

MODULE 1

PET PROTECTOR ANIMAL CHARACTERISTICS



Proudly developed by:



Notices

WARNING

This material has been reproduced and communicated to you by, or on behalf of, Animal Industries Resource Centre and Crampton Consulting Group (CCG) pursuant to Part VB of the *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act).

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further reproduction or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act. Do not remove this notice.

DISCLAIMER

The information and advice provided within this learning guide are prepared for educational purposes only. They are prepared in good faith and derived from sources believed to be accurate and reliable. Nevertheless, CCG does not warrant the accuracy, reliability, completeness or currency of the information or advice provided within this learning guide, and acknowledges that there is more than one way to perform many of the procedures detailed.

The information and advice within this learning guide are provided solely on the basis that the user will be responsible for making their own assessment of the information and advice. Users are advised to independently verify all representations, statements and information provided.



Module 1: Animal Characteristics

Cat Breeds	4
Natural Breeds	4
Mutation Breeds	5
Hybrid Cat Breeds	5
Domestic Cats	5
Pet Identification	6
Appearance	6
Collar with Identification Tag	7
Microchips	7
Cat Behaviour	8
Communication	8



Welcome to Pet Protector for cat owners. The first module examines the history of cats and the various breeds and breed groups and discusses way of accurately identifying individuals. The way that cats communicate both with each other and with humans is also addressed. As pet owners and pet advocates, it is particularly beneficial to be able to read and understand our cats' body language.

Cat Breeds

Cats are commonly thought to have been first domesticated in ancient Egypt 9,000 - 10,000 years ago. Originally they probably helped humans by controlling crop-destroying pests when agriculture was first developed. The nature of cats did not lend itself to becoming herders or guardians as dogs did, so there were no compelling reasons to select cats for specific traits and so develop breeds that performed specific purposes. Cats have long been admired for their grace and beauty, so when cat breeds were eventually developed it was for aesthetics (coat colour and patterns) rather than work.

The term used to describe the cat family is **feline**. Male cats are called **toms** or **tomcats** while females are **queens**. An offspring is called a **kitten**.

Some 40 feline breeds are recognised by the Cat Fanciers' Associations (the name given to organisations that oversee pedigree cats) yet only sixteen have existed for more than 50 years. The remaining breeds were developed over the last 50 years and are usually defined as simple variants derived from the natural breeds.

Natural Breeds

These are breeds that developed in certain geographical regions; cats resembling these breeds can be found in each region's population of domestic cats.

Examples of natural cat breeds include: Abyssinian Cat; American Shorthair Cats; British Shorthair; Japanese Bobtail; Maine Coon; Persian; Russian Blue; Siamese; Somali; Turkish Angora; and Turkish Van.



By Karin Langner-Bahmann (Own Work), via Wikimedia Commons



By BritishEmpire (Own Work), via Wikimedia Commons



By UnionMarmintia (Own work), via Wikimedia Commons



By Karin Langner-Bahmann, upload von Martin Bahmann (Own work), via Wikimedia Commons

Examples of natural cat breeds. 1. Abyssinian. 2. British Shorthair. 3. Persian. 4. Siamese.

Mutation Breeds

These have been developed from individuals that show up with randomly occurring natural mutations. They had a 'look' or body type that people wanted to selectively breed. These mutations include folded ears, flattened faces and noses, curly or wiry hair, shortened legs, no hair, a reduced number of toes or extra toes, and various others traits. Most of these breeds have been developed in the past 50 years.

Examples of mutation cat breeds include: American Curl; American Wirehair; Balinese; Cornish Rex; Devon Rex; Scottish Fold; and Sphynx.



Examples of mutation cat breeds. 1. American Curl. 2. Cornish Rex. 3. Scottish Fold. 4. Sphynx.

Hybrid Cat Breeds

Hybrid breed cats are developed by crossing two different breeds or species of cat. They can be a cross between two breeds of domestic cat, or a cross between a domestic cat and a wild cat.

Examples include: Bengal; Havana Brown; Oicat; Oriental Shorthair and Tonkinese cats.



Examples of hybrid breed cats. 1. Bengal. 2. Oicat. 3. Oriental Shorthair. 4. Tonkinese.

Domestic Cats

Domestic long-haired and domestic short-haired cats are cats of mixed ancestry and do not belong to a recognised cat breed. They vary in size, shape and colour.

Pet Identification

It is important to be able to identify your pet in case it escapes or becomes lost. If this happens, you need to be able to give an accurate description of your cat to local authorities, rescue centres, veterinary clinics or anyone else who may be able to help you locate them.

Appearance

An accurate description is relatively easy if you own a domestic cat, however interpretation of colours can vary enormously when it comes to describing cats. Also, many people are unfamiliar with less common breeds of cats.

Physical descriptions will need to include the breed, and colour of your cat. With cats of more than one colour, the predominant colour is usually mentioned first, for example black & white. The colours that cause the most confusion in cats are tabby and tortoiseshell.



