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01 “I’M HAPPY AND CONTENTED.”

Purring in cats, like tail wagging in dogs, is often misunderstood. A dog wagging its tail could still attack you because the tail wagging actually means “I’m excited,” not “I’m pleased to see you.” The purring cat is saying “I’m in an upbeat social mood.” Though owners like to think it is their unadulterated love and careful stroking that causes the purring, cats will purr when they get their favorite food and even when they’re injured or giving birth. It’s also a signal intended to inspire a reaction from humans or other cats: “I want friendship,” or “I want reassurance.”

PURR-FECT HARMONY

Small cats can produce a satisfying purr, but so can some big cats. Lions, tigers, and cheetahs can do variations of the purr, but jaguars can’t purr at all. The frequency of a cat’s purr is anywhere between 25 and 150 hertz (Hz). At the bottom end of the range, around 25 Hz, the harmonics of a cat’s purr are the same as an idling diesel engine.



23 “HI, MOM!”

Just as adult cats will jump up and greet their human parents, kittens will try to do the same with their returning mother, who they can't quite greet nose to nose. The “welcome back” hop onto the back legs is something learned in kittenhood. Not all kittens will have the strength to manage it, and some will try to emulate the hop of their brothers and sisters only to flop hopelessly (and adorably) backward. Balancing on the hind legs is a useful skill for later in life, as so many interesting things happen on raised surfaces that are frustratingly just out of their sight.

LITTLE AND OFTEN

When kittens start to eat solid food, they won't approach meals the same way as an adult cat. Instead of one or two big meals a day, kittens will want to eat a number of small meals. They will arrive at the food bowl, eat a small amount, and then wander off, only to return a little while later. It doesn't mean that the kitten doesn't like what you've given it or it's not hungry; it's a typical eating pattern for a kitten.

35

“HEY, IT’S CASUAL FRIDAY . . .”

Cats groom themselves for a number of different reasons, but the principal reason is the obvious one—to keep themselves clean. They will spend what seems like hours going through the delicate ritual of removing dirt, grass, and bits of food from every accessible place on their body. (see the cat lick checklist on page 16). One proven way for an owner to tell if a cat is ill is to look at the condition of the cat's fur. Fur out of place or remaining matted and dirty signals that the cat is too weak or distracted to attend to this most important of cat functions.

