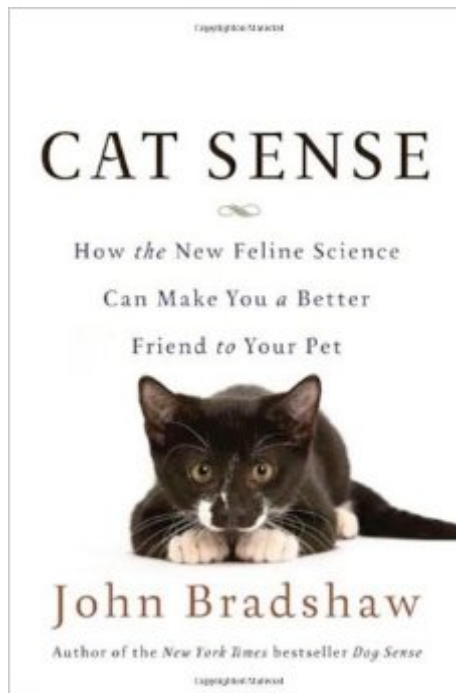


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Cat Sense: How The New Feline Science Can Make You A Better Friend To Your Pet



Synopsis

Cats have been popular household pets for thousands of years, and their numbers only continue to rise. Today there are three cats for every dog on the planet, and yet cats remain more mysterious, even to their most adoring owners. Unlike dogs, cats evolved as solitary hunters, and, while many have learned to live alongside humans and even feel affection for us, they still don't quite get us the way dogs do, and perhaps they never will. But cats have rich emotional lives that we need to respect and understand if they are to thrive in our company. In *Cat Sense*, renowned anthrozoologist John Bradshaw takes us further into the mind of the domestic cat than ever before, using cutting-edge scientific research to dispel the myths and explain the true nature of our feline friends. Tracing the cat's evolution from lone predator to domesticated companion, Bradshaw shows that although cats and humans have been living together for at least eight thousand years, cats remain independent, predatory, and wary of contact with their own kind, qualities that often clash with our modern lifestyles. Cats still have three out of four paws firmly planted in the wild, and within only a few generations can easily revert back to the independent way of life that was the exclusive preserve of their predecessors some 10,000 years ago. Cats are astonishingly flexible, and given the right environment they can adapt to a life of domesticity with their owners; but to continue to do so, they will increasingly need our help. If we're to live in harmony with our cats, Bradshaw explains, we first need to understand their inherited quirks: understanding their body language, keeping their environments; however small; sufficiently interesting, and becoming more proactive in managing both their natural hunting instincts and their relationships with other cats. A must-read for any cat lover, *Cat Sense* offers humane, penetrating insights about the domestic cat that challenge our most basic assumptions and promise to dramatically improve our pets' lives; and ours.

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Customer Reviews

This is a solid book on an under-researched topic: cats. The first three chapters provide a context for thinking about cats in today's world. The author discusses the history of the domestication of cats and traces their emergence as a "truly global phenomenon." In the middle chapters, the focus is on how different the senses and brains of cats are from humans. Cats, we learn, are not little furry humans. The author discusses the way cats gather information, how they interpret and use that information, and the way their emotions guide their actions. The science in these chapters is fascinating. The author goes on to examine the social life of cats--the connections they make with one another, and the science of cat "personality." The chapter on "Cats and Their People" is especially good. It discusses the human preference for "baby-faced animals," but points out that the physical appearance of cats cannot explain the affection humans have for them. Cats owe their success as pets, the author writes, because they are open to building relationships with humankind. The discussion of what cats feel for humans, and the analysis of purring, will warm the hearts of cat owners. The book closes with a look at the different pressures cats are under in today's world. The evolution of cats, the author argues, is moving away, rather than toward, better integration with human society. The book reveals that cats and dogs are more different than we might have imagined. "The dog's mind has been radically altered from that of its ancestor, the gray wolf; cats, on the other hand, still think like wild hunters." There is much to be learned from this work. NOTE: One reviewer here says the author "advocates breeding." That's not quite right. The author says that we should not be breeding cats for appearance--which is what is done today. If there is to be breeding, it should be done in order to select behaviors. The author is not calling for breeding, however.

