

Managing Fighting Felines

AAHA! Denver

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‘Thousands of years ago, cats were worshipped as gods. Cats have never forgotten this’

Anonymous



Where Did Cats Come From?

- From African wild cat

- Solitary and nocturnal
- Not much known about its behavior

- Cats' appearance changed relatively little

- Relatively few behavior changes

- Flexible social system
- Tolerance of people
- Changes in vocalizations

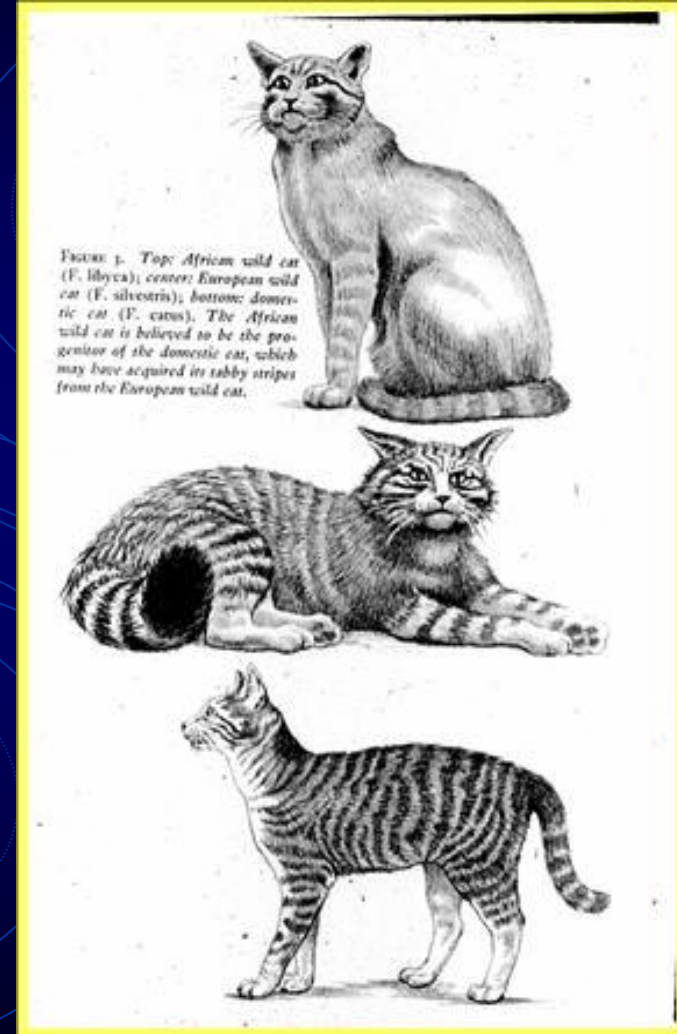
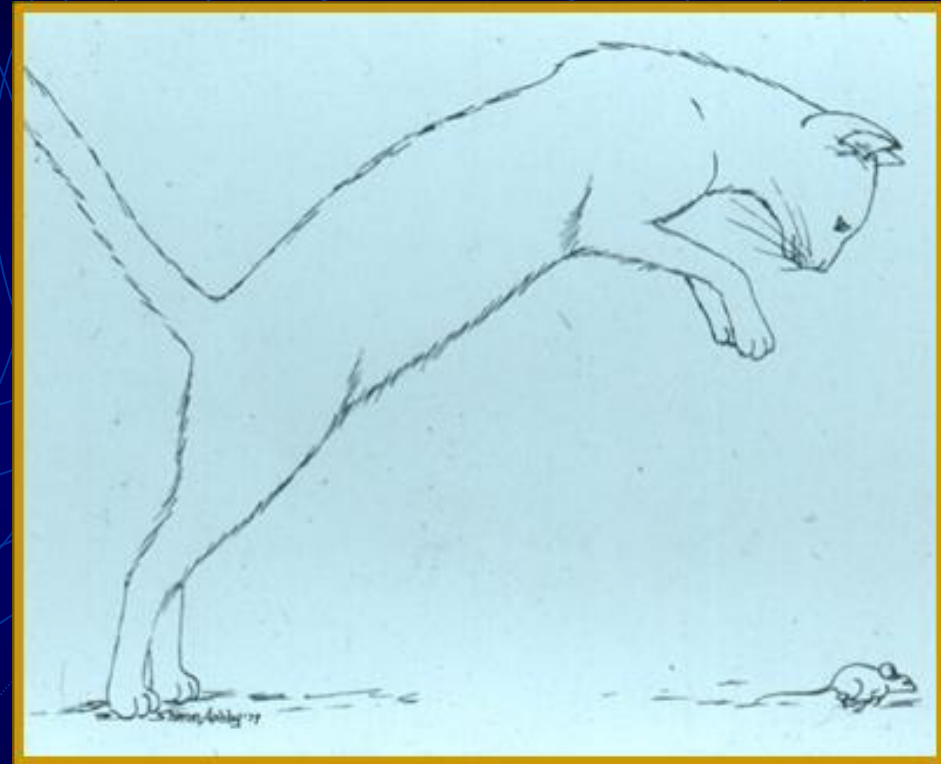


