

Butte **Humane** Society



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# Cats Training Manual

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Saving Lives.  
Finding Homes.  
Inspiring Compassion.

[www.buttehumane.org](http://www.buttehumane.org)

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*Disclaimer: This manual is subject to change without notice. For the most current information visit: [www.buttehumane.org](http://www.buttehumane.org) or contact the Volunteer Coordinator [Kailynlopezpadilla@buttehumane.org](mailto:Kailynlopezpadilla@buttehumane.org) or 530.343.7917 ext. 310 or Adoptions at ext. 101.*

## Welcome

Welcome to the wonderful world of cats! By this time you have already learned the basic ins-and-outs of Butte Humane Society and now it's your chance to become familiar with how cats are cared for and handled at the shelter. This training manual and associated training courses will give you the knowledge and tools you need to enrich the daily lives of cats housed at Butte Humane Society and help them find loving homes.

As a volunteer, you are committed to helping Butte Humane Society fulfill its mission. The service you provide our animals is incredibly valuable, and the BHS staff is here to support you every step of the way. If at any point during your service, you have questions, concerns, or suggestions regarding any animal at the shelter, please do not hesitate to contact any of the staff.

**Thank you** for signing up to volunteer with us and improve the lives of homeless pets. We strive to make your experience as a volunteer as enjoyable, educational, and rewarding as possible.



## **The Intake Process**

Cats and kittens are acquired by Butte Humane Society through our re-homing program. This means that owners submit an application to have their cat(s) or kitten(s) surrendered to BHS, for whatever reason or circumstance, so we can then adopt them out to new homes.

## **Safety is Key**

As a volunteer cat handler, we expect you to use common sense when working with animals. It is impossible to train you for every situation that might arise during your volunteer service but we hope this training will provide you with the necessary tools to help you think quickly and practice good judgment. We also hope you will take the initiative to ask questions throughout your volunteer service. **If you are ever unsure about handling an animal, please contact a Mentor, a more experienced volunteer, or a member of the Butte Humane Society staff immediately so they can assist you.**

## **Safety and Well-Being**

Safety when handling animals is a top priority at Butte Humane Society. The shelter environment can be very stressful and shelter cat behavior can be unpredictable. Maintaining animal well-being and working with minimal restraint is optimal, but the safety of volunteers and staff **always** comes first.

## **What to do if you are injured while volunteering**

Volunteers who are injured while providing service for BHS (either on or off-site) must report their injuries to the Volunteer Coordinator or another supervisor immediately. A witness statement must be filed for any major injury or wound involving broken skin. Any animal bite or scratch that draws blood must be documented and the animal quarantined for 10 days. Concealing injury or failing to report accidents is not encouraged.

## **Animal Identification**

Kennel cards with the animal identification number as well as the animal name, status, type, breed, sex, and age are on each cat's kennel. Kennel cards may also include pictures and a short narrative describing known characteristics.

## **Cell Phones**

Unless used to take photos and video of our animals for the purpose of sharing on social media, cell phone use is prohibited. You are there for the cats and if you are on your cell phone you are putting the animal and yourself at risk because you are not paying attention to your surroundings. If you need to use your cell phone, please step outside the building.

## Cross Contamination Protocol

Diseases spread quickly in the shelter environment. It is important to take every precaution to prevent an outbreak of diseases and illnesses such as calicivirus, ringworm, and upper respiratory infections. The CCP must be followed religiously for the safety of our cats.

**Wear Gloves**—Gloves must be worn when touching under-vaccinated cats and kittens. The gloves must never touch more than one feline. This means that **you must change gloves between cages**. Do not touch door handles with gloves, contaminated or otherwise. When removing gloves take one off and bundle it in the hand with the glove still on. Carefully reach your ungloved middle and forefinger between your wrist and the glove and wrap the bundled glove while you take the second glove off. **Due to shortage of gloves, please make sure to sanitize your hands with hand sanitizer after every kennel**



**Under-Vaccinated** – Refers to cats or kittens that have not yet completed their vaccination schedules. Kittens' immune systems aren't considered fully developed until they are 16 weeks of age. Until then they must receive vaccinations every week, or depending on health, two to three weeks. Adult animals get a vaccine upon arrival and then a booster two weeks later. Rabies vaccines are given at three months of age, a year after the first rabies vaccine, and then every three years after that.



