

Breed Traits

Your cat's hunting and marking behaviors can be traced to its wild ancestors.

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Your cat climbs up in your lap and kneads your tummy before getting comfy. You walk down the hallway dodging your cat scrambling between your feet. You watch your cat claw your favorite recliner wondering, "why?" Rest assured, its not personal. Your cat is only doing what comes naturally.

Hunting Behaviors

According to Nancy Peterson, issues specialist for The Humane Society of the United States in Washington D.C., the predatory and social behaviors of today's cat hasn't changed much since feline domestication centuries ago.

"If you share your life with a cat, you've witnessed their hunting abilities," Peterson says. "Whether chasing a fly on the wall or the light of a laser pointer, the cat is hunting. You need to give your cat an outlet for this natural drive."

Jill Goldman, Ph.D., certified applied animal behaviorist of Carletons Place in Laguna Beach, Calif., agrees. There are three basic hunting traits in cats: stalking, chasing and pouncing, Goldman says. First, the cat observes his preys behavior, then waits, chases and pounces.

Goldman says that in the wild, cats have plenty of opportunities to act out these behaviors, but not so as housepets.

"If a domestic cat isn't given the chance to participate in positive hunting behaviors, he will participate in unacceptable behaviors, like chasing the owners feet, hands or eyes, or pouncing on peoples faces in response to curiosity over rapid eye movement during REM sleep," Goldman says. "These acts are not aggression. The cat just isn't getting enough proper stimulation to allow it to respond to its basic genetic code, which includes hunting behaviors."

Goldman suggests object and interactive play to redirect unwanted behaviors.

"In object play, the pet owner puts bits of the cats food inside a toy; the cat works to get it out, thus answering its need for physical and mental stimulation," Goldman says. "In interactive play, the pet owner interacts with the cat using a toy to attract his attention several times each day. If the owner doesn't have time, an automated interactive toy can be used, like a mechanical cat dancer."