FIGURE 1. Top: African wild cat (*F. libyca*); center: European wild cat (*F. silvestris*); bottom: domestic cat (*F. catus*). The African wild cat is believed to be the progenitor of the domestic cat, which may have acquired its tabby stripes from the European wild cat.

The Nature of Cats

- solitary hunters
- are capable of raising young without depending on a group
- social structure varies
- may have difficulty with group living



The Nature of Cats

- Groups of free-ranging cats often organized around matriarchal lines
- Related queens can engage in cooperative raising of the young
- Adolescent males disperse
- Indoor densities can be 100x greater than free-ranging
- Significant individual variation in tolerance of social-group living



THAT'S JAKE by Jake Vest



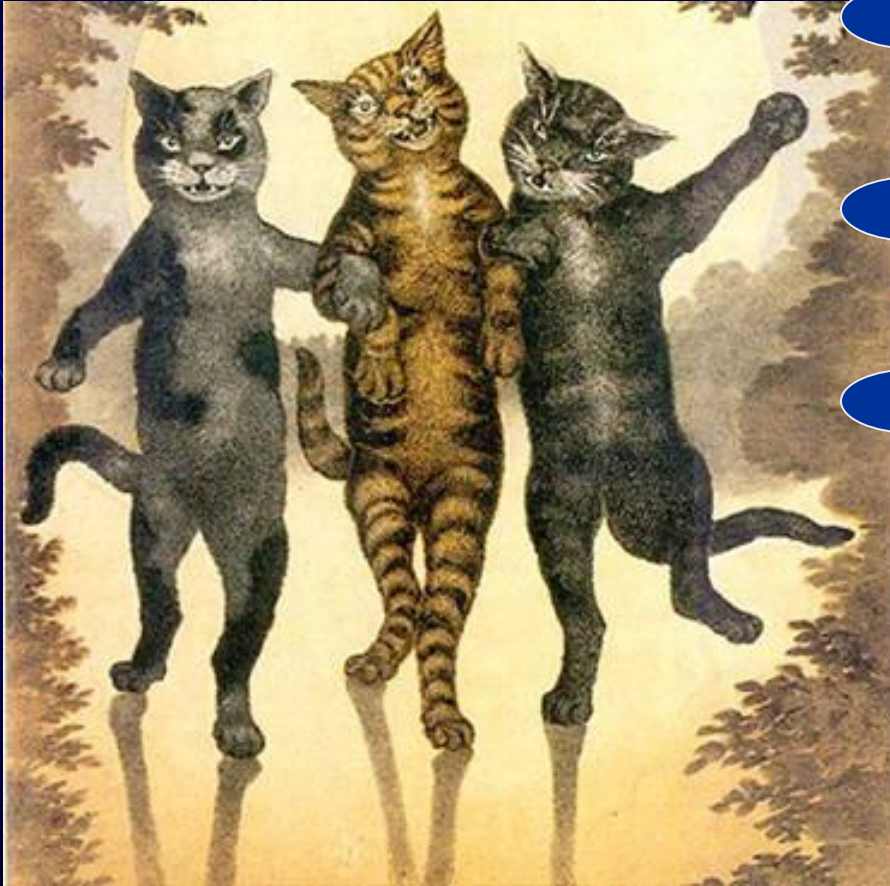
If Lassie had been a cat, Timmy wouldn't have lived through the first TV season.

Looking out for members of your social group is often not on cats' radar screen!