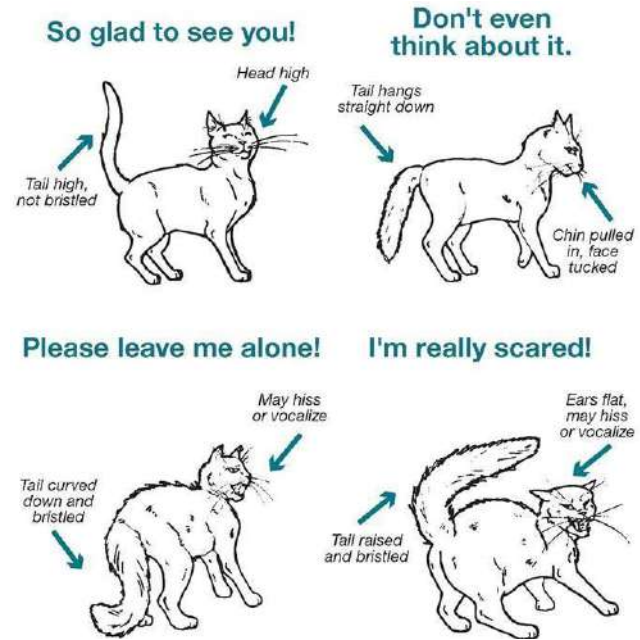
**Blankets**- When holding an under-vaccinated cat or kitten against your chest, put a towel between your clothes and the feline. Change towels as you would gloves. Towels can be found in the tall cabinet when you enter the under-vaccinated cattery, if there are none you may go back to the supply room and grab blue towels with which to restock the cabinet. If no blue towels are available, green is the backup color. Blue is the color of the public catteries. Other colored towels, blankets, and pads are used by the clinic.

**Rescue™** (formerly Accel) is the name of the disinfectant we rely on to kill tough bacteria found in shelters. It is accelerated hydrogen peroxide and is used to eliminate harmful bacteria. The cages and catteries are cleaned by **trained staff**.

## Interpreting Cat Behavior

There are many behavioral signs in cats that may indicate fear, anxiety, and/or depression. These are important to recognize in order to respect the animal's comfort. Some indicators are more severe and obvious than others and a definitive interpretation is not always available. Below are a few signs that indicate a cat might be frightened or depressed:

| Signs of a frightened cat:  | Signs of an anxious cat:  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ears back</li> <li>• Hissing</li> <li>• Striking</li> <li>• Hiding</li> <li>• Dilated Pupils</li> <li>• Wide Eyes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crouching posture</li> <li>• Tucked tail</li> <li>• Low ears</li> <li>• Alertness</li> <li>• Wide eyes</li> <li>• Surveying</li> </ul> |



### Stop Bites Before They Happen

The shelter atmosphere can be extremely stressful for animals and even though they are all evaluated, certain situations or environmental triggers may cause an animal to act out or become aggressive towards people or other animals. Animals can show signs of aggression for various reasons and sometimes without any warning. Unfamiliarity with the environment, illness, medical treatments, confined housing situations, isolation, boredom, and maternal instincts can all contribute to the stress and potential aggression of a shelter animal. Stay alert and exercise extreme caution when handling

animals that exhibit signs of fear and/or aggression. If you are unsure of how to handle an animal that might become aggressive, contact a staff member immediately.

## **Recognizing Stress**

Cats can display a wide variety of physical and verbal cues to indicate their levels of stress and anxiety. Understanding a cat's emotional state is the first step to alleviate unwanted symptoms and help the cat feel at ease.

