

# Cats: Making Themselves at Home

Read.

Does a cat live in your house? Is he or she your pet? Or does your cat just seem like a long-term visitor who counts on you for a meal? Unlike dogs, who seem like they were born to please people, many cats lead their own lives. There is lots of evidence showing the relationship between humans and dogs and how it evolved. The relationship between humans and cats is trickier.

Scientists think cats became *domesticated* around 12,000 years ago, while dogs may have begun living closely with humans as long as 33,000 years ago. Evidence of this relationship between cats and humans comes from countries around the Middle East and Mediterranean Sea.

But why did humans and cats get comfortable with each other? It's simple, scientists say. While dogs helped early humans with the hunt and with guarding their settlements, cats were important in another way. As early humans settled more permanently in agricultural communities, they began storing their harvests, such as grain. Stored grain was a target of *vermin*, such as mice and rats. Wild cats hunting these vermin soon found the human settlements and made themselves at home. The cats killed the mice and rats but didn't eat the grain. People were happy to have the cats around!

So while early humans trained dogs to hunt, manage and guard their herds, and protect their communities, cats were different from the beginning. Cats simply made themselves at home. Scientists think that as people and cats grew comfortable with each other, the gentler and more social cats were invited into people's homes as pets. Today, cats are the most common house pet, living in 34% of American homes.

Cats have enjoyed an interesting relationship with humans. In ancient Egypt, it was considered a crime to kill a cat. In the Middle Ages in Europe, cats were considered evil. You might get the feeling cats really don't care what we think about them—as long as we offer up a gentle rub or scratch whenever the cat is ready.



Cats may often seem aloof, but many cats enjoy the companionship of a friend. IFAW works with organizations across Mexico to raise the level of care for cats like these.

# Questions



Cats have been our companions for thousands of years. This kitty and others at the Humane Society of Cozumel are looking for help from IFAW to find good homes.

1. In what region of the world do scientists think cat domestication first took place?  
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2. True or false? In Europe during the middle ages, it was illegal to kill a cat. Highlight this information in the passage.  
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3. In your own words, describe what the word **vermin** means in the third paragraph.  
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4. According to the article, which of these was not something early domesticated dogs helped humans with?
  - a. keeping people warm
  - b. guarding settlements
  - c. helping with herds
  - d. hunting
5. In your own words, explain why scientists think cats first came into human settlements.  
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### Answers

1. the Middle East and around the Mediterranean Sea
2. False
3. Generally, the word **vermin** means any small, common, and harmful or objectionable animal that is difficult to control, such as mice, fleas, or rats.
4. a
5. In general, the following section provides the answer: *As early humans settled more permanently in agricultural communities, they began storing their harvests, such as grain. Stored grain was a target of vermin, such as mice and rats. Wild cats hunting these vermin soon found the human settlements and made themselves at home. The cats killed the mice and rats but didn't eat the grain. People were happy to have the cats around!*