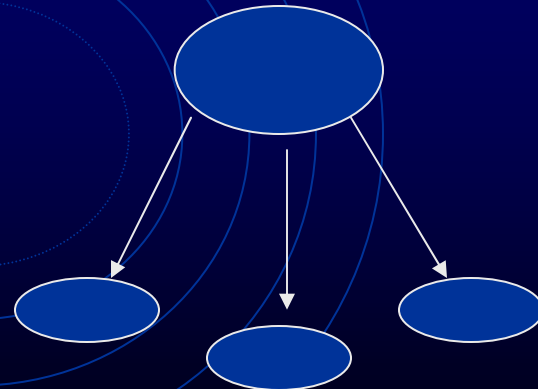
Groups of cats are not a cohesive whole, as a pack is, but can be an aggregate of individual animals with individual relationships

Inc. All

The Nature of Cats



- **+/- social structure**
- **No linear dominance hierarchies**
- **Often despotic**
- **Or mixture**



The Nature of Cats

- **Conflicts seldom “dominance motivated”**
- **Social hierarchies allocate resources and minimize competition**
- **Conflicts about food, toys, etc. among cats are rare**

Sources of Individual Variation

- Genetics
 - Individual personality type
- Socialization history / early experience
 - Sensitive period – 2-7 weeks for socialization to people
 - Not studied in relation to intraspecific relationships
- Later experiences/ learning
- Gender



The Nature of Cats

- very territorial and sensitive to interpersonal distance





Hey you - get off of my cloud!

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The Nature of Cats

- **may stay aroused for long durations**



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Cats Don't Handle Social Conflict Well

