

# Super Cats

True Stories of Felines  
That Made History



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With lots of love to those purr-fect cats  
Percy, Poppy, and Callie and their family  
Sarah, Emily, Melanie, Shane, Judy, and Frank—EM



# Contents



Cool Cats .....	<b>4</b>
Cat Gods.....	<b>6</b>
Bad Luck Cats.....	<b>16</b>
Good Luck Cats.....	<b>26</b>
Inspiring Cats .....	<b>36</b>
Feline Hunting Machines.....	<b>46</b>
Working Cats .....	<b>54</b>
Spy Cats.....	<b>64</b>
Cats That Help and Heal.....	<b>72</b>
Time Line.....	<b>82</b>
Places to Visit.....	<b>84</b>
Main Sources .....	<b>85</b>
Further Reading.....	<b>86</b>
Photo Credits.....	<b>87</b>
Index .....	<b>88</b>



## Cool Cats



**M**ysterious, playful, skilled hunters, cuddly—cats are all of these things. From being revered as gods in ancient Egypt to being featured in Internet videos, felines fascinate us.

Cats can even change history. These animals have saved people's lives during wars. They've inspired inventors, musicians, and writers and exposed spies. Born with the instinct to hunt, cats are "hired" to control rodent populations in libraries, factories, and even museums! Some felines are so tuned in to how humans feel that they can predict when patients are about to pass away.

There's no "pussyfooting around" (which means to avoid the truth)—cats are the world's most popular pet. Researchers estimate there may be as many as 600 million pet cats in the world. The largest number of these live in the United States, where there are more than 75 million pet cats. No wonder something terrific is described as the "cat's meow," "cat's pajamas," or "cat's whiskers."



If it's "raining cats and dogs," people know to stay inside unless they want to look like "something the cat dragged in." The stage that models strut along is called a "catwalk," since they have to walk it as lightly as a cat does. Today, a "cool cat" means anyone who's savvy and hip. But originally, it was a top jazz musician who was skilled and as aloof as a cat.

Because cats have lived with people for at least 9,500 years, there are many legends and superstitions about them—especially about black ones. But it's no myth that owning a cat makes you healthier. According to a number of medical studies, petting a cat is calming and cat owners are less likely to have high blood pressure or heart disease. A cat can even learn to detect when its owner is sad and may meow and cuddle more to try to make her feel happier.

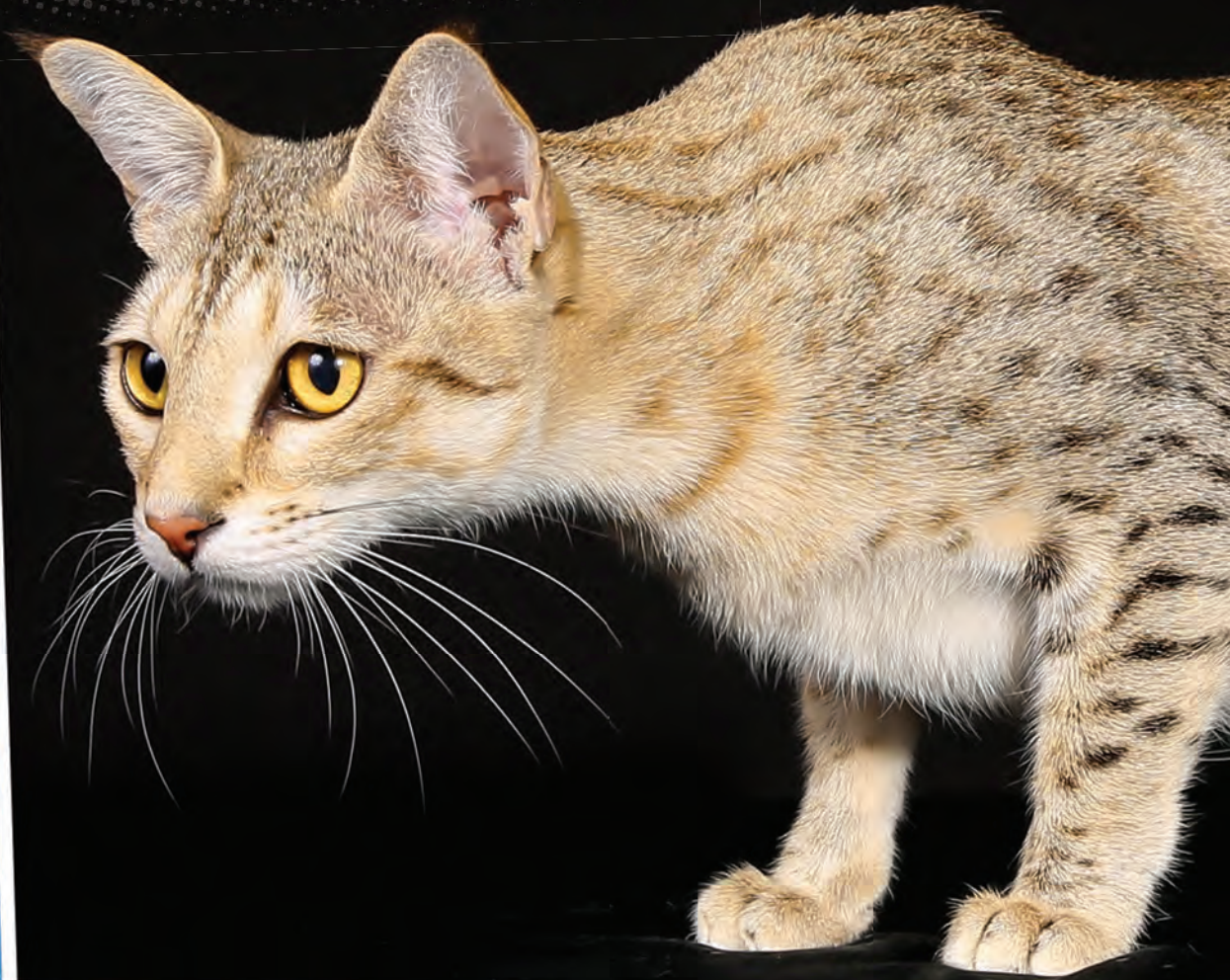
Many people think cats only hang out with humans to get fed, but scientists have shown that felines actually think people are—well, the cat's meow! A study carried out in 2017 by researchers at Oregon State University proved that cats love buddying up with people even more than they like food, toys, or even catnip.