- **Excessive Shedding**
  - There are muscles that are tensed and activated during times of stress and there are hair follicles attached to some of these muscles. When the muscles contract several of the hairs are released.
- **Excessive Grooming**
  - Stressed cats will often start over-grooming themselves. This will include excessive licking, scratching and biting at their bodies. Over-grooming can lead to skin irritation or infections, so it is important to monitor this behavior closely.
- **Tail Position**
  - Many anxious, nervous or stressed cats will hold their tail in a low position and flick it quickly back and forth.
- **Gastrointestinal Upset**
- **Hiding**
  - Cats experiencing a great deal of stress and anxiety will remove themselves from the situation and attempt to hide in a location where they feel safer.
- **Aggression**
  - In contrast to those animals that react to anxious or stressful situations by hiding, some of our cats will react by being aggressive humans. Cats will utilize their claws and their razor sharp teeth when they feel cornered and stressed.
- **Ear Positioning and Pupil Dilation**
  - Stressed cats will often pin their ears back flat on their head as a warning to those nearby. In addition, their eyes will widen and their pupils will dilate in stressful situations.
- **Vocalizing**
  - Cats placed in stressful situations will often vocalize to display their displeasure. This can be meowing, growling, hissing or a high-pitched yowling. During these times of distress it's best to give the cat space and avoid intense handling or interaction. These can be warning signals that could lead to aggressive behaviors, including scratching or biting. Silent cats may also be anxious and expectantly lash out on a person handling them in times of stress, so it is best to always take into account the cat's entire body language.
- **Heavy Breathing**

- An extremely stressed cat will display signs of increased respiratory effort. This often correlates to an increase in heart rate and pulse. In these situations, the body is outwardly displaying signs of stress that the pet is experiencing internally.

When a cat is expressing signs of stress it's best to leave it alone and move on to another that will benefit from your attention.

## Catteries & Supply Rooms

There are two catteries in which we house our healthy, adoptable cats. These catteries are open to the public. The catteries are fairly small, so it is important to allow potential adopters space to make the life changing decision of expanding their family.

### Cattery 1 & 2

These catteries are the first rooms you step into when walking into the cat adoption lobby, they house caged cats only. The majority of the cats in the cages are under vaccinated cats and kittens but some are resting after surgery or cannot be in the free roam cattery for various reasons. Volunteers and members of the public are permitted to pet or hold the cats if following cross contamination protocol.

### Free Roams

These catteries are free roaming cats only. The cats that are free roam don't require gloves to be touched. These cats benefit from daily socialization and enrichment from volunteers.



### Sick and Transition Rooms

The sick room and transition rooms are off limits to everyone but staff. These rooms contain contagious cats and need to be avoided. They will be labeled with a sign that says Staff Only. **Volunteers may not enter any room that says Staff Only.**

### Supply Room

In the supply room, which is towards the Volunteer Lounge, you will find blankets, toys, and treats for the cats. You will be shown exactly where these things are in your Shadow Shift.

The wash room for dishes is also located in this room.

### Laundry Room

The laundry room is located down the hallway to the left of the lockers. In this room you'll find the washing machine and dryer as well as dirty laundry.

## Your Shift

Here is a step-by-step list of the typical routine for volunteering with cats. This is subject to vary. Cat adoption doors are open to volunteers from 11:00am to 6:00pm every day of the week.

