

ILKEN'S CAT: And Other Findings in Pet Behavior

by Biedermeier X. Leeuwenhoek

Since the Dawn of Time, roughly, people have kept cats and dogs as pets. From the vine leashes woven by Australopithecus to the bronze litter boxes forged by Cro-Magnon Man, an unbreakable bond between Man and Pet has developed. And that pact was this: Man gives a few pats on the head, some processed meat byproducts, and most of his bed to sleep on; in return, Pet will guard the home from songbirds, squirrels, Avon persons, and other marauders.

Although Homo Sapiens has flowered into a noble race, scientists remind us that the modern pet's instincts were created in the barren backyards of the Dinosaur Age, when the Dogodon (dino flintstonii) and the Catasaurus (andrewlloydum webberus) were first domesticated by the talking ape families who lived in caves and rode velociraptors to work. It was in these crude homes that the monstrous prehistoric dogs and cats first learned to ruin furniture — their talons could rend even granite hassocks — and to beg for food while the ape people ate their primeval soup.

Yet over the centuries, cats and dogs have been increasingly influenced by manmade factors. Inventions such as the printing press and indoor plumbing have enabled dogs to fetch newspapers and cats to sit in sinks. Thus, pet behavior has become more complex, and owners must turn to highly pseudo-technical sources such as this article to understand their furry but multifaceted pals.

The following major behavioral aspects are ranked by importance, although you could reverse this list and find it equally confusing.

Territory:

Cats like to stand on their tiptoes and rub up against furniture, legs, and refrigerators while arching their backs and twitching their tails. Most owners assume this is all part of a cat's ritual of leaving its scent, "marking" the object as its own. In fact, this is not the case.

Depending on the direction of interest rates and stock market cycles, your cat may be telling you, for example, to shift your savings out of tech stocks and into long bonds (if only you had listened, eh?). Although it's difficult to gauge a cat's sentiments at first, and past performance is no guarantee of future success, with time the average investor should find his or her returns on investment increasing and comfortably outperforming the S&P 500 index.

The Persian cat, for instance, is particularly skilled at anticipating the course of oil prices, and is an appropriate pet for those who invest in currencies and precious metals. Mike

Milken, the famous bond salesman, owned an especially prescient Himalayan named Arby. But Milken's fortunes tumbled after he spurned his cat and started listening to little birdies.

One of the dog's most common traits — aside from snickering or leaving nose prints on the living-room window — is frequent urination on trees, fire hydrants, and children. The conventional wisdom is that the dog, like the cat, is defining its "area." But what the dog is really saying is, in effect: "Man, that Mexican beer goes right through me." Dogs, less solitary than cats, see the family as a "pack," and thus like to spend time alone in their rooms reading comic books. But they are quite friendly, and will usually nose the crotches of visitors as a way of saying hello.

Food:

Cats are persnickety. Owners often wonder at the cat which meows loudly for a meal — such as Choco-Onion Brand's Tomato 'n' Horsechops with Chunx o' Pig-Snout — only to take a few bites and walk away; or the pudgy puss that snubs nutritionally complete "health chow" only to contentedly lick that open-face cream cheese sandwich you let your eye wander from.

What your cat is reminding you when you ponder such behavior is that it's human nature to see patterns where there aren't any, to imagine that things are anything other than desperate, random, and pointless. In a sense, then, the cat is telling its owner that it isn't telling it anything. Asks the inscrutable feline: What is the sound of one paw ripping the side of your new white-leather sofa?

Dogs will eat anything they think their master would eat, preferably ABC (already been chewed) food. Interestingly, but not in fact interesting, dogs have lost the need to chew. They make the motions, of course, and high-speed photography shows some get a few chomps onto the tail-end of whatever they're inhaling. Yet for most dog food, such as pizza, peanut butter, or oranges — with the notable exception of the potato chip — chewing is no longer used, much as common sense isn't by my wife (ha-ha, just kidding, honey!).

Beverages:

Don't be alarmed if you catch your cat or dog drinking from the toilet, as this is their only source of Vitamin P.

Play:

Cats, unlike dogs, lack a complete "fetch" gene and can play only half of that game. They will chase a toy mouse only to almost instantly lose interest, unless it's a live toy mouse being thrown.

Their favorite games include:

Shedding,

Stalk-or-run-from-things-that-aren't-there, Dump-the-wastebaskets-at-4:00-a.m., and

Grab-and-bite-master's-fingers-too-hard-while-shredding-his-forearm-with-my-back-paws.

The intensity of any game can be heightened by adding a generous dose of catnip. A wise cat-owner, however, always stocks up on plenty of disinfectant and bandages.

Dogs like to play:

I'm Barking!,

C'mon-let-me-hold-the-leash, and You're-going-to-have-to-run-very-hard-to-catch-me-and-get-me-back-inside.

The latter game is yet another good reason to always carry a tranquilizer gun. For elderly dogs, the preferred game is Stare-into-space.

Sleep:

For both cats and dogs, the older they get, the more they sleep. They're lazy, they drink malt liquor, and they won't get a job. There's little more to say on this.

Hygiene:

Both cats and dogs lick themselves clean. Who are we to judge those that can? Meanwhile, do not attempt to remove your pet's fur for dry-cleaning. Contrary to indications and statements made by Warner Brothers and certain foreign governments, their fur isn't held in place with snaps, zippers, or even Velcro.

Names:

Cats won't respond to their names, as they are unaware of any sort of connection between them and those sounds coming from your lips. Most petnameologists say an appropriate name for a cat would be something like "bszszszshhhhhddnnn," similar to the sound an electric can opener makes.

Dogs, however, will respond readily to their names, or to any other noise you make. A rule of thumb when naming pooches: the more embarrassing the name would be for a human, the more the dog likes it: Poopy-Dew, Snugglebear, Barfy, and Airhead are all excellent choices.

Noises:

Cats and dogs make assorted sounds, anywhere from the fear of a hiss or a bark to the contentment of a purr or a spreenbeet. (Spreenbeet is the Latin name scientists give to the little-known purring noise dogs make, an undetectable sound that lies outside the range of human hearing.) They also make various coos, trills, and yelps, which reflect hunger, the desire for play, or the fact that you're standing on their tail. Note: To induce howling in a dog, whistle the theme tune to "The Andy Griffith Show."

Tips for burglars: A dog usually will stop barking for the price of a juicy steak and a cold brewski. Cats, however, prefer only a dish of mint ice cream and a few rounds of gin rummy, which you may find too time-consuming, nonetheless.

Shoes:

Neither cats nor dogs require footwear. If the need arises, though, etiquette requires Italian loafers or flats for cats and wing-tips or clogs for dogs.

Television:

Cats like to watch TV. Of course, they like to watch mirrors, too, which demonstrates their vanity or stupidity, scientists aren't sure which. Their preferred method of watching TV is to sit on top and hang over the front while trying to sink their claws into the moving images. Cats also like to sit on whatever you're reading, such as newspapers, or on whatever you're writing, such as bogus science articles (whether paper or computer keyboard is used).

Dogs, however, don't watch television, but they do like to stand in front of them. Tests conducted at the Jet Propulsion Lab (when the staff isn't busy reverse-engineering UFOs) in California have shown that the speed of a dog's strobe-like tail-wagging and its reluctance to move away from the screen increase in direct proportion to how much an owner yells at the canine to get away from the TV.

And Finally, Sex:
Man, it's been a while. •

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