Haven't evolved many ritualized ways to settle conflict



The Nature of Cats

- **no equivalent for canine submission**



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The Nature of Cats

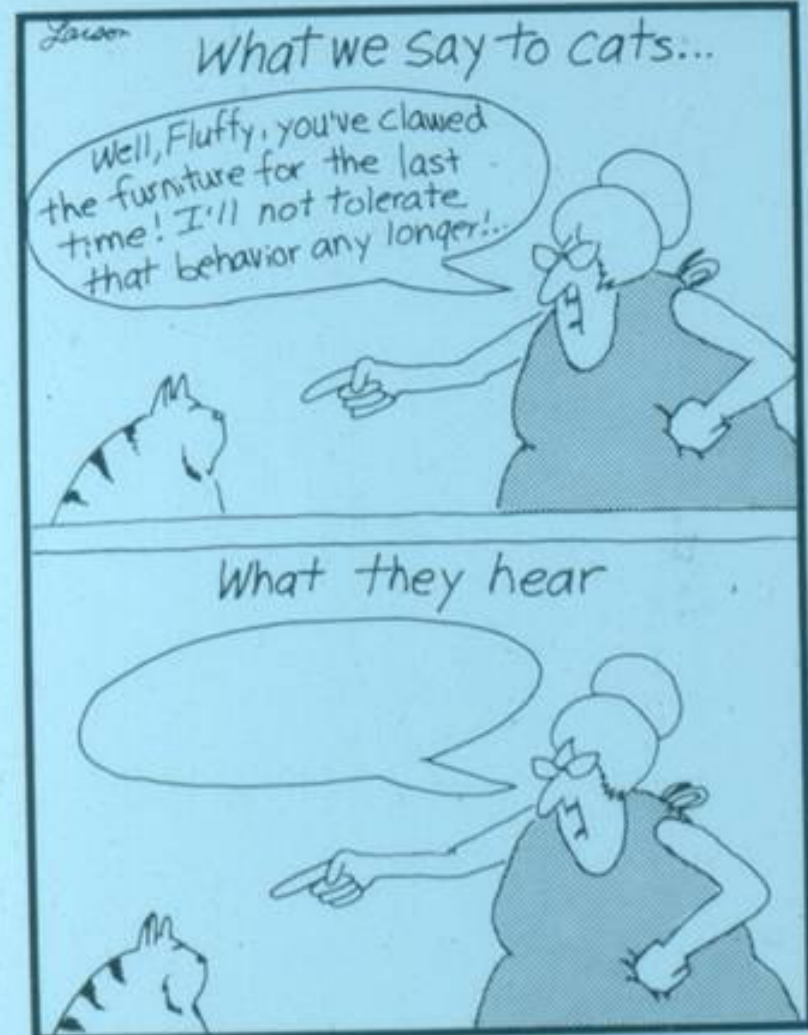


No clear invitation to play – signals can be mis-read = fights

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Cat Communication

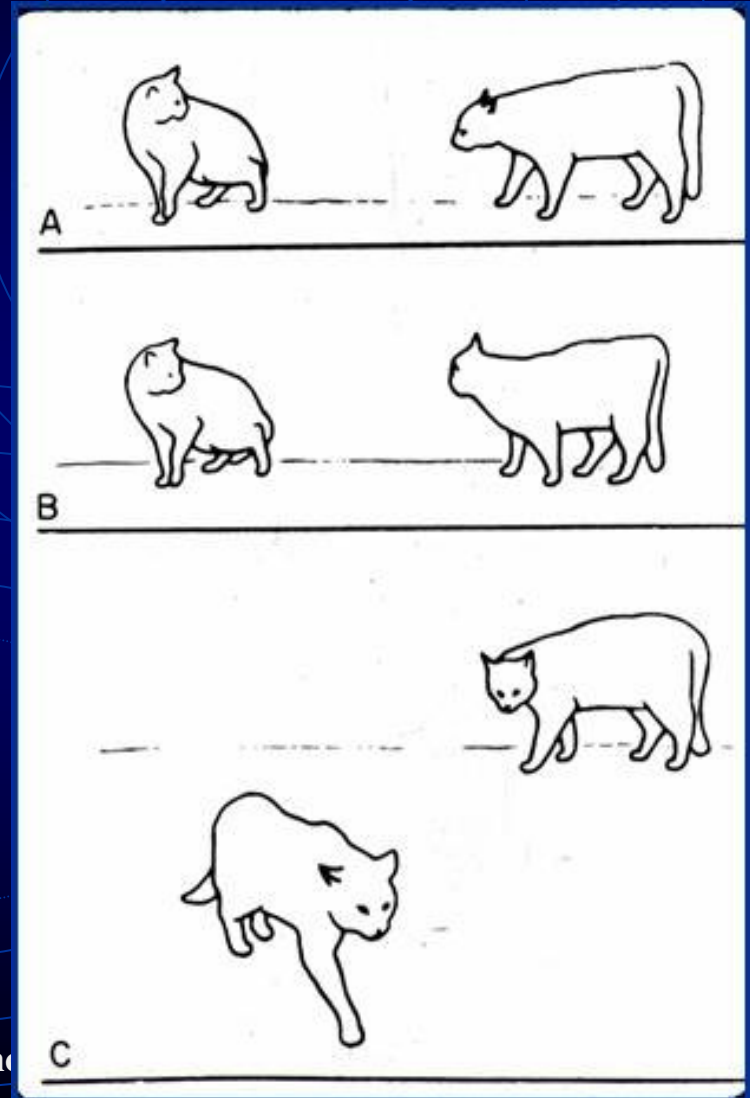
- Don't have as much signaling capability as group living animals
- Subtle body postures, change rapidly
- Owners often miss early signs of problems



What do you do when you're threatened?



Leave - if can't
Can't be submissive
Difficult to signal play
Be defensive
Fewer options



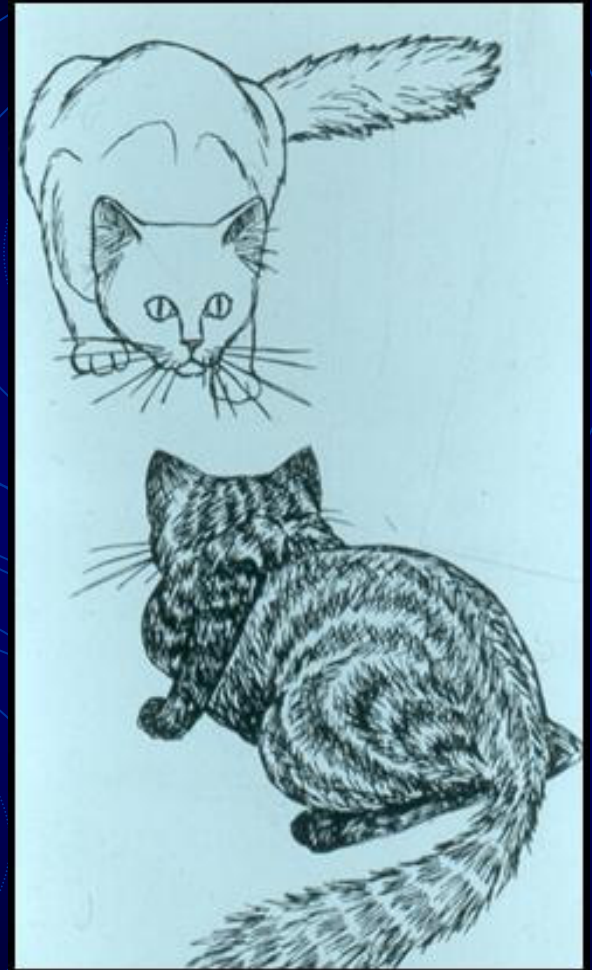
Is Adding Another Cat A Good Idea?