Tabby - brown & black



Tortoiseshell - brown, ginger & black

Both tabby and tortoiseshell cats can have white markings over any part of their body, including the face.

The length of coat may also be a useful inclusion and may range from long (fluffy) to short-haired (smooth). You should also make a note of any unusual markings that your cat has that may aid in identifying them. Their sex, neutered status and age should also be added.

A colour photograph is the most effective means of showing others what your cat looks like.

Collar with Identification Tag

Some local councils insist that cats wear a collar with an identification tag. It is a good idea, even if it is not law where you live. Ideally cats should wear their collar at all times, even in the house, in case they escape when a door is unintentionally left open. A collar and ID tag are no use if your cat doesn't have them on. Your new kitten may not be keen to wear a collar at first, many kittens scratch at them for the first day or so. Using a soft fabric collar is advisable. Put it on, making sure it is neither too tight nor too loose and leave it on so that your kitten gets used to it. A metal ID tag, engraved with details such as name, and phone number. For cats that are allowed outside it is advisable to consider using a quick release collar in case they get caught when climbing a tree etc.

Microchips

The best method of permanently identifying your pet is with a microchip. A microchip is very small and is 'injected' under the loose skin over the back of the neck, between your cats shoulder blades. The chip contains its own individual ID number that corresponds to pet and owner information stored on a central database.

The procedure is straightforward and relatively pain free (some kittens feel a little discomfort, but it passes quickly)

Local council pounds, rescue charity groups and veterinary clinics all have scanners capable of reading microchips. They also have access, via a secure PIN, to the central database that stores your contact details, enabling them to get in touch if your pet is brought in to their facility.

It is vital that you update your contact details on the database if you change phone numbers or move house.



Enlargement of a microchip. The actual microchip is about the size of a grain of rice.

Cat Behaviour

The ancestors of cats were solitary animals that lived and hunted alone. Cats are territorial, developing their own area in which they hunt and mark their territory mainly via scent. They come together mainly for mating.

Although the domestic cat now lives in close association with people, they have a reputation for being aloof and independent. They spend a lot of their solitary time sleeping with more active periods at dusk and dawn. These times correspond to their natural hunting behaviours.

Communication

Vocalisation

Cats communicate using a wide variety of sounds. These sounds can be classified into five groups: the purr, chirr, call, meow and growl/snarl/hiss.

Purr

Purring is a continuous, soft, vibrating sound made in the throat.

Although we assume that a cat's purr is an expression of pleasure or is a means of communication with its young, perhaps the reasons for purring can be deciphered from the more stressful moments in a cat's life. Cats often purr while under duress, such as during a visit to the veterinarian or when recovering from injury. Thus, not all purring cats appear to be content or pleased with their current circumstances. [Lyons L, Why do cats purr? *Scientific American* January 27, 2003.]

Vibrations somewhere in the upper airways cause purring, possibly in the larynx or vocal cords. However, the exact mechanism is unclear. Cats purr during both inspiration and expiration with the sound frequency slightly higher during inspiration.

Meow

The meow is one of the most widely known vocalisations of domestic kittens. It is used to solicit attention from the mother.

Adult cats commonly vocalise with a "meow" (or "miaow") sound. The meow can be assertive, plaintive, friendly, bold, welcoming, attention soliciting, demanding, or complaining. It can even be silent, where the cat opens its mouth but does not vocalize. Adult cats do not usually meow to each other and so meowing to human beings is likely to be an extension of the use by kittens.

[Wikipedia 9 July 2014, *Cat Communication*, accessed 17 July 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_communication>]

Chirr

The chirr or chirrup is a trilling sound, like a cross between a meow and a purr. It is considered to be a greeting and is heard from friendly cats when a human or cat approaches. Cats sometimes make chirping or chattering noises when observing or stalking prey.

Call

The call is a shrill, rhythmic, wailing noise made with closed mouth. It is the cry of a female cat in heat calling to a male. When males fight with each other they sometimes also make this noise.

Growl/snarl/hiss

The growl, snarl and hiss are all sounds associated with aggression. They will be heard before and during cats fighting with each other or directed at a perceived threat from a human or other animal.

Body language

Cats communicate using body posture and movement of their eyes, ears, mouths, tails and coat.

Posture

Cats that are calm stand relaxed with a tail about level. Hind legs held stiffly and rump elevated indicates increasing confidence, assertiveness and aggression intended to scare off intruders.

A cat that is fearful and submissive tries to look smaller by lowering themselves towards the ground, rounding their back and leaning away from the threat.

A cat that is scared but trying to defend itself or scare off the attacker by standing more upright and turning its body sideways towards the threat.