This is one of the best books on feline "psychology" and cat nature that I've read. Either you are a cat person or you are not; I've had cats almost continuously for more than fifty years and I like them. They are easy to care for, affectionate, yet sometimes you'll get a cat with a quirk and it drives you crazy. I found some of the quirks explained in this book--for example, why "Oriental" (ie Persian and Siamese cats) eat wool or other fabrics. I have had several Siamese and all of them were dangerous around wool. Eating yarn is bad--it can wrap around a cat's intestines and cause a

deadly condition. The observation that Siamese do indeed seem more prone to nervous disorders and eating fabric to comfort themselves is true in my experience as well. I enjoyed the chapter on the domestication of cats. Cats have not been domesticated nearly as long as dogs. Domestic cats more or less hark back to Ancient Egypt, and the author discusses how the wildness is just below the surface in any cat, which may account for the fact that some people find them difficult to understand and call them "aloof" or unfriendly, even. But it's all to do with their nature. There is info all sorts of cat psychology and physiology, for example, the effect of "scruffing" --which can be controversial. This is picking a cat up by the loose skin on the back of the neck, same as a mommy cat would do to a kitten. I happen to know from my own animal physiology classes that this causes a relaxation effect in a cat --they go limp when you pick them up by the scruff, same as when Mommy Cat picks up a kitten, and this is an actual physiological effect that will calm a cat. But it looks nasty to some people. Other cat behaviors also hark back to kittenhood and soothe a nervous kitty, such as "kneading" or "knitting." When cats pulse their paws against your side or a blanket, they are repeating nursing behavior, pushing Mommy Cat for more milk, and thus going back to infant bliss. (My university degree is in zoology, so perhaps I look at things slightly differently than most folks when it comes to animals--but I find all this absolutely fascinating.) There is information about purebred cats and their specific traits in this book. This is proper for a book on cats; the breeding of cats has produced a lot of variants, such as the flat face breeds and other extremes. This discussion is proper for a cat book; my cat is a dumpster rescue, but he turns out to be a purebred Siberian (we were surprised when we found this out.) He was probably tossed out by an irresponsible person because he has birth defects. Breeding cats however, is controversial because there are millions of feral cats, the product of their amazing fertility. A pair of cats over a few years can be the progenitors of literally (litter-ly) thousands of offspring. These cats, your "dumpster cats" eat wildlife, and are not only eating rodents (yay!) but also birds and can make a dent in the local songbird population. So stabilizing wild feral cat populations and spaying and neutering are key. But the author talks about cat breeds and this book would not be complete without a rundown about the various types of cats. So I'm not dinging this book for discussing breeding, which is a scientific endeavor. If you feel that there are too many cats in shelters, as I do, then adopt one, as I did and will always do in future. Anyone who dings this book for containing valid information about cat breeds is being unfair; you can discuss cat breeds and then go right down to the shelter and adopt a cat and that's what I always do. But the information belongs in this book and is interesting as well. I would not have known as much about my adopted cat if I didn't have access to such information.

Cat Sense is worth your time, I wish I could have given it four stars, but it had some flaws that kept it from that rating. It gets many things right. The structure of the book is clear and moves cleanly from the evolution and history of the cat to behaviors and quirks that makes this animal a beloved pet. I learned a lot about my cat, confirming some things I suspected and correcting some misunderstandings. I appreciated most the scientific grounding of the book, especially in regards to the ecological impact of cats. Bradshaw does not get sucked into the "cats are innocent" and "cats are indiscriminate killers" dichotomy. Reality is much more complex. However, the book was frustrating in that it wasn't written very well. Chapters closed with recaps of content like students trying to pad papers for length. I felt like I could have skipped the last two or three pages of most chapters. If it had been more fluidly written I probably would have finished it much quicker. Still, I'm glad to have finished it and recommend it for anyone interested in cats.

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