Realistic expectations

May take up to a year for friendly relationship to develop

“Tolerance” after several weeks or months (not days!)

“Good buddies” isn’t always the outcome



Assess the cat's tendencies

- Cat's socialization history, experience with other cats
- How does cat react when sees a cat outside?
- How 'confident', friendly, sociable is the cat?
- How adaptable does cat seem to be?



The background features a blue gradient with three large, overlapping circles. The circles are centered in the upper half of the frame and overlap each other in the center. The text is centered horizontally across the middle of the image.

Reasons for Conflicts Between Cats

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■ Fear/Defensive

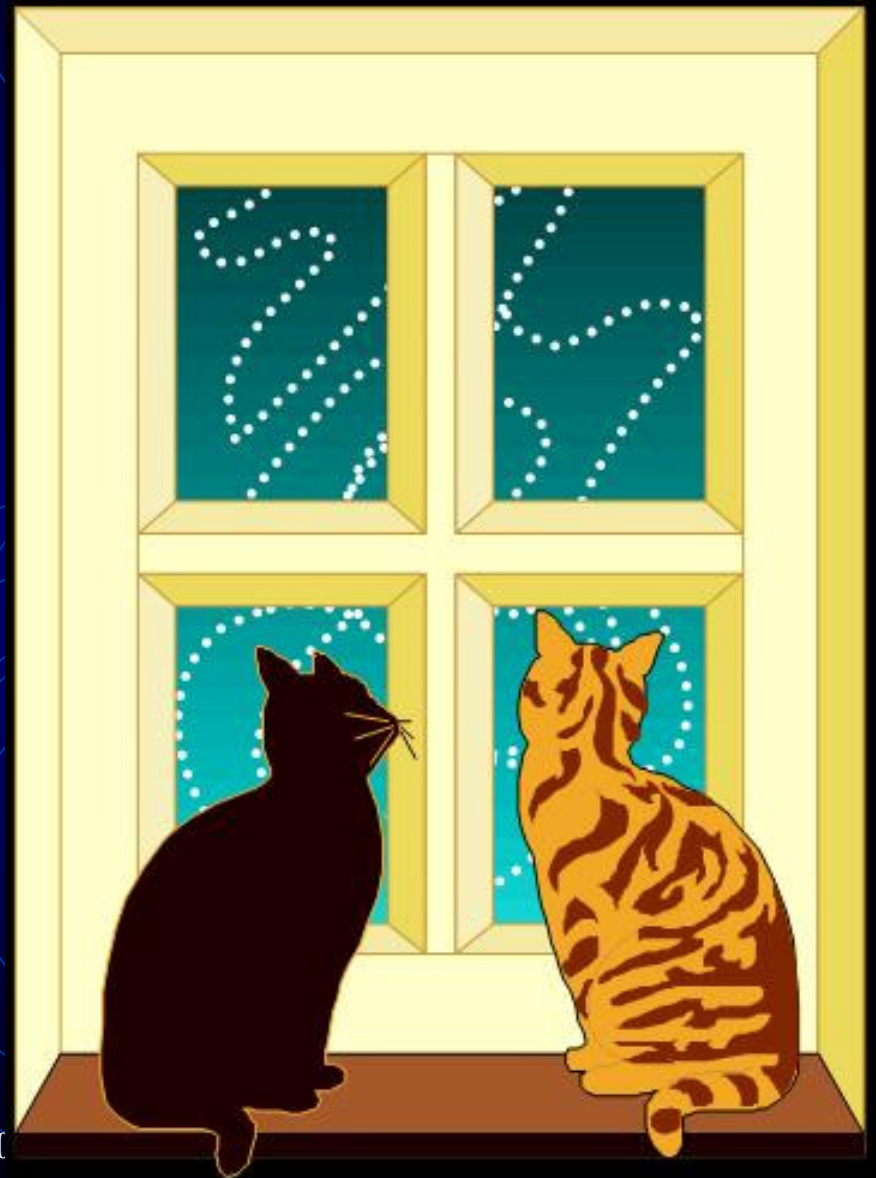
- defensive postures
- wants to keep other cat at a distance /out of personal space
- doesn't want interaction
- Gradual introductions can help prevent