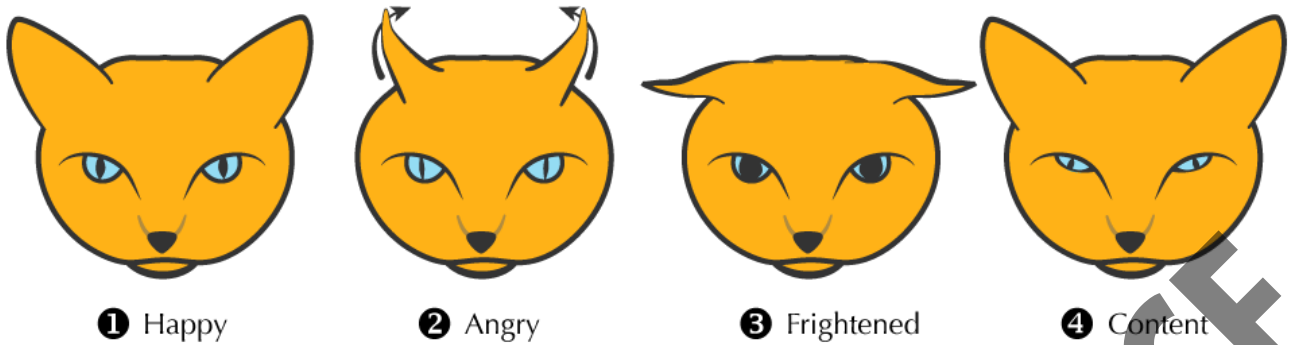
Ears

Erect and forward ears indicate the cat is alert and strongly focussed on whatever threat or matter of interest that is in front of it. A calm cat will hold its ears in a relaxed position towards the side of its head. Ears held tightly flat against its head indicates an extremely defensive or aggressive posture.

Eyes

A direct stare by a cat is a challenge or threat, more likely to be seen in high-ranking, confident cats. Relaxed cats have a pupil size in the mid-range. As the level of fear rises in a cat the pupils become more and more dilated. Dilated pupils let more light in so the cat can gather as much information as possible. As cats become angrier and aggressive the pupils become narrowed allowing them to focus clearly on the threat. It must also be remembered that pupils will also be dilated in dark rooms and narrowed in bright light. Pain will also cause dilated pupils in cats. These other conditions should be taken into account when considering pupil size.

Wide-open eyes indicate alertness and are associated with focussing on potential threats. A relaxed cat will have half-closed eyes.



Tail

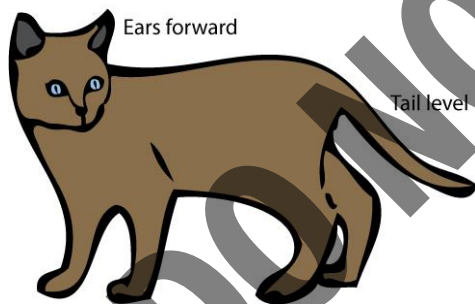
When the tail is held upright this indicates happiness and confidence. It will be seen when greeting other friendly cats and humans. As a cat becomes more unhappy about a situation it will increasingly lower the tail.

When the tail is swung from side to side in a slow arc this generally indicates a relaxed state. Twitching of the tip of the tail can indicate irritation. If a cat is being handled and the tail is twitching it may indicate the cat is about to bite or scratch. Cats will also twitch their tail when they are hunting. A cat that is stalking prey will crouch low to the ground, hold its tail low and swish it from side to side. During play or when extremely happy cats will often hold their tail upright and twitch the tip rapidly.

A scared or surprised cat may fluff up its tail and raise the hair along its back.

Relaxed Confident Cat

A relaxed, confident cat will be alert and moving about, examining the environment. The tail may be raised or level with the body and the ears are pricked forward.

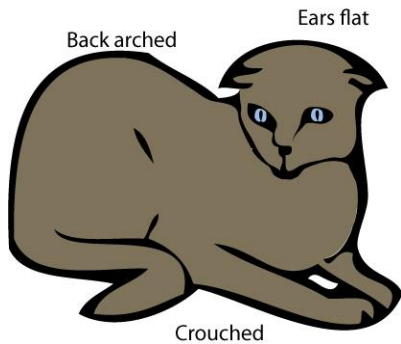


Relaxed confident cat



Withdrawn Cat

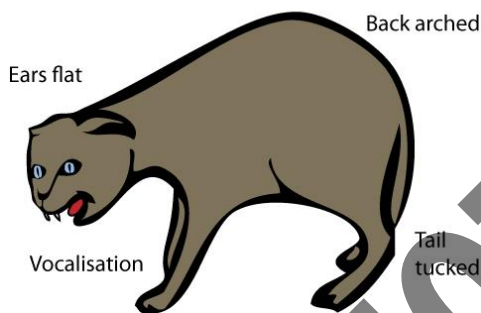
A withdrawn cat with back arched and ears flat may become fearfully aroused if provoked, leading to aggression.



Withdrawn cat

Defensive Aggressive Cat

A non-confident cat that has been provoked into defensive aggression. The ears are flat, back arched and tail down (although the tail may rise as the cat becomes more aroused).



Defensive aggressive cat

Confident Aggressive Cat

A more confident cat is likely to stage an attack. The ears are pulled back but the body is more level with the head, the hind legs are extended, the tail piloerected (raised hairs) and may be carried straight.



Confident aggressive cat