- **Proper attire-** Always wear your volunteer shirt, jeans, and closed toed shoes.
- **Parking-** All volunteers, as well as staff, must park at the far right side of the building past Clinic. You will see other cars parked in the area.
- **Sign in-** Use your Bloomerang Volunteer account to sign in on the computer in the Volunteer Lounge, OR use your Bloomerang Volunteer app to login.
- **Name tag-** Find your name tag from the name tag box in the Volunteer Lounge, put it in a name tag sleeve, and affix it to your chest where it's visible.
- **Select a cattery-** See (Catteries & Supply Rooms)
- **Interact with cats**
  - a. Participate in other tasks
  - b. Diligently adhere to the Cross Contamination Protocol.
  - c. Ensure you are enriching but not stressing out the cats
- **Clean up-** Scope out the catteries to make sure they are comfortable for cats and presentable for adopters.
- **Name tag—** Replace your name tag and protective sleeve in the name tag box.

## Cat Socialization & Enrichment

### Purpose

Socialization is the key to a happy shelter cat. You can take part in ensuring the cats are comfortable, happy, and healthy during their stay with us. Socializing and grooming the cats in our catteries helps prepare them for their forever home.

### Primary Duties

- Socialize the cats
- Groom and brush them, especially long haired cats
- Play with the cats
- Tidy up the catteries
- Refill water bowls
- Water containers are “clean” objects, meaning gloves must be worn when handling them.
- Observe the cats
  - Note any temperament, behavior, or medical concerns.
  - Pay attention to each cat's behavior and health status.





- As volunteers, you are spending the most quality time with the cats, therefore seeing signs of illness that staff may miss. If you have a concern about a particular cat's health, immediately inform staff.
- Common things to watch for:
  - Runny eyes and/or noses
  - Sneezing/ coughing
  - Diarrhea
  - Your observations are important!
- Help the staff.
  - Ask staff how you can help
- Talk to potential adopters.
  - If you feel comfortable talking to adopters you are welcome to.
    - Help adoptions staff by showing potential adopters where they can find adoption applications and explain the adoption process.
    - If you know the answers to the questions they ask, great!
    - If you don't know the answers to the questions they ask, refer them to a staff member. Do not make up answers.
- Get to know the cats
  - What do they like?
  - Do they get along with other cats?
  - Do they play?
  - Are they active or docile?



These are all things that potential adopters will like to know. Be sure to mention all of this when talking to people about our cats.

### **Approaching a Caged Cat**

Open the cage door slowly, especially if the cat is sleeping. Let the cat sniff your hand before trying to pet. If the cat is asleep it is best to move on to another cat, however if you need to wake it up the best way is a gentle pet on the back or tail as this is not as threatening if the cat is deeply asleep and startles. Try to let the cat sniff and rub you before petting it. **Always pay attention to kennel cards on the cage doors.** Some cats cannot be handled.



### **Approaching a Free Roam Cat**

All cats need socialization. While socializing cats try to draw out the timid, reclusive cats. This can be tricky because they prefer not to be handled and attended to. In cases like these when the cat doesn't approach you, you'll want to very slowly approach it but not pet it right away. Offer treats and show signs that you are not a threat. Reach your hand out for it to investigate and give it time. Most cats need to get to know you before you introduce toys.

## Common Issues with Handling Cats

- **Playful Cats** – Playful cats can be great to pick up and handle since that may be all they are looking for. However, if they get too wiggly to hold or they won't stay on your lap, you may want to get a toy for them to play with.
- **Shy Cats** – It is best to allow shy cats to come to you. Let them sniff you, if they stop sniffing but don't initiate contact, be patient with them and give them gentle pets on the head, back, and tail. Don't try to pick them up if they are acting scared. They will eventually warm up to you if you let them take their time but will get very scared if you force them from their "safe spot". If you must take them out, move very slowly and remember to support their rear and hold them close to your body so they feel safe.

