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# Cat Communication

Cat communication is the range of methods by which cat communicate with other cats, humans, and other animals. Cats hiss, purr, growl, and snarl. Communication methods include postures, movement (including "quick, fine" movements not generally perceived by human beings), auditory and chemical signals.[1]

The communication methods used by cats have been impacted by the domestication process.[2]

## Auditory communication methods[]

A meow is a vocalization used by cats to signal a request to their mother. Adult cats do not normally meow to each other, and so the meowing to human beings that domesticated cats exhibit is likely partly an extension of the use of this plaintive signal.[3] When communicating with human beings, adult cats express variations of this tone to demand food or attention, register complaints, and convey bewilderment. An alteration in tone, pace or punctuation changes the meaning, however slight.[4]

While cats occasionally vocalize to one another with purrs, growls, and screeches, they generally communicate with one another through body language. When preparing to fight an adversary or to frighten one away, cats can emit long, articulated meows. Most vocalizations recognized as "meow" are specifically for human interaction.[5]

The word meow is itself an onomatopoeia with various spellings including meow, miaow, miaou, mrow, mau, me-ow and myow, sometimes other sounds such as reow, or booreow

A purr is a sound made by all species of felids. A tonal buzzing can characterize differently between cats. Domestic cats purr in a frequency of 25 to 150 vibrations per second. Purring is often understood as signifying happiness,[6] however, cats sometimes purr when they are ill, or during tense, traumatic, or painful moments.[7]

Although purring is a universally recognized phenomenon, the mechanism by which cats purr is elusive. This is partly because the cat has no unique anatomical feature that is clearly responsible for the sound.

Most cats growl or hiss when angered or feeling threatened, which serves as a warning to the offending party. If the warning is not heeded, a more or less serious attack may follow. Some may engage in nipping behavior or batting with their paws, either with claws extended or retracted.

Most cats make chirping or chattering noises when observing prey. Proposed explanations for this behavior include that it is a threatening sound, an expression of excitement or frustration, or an attempt to replicate a bird-call (or replicate the call of a bird's prey, for example a cicada). Recent animal behaviorists have theorized that it is a "rehearsal behavior" in which the cat anticipates or practices the killing of prey, because the sound usually accompanies a biting movement similar to the one they use to kill their prey (the "killing bite" which saws through the victim's neck vertebrae).

Some cats will snort (exhale sharply) after a determined effort to catch something has fallen short.

Some cats (including tigers) will chirrup or chudder as a form of greeting.[8]

Some cats grunt while purring when given physical attention.

Contented sleeping cats make soft humming sounds, similar to sighs, when petted.

The cry of a cat in heat is called a caterwaul.[9]

Cats in close contact with human beings use vocalization more frequently than cats that live in the wild, the reason being that owners respond strongly to cat vocalizations, reinforcing the behavior. Adult cats in the wild rarely vocalize; they use mostly body language and scent to communicate.

## Body language[]

Cats communicate a variety of messages using body language. Examples include arching their backs as a signal of fear or aggression, and slowly blinking to signal relaxation. A cat that chooses to lie with its stomach and chest exposed conveys happiness, trust, and comfort (this is also typical of overweight cats, as it is more comfortable for them); however, a cat may also roll on its side/back to be able to defend itself with all four sets of claws. Usually other signs (like ears and whiskers folded backwards) give an indication of the cat's overall humour. Flattened ears mean that the cat feels threatened, and may attack. Mouth open and no teeth exposed suggests a feeling of playfulness.[10]

As is the case with dogs, the tail is often used as a signaling mechanism. A tail held high suggests confidence, happiness, or can be used as a greeting towards human beings or other cats (usually close relatives) while a half-raised tail shows less pleasure, and unhappiness is indicated with a tail held low. In addition, a cat's tail may "wag" or move rapidly to express a state of conflict. A cat with tail held high and twitching shows excitement, but this is often mistaken for anger. Cats will twitch the tips of their tails when hunting or when they are rather irritated, while larger twitching indicates displeasure. They may also twitch their tails when playing. [11] A scared or surprised cat may puff up its tail, and the hair along its back may stand straight up and the cat will turn its body sideways to a threat, in order to increase its apparent size. Tailless cats, such as the Manx, which possess only a small stub of a tail, move the stub around as though they possess a full tail.

Touching noses is a friendly greeting for cats, while a lowered head is a sign of submission. Some cats will rub their faces along their guardian's cheek, hands, or ankles as a friendly greeting or sign of affection. This action is also sometimes a way of "marking their territory," leaving a scent from the scent glands located in the cat's cheek. More commonly, cats do something called a "head bonk," or "bunting," where they literally bump someone with the front part of their head to express affection.[12]

Cats also lick each other and people (e.g. their owners). Cats lick each other to groom one another and to bond (this grooming is usually done between cats that know each other very well). They will also sometimes lick people for similar reasons. These reasons include wanting to "groom" people and to show them care and affection.

When cats are happy, they are known to paw their human companion, or a soft object on which they may be sitting, with a kneading motion also called "padding", "pitter-patting", "pacing", "sponging", "paddling", "happy clawing", "making bread", "happy feet", "making biscuits", or "needle paws". Cats often use this action alongside purring to show contentment and affection for their companions. This can also indicate curiosity.

Other times it can mean the cat is in pain or dying, as a method of comforting itself. It is instinctive to cats, and they use it when they are young to stimulate the mother cat's breast to release milk during nursing. As a result, cats hand-raised by human beings may not exhibit this behavior. Pawing is also a way for cats to mark their territory. The scent glands on the underside of their paws release small amounts of scent onto the person or object being pawed, marking it as "theirs" the same way they would urinate to mark their territory.

Since the nature of the activity is an instinctive response related to the mother's care for the kitten, it may be an expression of need, indicating an empty water bowl, hunger, an unappealing litter box, or the need for some attention from the caregiver.

## Biting[]

A bite accompanied by hissing or growling is not a demonstration of playful behavior. When cats mate, the male tom bites the scruff of the female's neck as she assumes a position conducive to mating.[13] However, cats familiar with their owners will sometimes bite gently to indicate uncomfortable petting.

## Scent[]

Cats can communicate through scent via urine, feces, and chemicals in skin glands located around the mouth, tail, and paws. They also use scent in order to mark their territory. If another animal tries to get in the cat's territory, they will fight for the territory, or the cat will scare the animal off. Cats have scent glands along the tail, on each side of their head, on their lips, base of their tail, chin, near their sex organs, and between their front paws. They use these glands to scent mark their territory. When the cat rubs you, it is marking you with its scent, claiming you as "theirs". In addition, it is picking up your scent. Cats rub up against furniture or doorways for the same reason - to mark the item as "theirs". Urine spraying is also a territorial marking.[14]

## See also[]

## References[]

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