■ Redirected

- Trigger different than target
- offensive or defensive
- response may be delayed

■ Cats have history of getting along



■ Play

- common between young new cat and older resident cat
 - often misinterpreted
 - predatory sequences
 - varied postures
- One cat wants to play, other cat defensive
 - May be lack of socialization, personality and age differences



■ Territorial

- Stalking
- Chasing
- Ambushing
- May be the most difficult to resolve



Preventing Conflicts Between Cats

- **Understand the nature of cats**
- **Help owners decide whether another cat is a good idea**
- **Help owners plan a good introduction******
- **Create an environment to maximize social distance**



Preventing Conflicts Between Cats

- NEVER advise “letting the cats work it out”
- ALWAYS query multi-cat owners about introduction when they first bring in new cat / kitten
- HELP owners “micro-manage” cat introductions

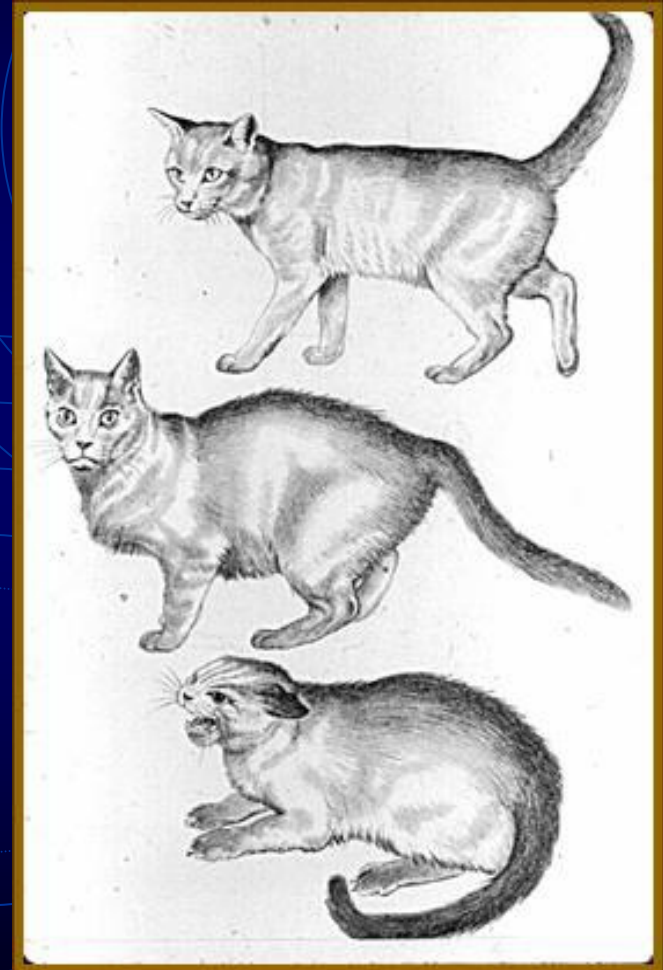


Managing Conflicts Between Cats

- If cats are fighting – must prevent future fights
 - Separate completely if necessary
 - Supervision/separation if fights few and predictable
 - Teach owners to watch body postures
 - Alternate confinement areas
 - Use scented items – if avoid, not ready for visual

What Are Some Signs To Watch For?

- Twitching, swishing tail
- Staring, stalking
- Slinking (defensive/fearful)
- Tense body
- Avoidance
- Lack of friendly, social behavior



