



TED Lesson: Why do cats act so weird?

By Tony Buffington

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Why do cats do that? They're cute, they're lovable, and judging by the 26 billions views of over 2 million YouTube videos of them pouncing, bouncing, climbing, cramming, stalking, clawing, chattering, and purring, one thing is certain: cats are very entertaining. These somewhat strange feline behaviors, both amusing and baffling, leave many of us asking, "Why do cats do that?"

00:46

Throughout time, cats were simultaneously solitary predators of smaller animals and prey for larger carnivores. As both predator and prey, survival of their species depended on crucial instinctual behaviors which we still observe in wild and domestic cats today. While the feline actions of your house cat Grizmo might seem perplexing, in the wild, these same behaviors, naturally bred into cats for millions of years, would make Grizmo a super cat.

01:19

Enabled by their unique muscular structure and keen balancing abilities, cats climbed to high vantage points to survey their territory and spot prey in the wild. Grizmo doesn't need these particular skills to find and hunt down dinner in her food bowl today, but instinctually, viewing the living room from the top of the bookcase is exactly what she has evolved to do.

01:43

As wild predators, cats are opportunistic and hunt whenever prey is available. Since most cat prey are small, cats in the wild needed to eat many times each day, and use a stalk, pounce, kill, eat strategy to stay fed. This is why Grizmo prefers to chase and pounce on little toys and eat small meals over the course of the day and night. Also, small prey tend to hide in tiny spaces in their natural environments, so one explanation for Grizmo's propensity to reach into containers and openings is that she is compelled by the same curiosity that helped ensure the continuation of her species for millions of years before.

02:30

In the wild, cats needed sharp claws for climbing, hunting, and self-defense. Sharpening their claws on nearby surfaces kept them conditioned and ready, helped stretch their back and leg muscles, and relieve some stress, too. So, it's not that Grizmo hates your couch, chair, ottoman, pillows, curtains, and everything else you put in her environment. She's ripping these things to shreds and keeping her claws in

tip-top shape because this is exactly what her ancestors did in order to survive.

03:03

As animals that were preyed upon, cats evolved to not get caught, and in the wild, the cats that were the best at avoiding predators thrived. So at your house today, Grizmo is an expert at squeezing into small spaces and seeking out and hiding in unconventional spots. It also explains why she prefers a clean and odor-free litter box. That's less likely to give away her location to any predators that may be sniffing around nearby.

03:32

Considering everything we do know about cats, it seems that one of their most predominate behaviors is still one of the most mysterious. Cats may purr for any number of reasons, such as happiness, stress, and hunger. But curiously, the frequency of their purrs, between 25 and 150 hertz, is within a range that can promote tissue regeneration. So while her purring makes Grizmo an excellent nap companion, it is also possible that her purr is healing her muscles and bones, and maybe even yours, too.

04:09

They developed through time as both solitary predators that hunted and killed to eat, and stealthy prey that hid and escaped to survive. So cats today retain many of the same instincts that allowed them to thrive in the wild for millions of years. This explains some of their seemingly strange behaviors. To them, our homes are their jungles. But if this is the case, in our own cat's eyes, who are we? Big, dumb, hairless cats competing with them for resources? Terribly stupid predators they're able to outsmart every day? Or maybe they think we're the prey.