Cats have flown into space, helped police with cases, and tracked down smugglers. The "cat's out of the bag" (which means the secret's been revealed)—cats are amazing animals!



# Cat Gods

## Cat Worship in Ancient Egypt





**M**iu<sup>t</sup> stretched and yawned. She'd had her usual breakfast of the most delicious lamb, fish, pork, and eggs her owners could provide. It had been so good that she hadn't even helped herself to meat from her master's plate. Royal cats might be fed even better food, but Miu<sup>t</sup> was very content with how her family treated her.

Sniffing the air, Miu<sup>t</sup> decided to walk through her small village to see if anything interesting was happening. Yesterday, she and her master had ridden in his horse-drawn chariot near a river where they'd spent the day hunting. In the morning, Miu<sup>t</sup> had raced through the grasses to retrieve birds her master had shot with his bow and arrow. Then, in the afternoon, she'd fetched fish for him from the edge of the water.

Just thinking about that fish made Miu<sup>t</sup> hungry. So she headed to the marketplace. She passed a whole family of people—a father, mother, and their four children—with shaved eyebrows. But Miu<sup>t</sup> hardly noticed anything odd about it, since she'd seen it so often.

As she loped past the stalls on her long, black-striped legs, the owners offered her tidbits of meat or chunks of fish to show how much they honored and respected cats. She gobbled them down, licked her whiskers, and kept going.

The Egyptian sun beat down on the village, so Miu<sup>t</sup> slipped inside a storehouse full of grain to rest for a moment. But she soon realized she wasn't alone. Her pale green eyes widened as she peered about. As she crept through the dusty gloom, her gray-beige fur with its dark spots camouflaged her.

Then suddenly, she saw it—a snake! Miu<sup>t</sup> silently edged closer and lowered herself into an attack crouch. With one pounce, she was on the wriggling beast. A quick bite just behind the snake's head, and soon the hunter was crunching down on her lunch.



Ancient Egyptians believed that if they wore amulets (charms) of cats, cat goddess **Bastet** would protect them.

### **Meow!**

The people of ancient Mesopotamia (today's Iraq and surrounding area) likely domesticated cats as early as 8000 BCE, long before the Egyptians did.

Miut started to think about the cozy bed waiting for her in her house. As she headed back, she passed a house on fire. Most of the people rushed about frantically with water, but there was a line of men standing outside the blazing building. The men became very worried when they noticed Miut and carefully watched her until she was safely past the fiery site.

The sun was sinking when Miut ambled into her home. The children rushed to pat her and play with her. After supper, while the family relaxed together, Miut crawled under her mistress's chair, curled herself up, and was soon fast asleep, happily dreaming of mice and birds.

## **Pest Control**

In ancient Egypt, the most honored and revered animal was the cat. The relationship between Egyptians and felines began around 2000 BCE when farmers were trying to solve the problem of mice and rats eating their grain and other food. Someone noticed African wildcats hunting the pests and began to leave out treats, such as fish heads, to encourage the cats to visit regularly.

The cats appreciated the easy food supply of both prey and snacks. Living close to humans kept them safe from larger predators too. Soon, cats were welcomed into the Egyptians' houses. The felines hunted the poisonous snakes, stinging scorpions, and dirty rodents that crept into the homes. The humans provided the cats with a safe place to raise their kittens.

## **It's a Crime to Kill a Cat**

In their homes, the cats ate the finest wild birds, goat meat, and even honey cakes and were allowed to help themselves to anything on the master's plate. Despite their love of cats, Egyptians rarely gave their pets names.



Female cats—tame or wild—were mostly called Miut (“she who meows”) while males were named Miu (“he who meows”).

When a cat died, a priest inspected the corpse to make sure it had died naturally. It was a crime to kill a cat, even accidentally, and the penalty was death.

Then the cat’s owners began weeks of mourning. This included everyone in the household shaving their eyebrows to show their sorrow. (The mourning period was over when people’s eyebrows had grown back.) They also held elaborate funerals where they beat their chests to express their grief.

Ancient Egyptians were very concerned about keeping cats safe and healthy. If a house caught fire, a line of men surrounded the flaming building. Their sole job was to watch out for nearby cats that might be attracted by the heat of the blaze and keep them out of danger.



Around 1500 BCE people began to create tomb paintings showing cats as part of everyday life.