## Approved Cat Enrichment Activities

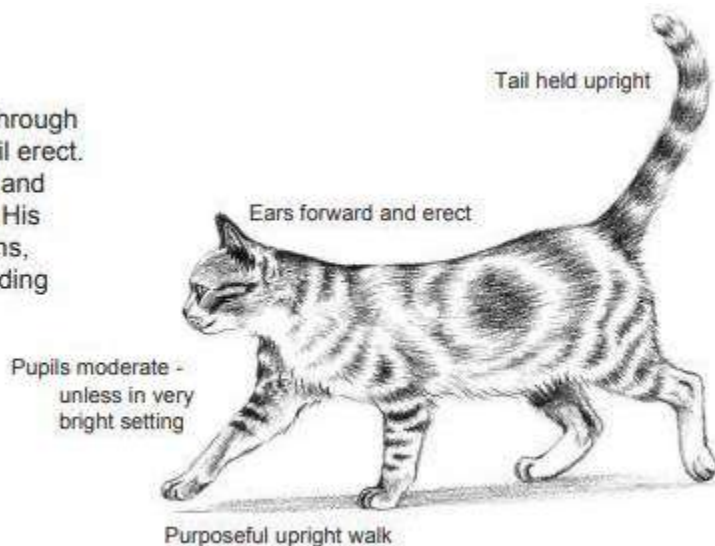
- **Brushing a Cat**
- Cat brushes can be found either in the cabinets located in each adoptable cattery or in the cattery supply area. Volunteers are encouraged to brush cats if they so choose and the cats are allowing. Cats in cages may not share brushes with other cats.
- **Socializing**
- For cats that are shy or reluctant to come out of their "safe spot" you may socialize with them in their own space. Each cattery has a chair. You may use the chair to sit with a cat and socialize him/her in their "safe spot".
- **Giving Treats**

Yes, cats get treats too. Helpful hint: use them to build trust in you when attempting to draw them out of a hiding place.

## Reading Feline Body Posture

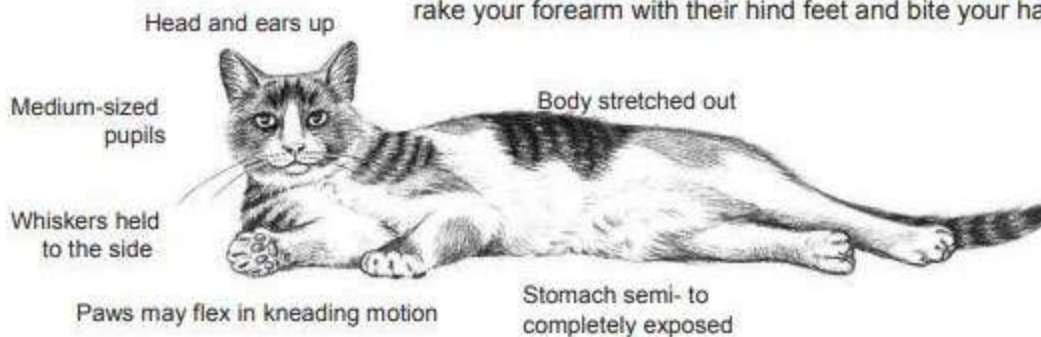
### the confident cat

The confident cat purposefully moves through space, standing straight and tall with tail erect. He is ready to explore his environment and engage those he meets along the way. His upright tail signifies his friendly intentions, while his ears are forward and erect adding to the cat's alert expression.



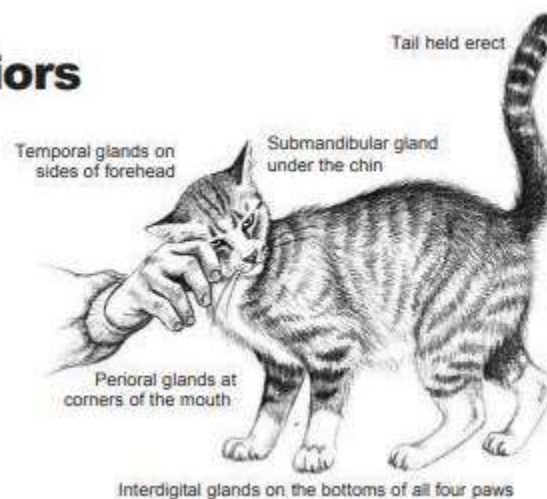
## the confident cat at ease

When relaxed, a confident cat stretches out on his side or lies on his back exposing his belly. He is in a calm but alert state and accepts being approached. His entire posture is open and at ease; but beware, not every cat that exposes his abdomen will respond well to a belly rub. Some will grasp your hand with their front paws, rake your forearm with their hind feet and bite your hand.