Cat Greetings



Dog Greetings



Friendly Behaviors

- Being in close proximity
- Allogrooming
- Allorubbing

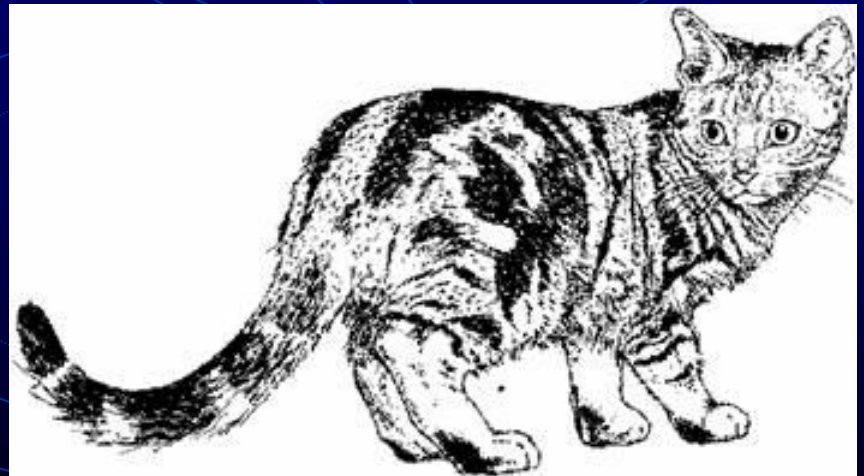


Reintroductions

- Similar to initial introductions
- May take longer because cats have had repeated unpleasant encounters

Proper Re/ Introductions Are Crucial

- Goals
 - Keep arousal levels low
 - Prevent fearful and aggressive reactions
 - Produce calm, enjoyable, relaxed emotional state
- Prohibit visual contact
 - Allow them to hear and smell each other only



(Classical) Counter Conditioning and Desensitization

- Pair “good things” with other cat
- Tiny steps
- Odors first
- Limited visual contact
- Physical contact last step



(Classical) Counter Conditioning and Desensitization Process

- ◆ Each should associate the other with 'good things'
- ◆ Food, play, petting
- ◆ Goal – both calmly approach door
- ◆ Practice 4-6x/day

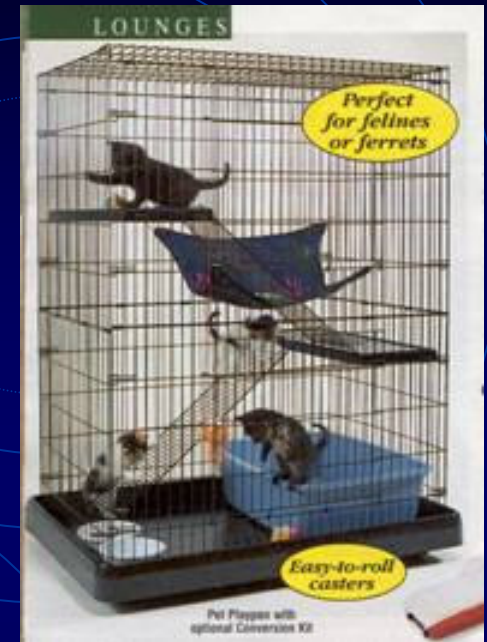


- Gradually permit limited visual, tactile interactions



Intermediate Steps

- Crate /cage
- “Tethering”
- Screen door



<http://www.hdw-inc.com/walkingjackets.htm>

Maximize Social Distance Between Cats

- Design environment so that necessities are in multiple locations
 1. more than one feeding location



2. Provide multiple scratching objects in multiple locations



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3. Provide multiple litterboxes, in multiple locations



4. Provide multiple resting sites, observation locations



5. Cats need hiding places; safe places, escape routes to increase social distance



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6. Make use of vertical space



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Play Problems

- Provide alternative play opportunities for playful cat
- Separate, “anchor” play-cat when together
- Consider medication for fearful/defensive cat
- Squirt gun, etc, unlikely to be helpful because of incorrect timing
- Magnetic cat door

Territorial Problems

- May be quite difficult to resolve
- Often requires prolonged separation
- Counter conditioning and desensitization
- “Anchor” technique may work
- “Time out” maybe



Redirected Aggression

- Best prognosis
- Takes time
- Essentially a re-introduction process

Medication*

- *Tricyclic antidepressants (amitriptyline, clomipramine)
- *SSRIs (fluoxetine, paroxetine)
- *Anxiolytics
- NOT buspirone
- Administration can be a problem
- Pheromones???
- *Landsberg, Hunthausen, Ackerman, 2003

IMO - It is not acceptable for a cat to be frightened or harassed so that she is constantly hiding or stressed

