

CATS!:

People either love them or hate them--there is seldom an "in between". There are now 10 million more cat owners than dog owners. Why do cat lovers fancy their felines? Let's look at the origin of cats first.

Two tribes of cats once existed, but one did not survive the Ice Age. The species of saber-toothed cats is now extinct. The surviving tribe consisted of cats identical to those alive today. The large cats such as the lion, tiger, puma, jaguar and leopard are all on the endangered list now. Many of the smaller cats like the ocelot, lynx, and serval are diminishing, primarily from destroyed habitats. Historians generally agree that the cat's association with man began in Egypt about 5,000 years ago when small cats came in from the wild to feed on the rats and mice at civilization's granaries. The well-fed cats were so appreciated by the Egyptians that they were protected by law and raised to the rank of deity. The female cat goddess, Bastet, was believed to control the fertility of humans and their livestock. Anyone killing a cat, even by accident, was condemned to death. When a cat died, its body was mummified and many centuries later more than 250,000 mummified cats were exhumed from just one cemetery.

After the birth of Christianity, the cat was associated with paganism, and the belief grew that they were creatures of Satan and "familiar" of witches. (Remember Pywackit from the movie "Bell, Book and Candle"?) However, in the 19th century cats regained favor as the bubonic or black plague swept Europe and the people realized that cats were taking care of the dreaded rats that carried the plague. For example, the British Museum was kept rat free for 20 years by "Mike", a cat that maintained punctual and loyal service from 1909 to 1929.

All domestic cats belong to the same species, "Felis Catus", though there are now more than 30 breeds. The most popular is the Persian, followed by the Maine coon and the Siamese. The first cat show was in England in 1871 and today there are hundreds of sanctioned cat shows throughout the world.

SOME FUN FACTS ABOUT CATS:

A group of cats is called a clowder; a litter of kittens is a kundle.

All kittens are born with blue eyes; after a few weeks they develop another color. Cats are color-blind, but as their eyes are able to reflect light, they can see in the dark. Blue-eyed white cats are almost always deaf.

Cats can sneak through an opening that is smaller than they are because the cat has little or no collarbone - and its chest cavity is "scrunchable".

Cats don't get carsick, unlike dogs and people - something to do with the inner ear.

All cats carry the tabby gene from their ancestors.

Cats sleep about 16 hours a day.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: If you are ready to add a cat to your family, would

you want a pure-bred or would you rather go to the animal shelter and not be concerned about the cat's lineage? Be prepared to expand on your choice.