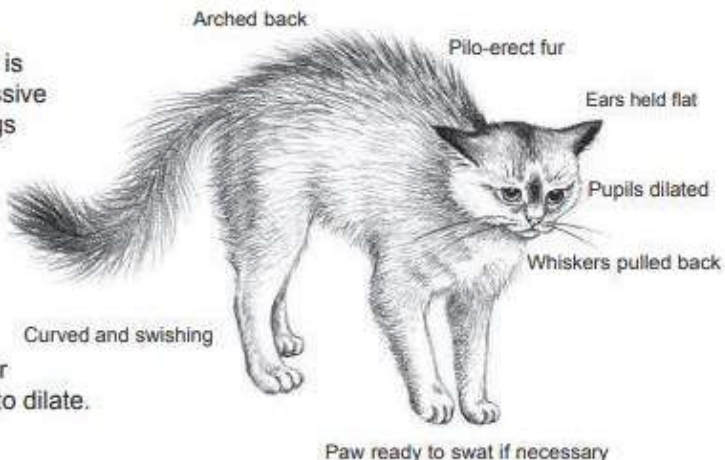
## distance-reducing behaviors

Distance-reducing behaviors encourage approach and social interaction and are meant to telegraph to others that the cat means no harm. The act of rubbing against a person's hand or another cat (scent marking) to distribute glandular facial pheromones from the forehead, chin or whisker bed is calming and seems to guarantee friendly interaction immediately afterward. The tail is usually held erect while the cat is scent-rubbing.

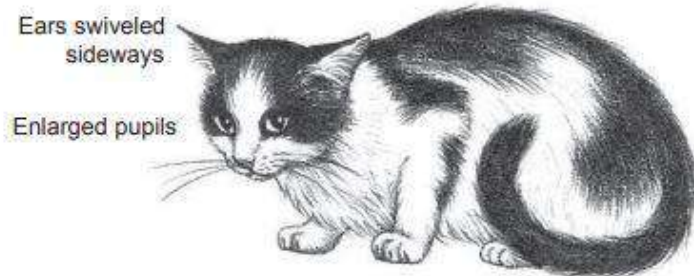


## distance-increasing behaviors

The goal of distance-increasing behaviors is to keep others from coming closer. Aggressive interactions are avoided when the warnings are heeded. Conflicted cats lack the confidence to stare down and charge others. Instead, they assume a defensive threat posture, warning others away by appearing as formidable as possible by arching their backs, swishing their tails, and standing sideways and as tall as possible. Fear and arousal causes their fur to stand on end (pilo-erection) and pupils to dilate.