Recommendation -
Either work with problem or find home for one of the cats



Behavioral Signs of Stress, Decreased Quality of Life

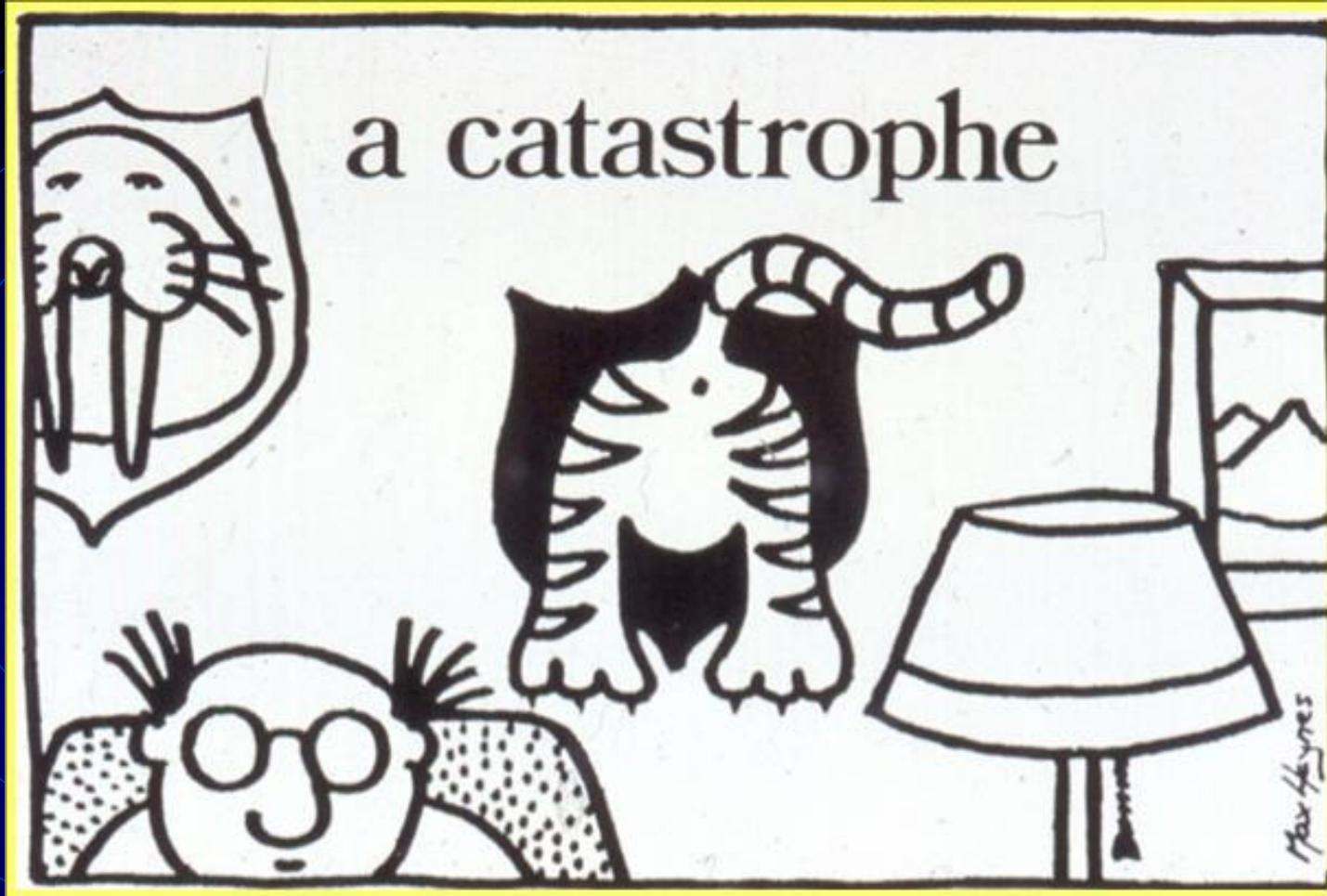
- ☞ Repetitive behaviors (stereotypies)
 - **pacing, circling, tail chasing**
- ☞ Self-mutilation
 - **hair-pulling, licking, tail chewing**
- ☞ Fear
 - **hiding**
 - **inactivity**
 - **sleeping**
- ☞ Compulsive eating/drinking, or failure to eat/drink
- ☞ Diseases influenced by stress, lowered immune function
- ☞ Decreased or hyper responsiveness to stimuli

What We Want

Modest Sunbathers



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THANK YOU

What We Are Trying To Avoid!

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THE END



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