

Housecat Ancestors Discovered

Researchers have traced the housecat's ancestors back to the Near Eastern wildcat.

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An international research team has traced the ancestry of the domestic housecat back to the Near Eastern wildcat. The research suggests that the Near Eastern wildcat was domesticated from at least five maternal lineages in the Fertile Crescent.

Carlos Driscoll and his research team studied the evolutionary relationships among domestic cats and the wildcat subspecies: the European wildcat, the Near Eastern wildcat, the Central Asian wildcat, the southern African wildcat and the Chinese desert cat. The researchers sampled genetic material from 979 cats and analyzed the variation among DNA sequences at a variety of "marker" spots within the genomes to determine which lineages were most closely related.

The researchers learned that each of the wildcat subspecies, as well as the housecats, fell into a group or "clade" that was genetically distinct. The researchers also learned that the lineage that includes the domestic cat and several wild relatives originated over 100,000 years ago, earlier than was previously surmised.