Body hunched, muscles tensed



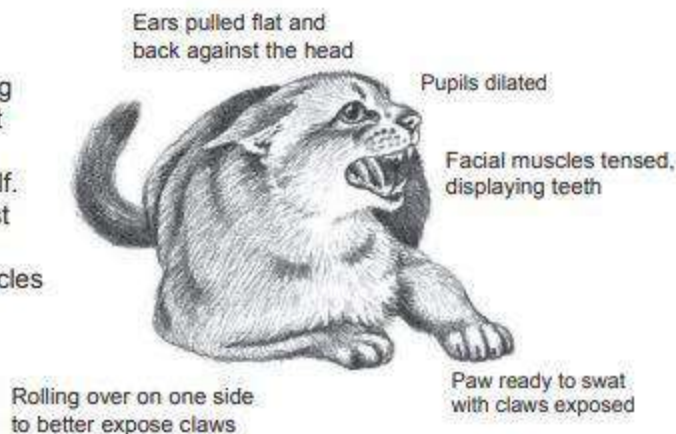
Tail held close to body, may flick out

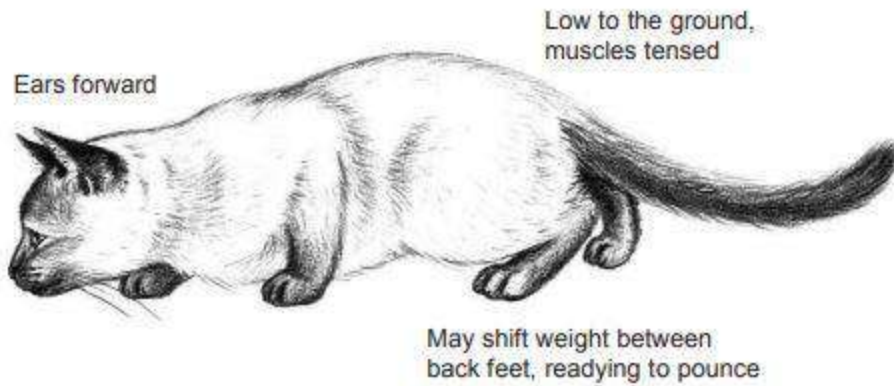
## the anxious cat

When a cat becomes anxious, he crouches into a ball, making himself appear smaller than usual. Muscles are tensed and the cat is poised to flee if necessary. The tail is held close to the body, sometimes wrapped around the feet. The head is held down and pulled into the shoulders.

## defensive aggression

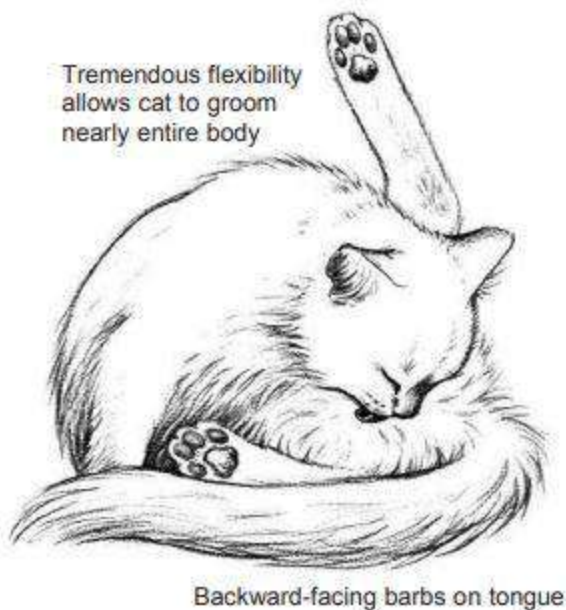
The pariah threat is another distance-increasing posture. When a cat determines that he cannot escape an unwanted interaction with a more dominant animal, he prepares to defend himself. The ears are pulled back and nearly flat against the head for protection and the head and neck are pulled in tight against the body. Facial muscles tense, displaying one weapon - the teeth. The cat rolls slightly over to one side in order to expose the rest of his arsenal - his claws. He is now ready to protect himself.





## the predator

Even when fed two meals a day, cats are still predators. The predatory sequence is stalk, pounce, kill, remove, and eat. When stalking prey, a cat may stealthily move forward or lie in wait, shifting his weight between his hind feet. When movement is detected, the cat pounces on his prey and delivers a killing bite. He may then take the fresh-killed prey to a quiet place to eat – or a female may take it to her kittens. Even cats that don't hunt for their meals still enjoy chasing moving objects, including toys and, in some cases, human body parts.



## the groomer

Cats spend 30 to 50 percent of their waking time grooming. Backward-facing barbs on the tongue act as a comb to loosen tangles and remove some parasites. Beyond maintaining the cat's coat, grooming also relieves tension and promotes comfort. Licking also facilitates cooling off in warm weather.