

The Evolution of Cats

Peter Gerstenzang, CatChannel's humor columnist, clarifies the mystery of cat history.

For some time now, I have wondered, "Where do cats come from?" This question is not to be confused with, "Where are cats coming from?" (That's more of a hipster question and can be answered easily with, "They're cool, man, and do pretty much what they please.") I want to go back to, say, prehistoric times and find out if cave people kept cats as pets. Or, if there were saber-toothed tigers back then (a cat ancestor), did they keep cave people as pets? So, I dug around and found plenty about how our beloved pet cats came to be ...

Fossilized dental records show that the earliest version of cats roamed the Earth nearly 200 hundred million years ago. Some experts think that a few of those cats still actually roam the Earth. As you can imagine, they are tired, grouchy and don't want to answer any questions such as, "Where have you been keeping yourself?" As for the saber-toothed tigers, it's still up for debate whether they evolved into the big cats of today.

Approximately 3 million years ago, a wide variety of cats were everywhere, except for the Arctic, Antarctic and the inhospitable tundra regions. Of course, some wild cats live in these spots now. Many of them hope to start an exchange program where they trade with cats that live where it's sunny and warm. In fact, if your cat misbehaves, you only need to hint that he's on his way to the frozen tundra, and he will immediately behave better and attempt to make the bed.

The earliest records of domesticated cats go back to the desert-dwelling creatures in Egypt 2,000 years ago. However, most cats have made it clear that the only place worse than the frozen tundra is the desert. Don't tell them it's simply the world's biggest litterbox. They will give you a look that in cat lingo means, "We've been burned on that one before, buddy."

Records show that a rounded head and a skeletal structure for agility means that most cats evolved from one common prehistoric ancestor. However, because most cats fancy themselves as quite regal, they resent the term "common" and hope someday to see it erased from the history books.

Finally, cats have evolved with good forward, sideways and night vision but little ability to distinguish color. In other words, they are excellent at seeing and capturing a field mouse. But if they bring it inside, drop it, and it doesn't match the hallway rug, cut the cat some slack. Say nothing about it, and dispose of the mouse when your cat isn't looking. If you want to replace it with a more color-coordinated mouse, that can be accomplished at another time. The best part? Your cat won't notice the difference.

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