

The New York Times

For Kids

EDITORS' NOTE:
THIS SECTION SHOULD NOT BE READ BY
ADULTS (OR CAT PEOPLE)

DOGS RULE!

CATS DROOL*



* BUT IF
YOU LIKE CATS,
FLIP THE
SECTION OVER.

CATS: THEY'RE BASICALLY WILD ANIMALS, AND THAT'S AMAZING

IF YOU THINK your cat is mysterious, you're not alone. Scientists are only beginning to uncover the history of how cats were domesticated—changed from their wild ancestors to the furbabies we know and love today. That's in part because it's hard to tell where wildcat genes end and domestic-cat genes begin. Throughout history, wherever cats ended up, they'd mix with the local wildcats, combining their DNA.

Felis catus is the only domesticated species in the Felidae family, which includes more than 35 species all over the world, from massive lions to dainty bobcats. But although you may be convinced your mink-like black kitty must have descended from a panther, scientists now think that all domestic cats actually descended from one wildcat species: *Felis silvestris lybica*, a wildcat native to North Africa and Southwest Asia that's only slightly bigger than today's domestic cats.

BIG MOMENTS IN CAT HISTORY
1. **THE BEGINNING** ABOUT 10,000 YEARS AGO
Cats have very flexible spines, 30 movable vertebrae (including the tail), and a comparatively long, muscular neck.

2. **MAKING FRIENDS** Thousands of years ago, when people in the Near East began growing crops, the extra grain they stored attracted rodents. The rodents, in turn, attracted *Felis silvestris lybica*. And it turned out that cats were pretty good at killing pesky pests. Over time, the feline-shy ones bred together and got used to living alongside humans.

3. **COOLED KITTIES** The ancient Egyptians loved cats so much that they saw them as deities, and mummified them as sacred offerings. Cat-genetics researchers have even extracted DNA from their mummies.

4. **CATS TAKE OVER** How did cats spread throughout the world? Ships. Whenever explorers and traders have taken to the seas, they've brought cats as rat-catchers. By the seventh century A.D., Egyptian cats had even made it to a Viking longship perched on the tip of the North Pole.

5. **A NEW CAT** One recent study suggests that most cats used to look just like their wildcat ancestors: grayish-brown, with stripes like a tabby. But during the 1800s, more cats began to have a black coat instead, possibly because of a genetic flip.

6. **BIG CHANGES** As cats spread, different areas of the world started to develop distinctive-looking cats. That's why many cat breeds have trace amounts of DNA from the wildcat cats of Russia, Britain, and elsewhere.

7. **ENTER THE SIAMESE** One of the most famous breeds, the Siamese, descended from cats who were brought to Europe from Siam (now Thailand). Their dark faces, paws and tails are caused by a mutation in a gene that controls their body color.

8. **CAT FANCY TAKES HOLD** The first widely publicized cat show was held in 1871 in London, organized by cat enthusiast Harrison Weir. His 1889 book, "Our Cats and All About Them," chronicled the breed of cats to control how they looked.

9. **CATS COME INSIDE** Once cats became household pets, a question arose: Where should they sleep and pee? For a while, the answer was boxes filled with ash or sand. But in 1947, a Michigan businessman named Edward Lowe gave a neighbor a container of dried, ground-up clay to try instead—ground-up clay, it turned out, had inadvertently invented kitty litter, and it has been used ever since.

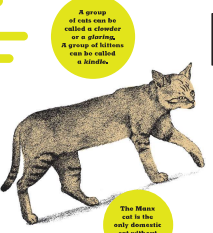
10. **MAD SCIENCE** Many cat breeds have been developed in the last few decades. Despite its name, it dates back only to the 1960s and '70s, when some kittens were randomly born with blue eyes and white fur. Scientists used them to create a new breed.

11. **THE WILD SIDE** One controversial breeding trend: Hybrid cats, created by mating domesticated cats to wildcats. In 1946, in Arizona, someone crossed a domestic cat with a wild leopard cat, which, many generations later, resulted in the first leopards hybrid. More recent crosses include the Savannah (mated with an African serval) and the cheetah (mixed with jungle cats native to Asia).

12. **STILL THE SAME** Despite these new breeds, most home cats today are pretty much like their feline ancestors. Most can survive in the wild, and if they're left without human care for long enough, they'll show their feline, feral side. Even with our long history with cats, they're still their own kind of wild.

MORE CAT FACTS!

1. **THE BEGINNING** ABOUT 10,000 YEARS AGO



The Meow cat is the only domestic cat without a tail.

2. **A NEW COAT** 1900s



Cats sleep for 12 to 16 hours each day on average. Some cats sleep up to 18 hours per day.

3. **BIG CHANCES** BEGINNING 5,000 YEARS AGO



4. **THE WILD SIDE** 1900s-TODAY



5. **ENTER THE SIAMESE** 1800s-TODAY



6. **CAT FANCY TAKES HOLD** 1800s



7. **THE WILD SIDE** 1900s-TODAY



8. **STILL THE SAME** 1900s-TODAY



WHO WINS?

1. MARKING TERRITORY AROUND 1,000 YEARS AGO

Adult cats rarely meow at one another.

2. COOLED KITTIES AROUND 3,000 YEARS AGO

The Siamese, which came with little on four paws, is the smallest cat breed. The Maine Coon is the largest.

3. CATS TAKE OVER BEGINNING 5,000 YEARS AGO

Cats have about 230 bones in their bodies—but their bodies have the exact number twice, depending on how long their tail is and how many toes they have.

4. CATS COME INSIDE 1947

12. **STILL THE SAME** 1900s-TODAY

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