to achieve and perpetuate new variations in coat color, type, and pattern, along with body shape and size. “Cat fancy” (see Chapter 6) is now big business and care needs to be taken that future breeds are healthy ones and that welfare is not compromised for the sake of novelty.



In contrast to the prized “mousers” of old, hunting by cats nowadays is generally frowned upon. Unfortunately, cats themselves haven’t quite received that message yet and the urge to hunt persists. Hunting is still a necessity for the survival of the millions of domestic cats that live, whether or not through choice, independently of people. Even for well-fed pet cats the instinct remains. Modern-day cats attract some bad press regarding the potential effects of their predation on local wildlife populations, an issue that is discussed in Chapter 3. The problem, however, is of our own making, and should come as no surprise. For centuries, humans have deliberately introduced an opportunistic skilled hunter to new lands populated with abundant prey. How the consequences of this can be managed and how it affects the cat–human relationship in the long term remains to be seen. It will doubtless be another chapter in the highly checkered history of the cat and its relationship with humankind.



**Bottom:** *The hunting instinct in cats has not been lost over the course of domestication.*



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Many people profess to love them, while others vehemently dislike them, but either way, everyone seems to have something to say about cats. With so many opinions it can be hard to separate truth from hearsay, which may account for the plethora of myths and stories that have surrounded the cat during its evolution from wild to domesticated.

This book follows that evolution, sorting some of the facts from the fiction along the way. It aims to provide a comprehensive insight into what makes cats so unique and endlessly fascinating, together with more recent scientific findings on cats and how they fit into the human world.

The first chapter traces how the cat family evolved from the very earliest carnivorous mammals and describes how the wild ancestors of the domestic cat gradually became associated with humans, from the humble beginnings of their relationship in the Fertile Crescent around 10,000 years ago to the eventual worldwide spread of the cat.

Chapter 2 assesses the anatomy and physiology of the cat and its impressive physical adaptations to its natural life as a carnivorous predator. It also considers genetics and how, through natural mutations and artificial breeding, cats now appear in such a vast array of forms.

The way cats live—how they communicate with one another and their ability to adopt different forms of social organization—is examined in Chapter 3. This chapter also considers how cats develop, from kittenhood through to adulthood.

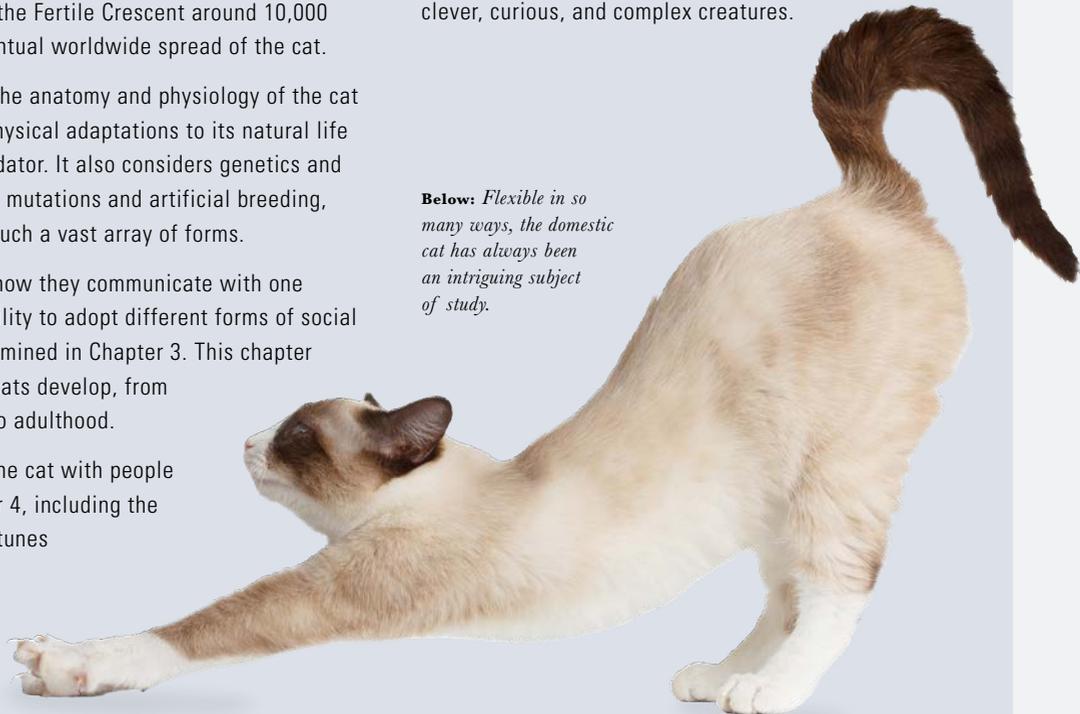
The relationship of the cat with people is covered in Chapter 4, including the feline's changing fortunes

at the whims of humankind. How cats have adapted their language to communicate with us and the ways in which we reciprocate are also examined, along with factors affecting the quality of the cat–human relationship.

Chapter 5 considers the challenges facing the modern cat, including boredom, obesity, and living longer in an overcrowded world. The consequent problems that arise and how they can be solved and avoided by pet owners are discussed, along with what the future might hold for the domestic cat.

Finally, Chapter 6 enters the realm of cat breeding, explaining what cat breeds are and how new ones are developed, before showcasing a selection of those breeds that are most widely recognized by the various cat-fancy organizations around the world. Cats have adapted to our world and, with fresh insight into their behavior, this book seeks to open our hearts and minds to these clever, curious, and complex creatures.

**Below:** *Flexible in so many ways, the domestic cat has always been an intriguing subject of study.*



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