

BESTIARY AND NATURAL HISTORY

From Edward Topsell, The Historie of Foure-footed Beasts, 1607

A Cat is a familiar and well knowne beast...Ovid saith, that when the Gyantes warred with the Goddes, the Goddes put upon them the shapes of Beasts, and the sister of Apollo lay for a spy in the likenes of a cat, for a cat is a watchfull and warye beast...And for this cause did the Egyptians place them for hallowed Beasts, and kept them in their Temples...and not onely the Egyptians were fooles in this kind, but the Arabians also, who worshipped a cat for a God; and when the cat dyed, they mourned as much for her, as for the father of the family..

Once cattes were all wilde, but afterward they retyred to houses, wherefore there are plenty of them in all countries...

The Spanish blacke cats are of most price among the Germaines, because they are nimblest, and have the softest haire fit for garment.

A cat is in all partes like a Lyonesse, (except in her sharpe eares)...Venus had turned a cat into a beautifull woman...who forgetting her good turne, contended with the goddesssee for beauty: in indigation whereof, she returned her to her first nature...

Cats are of divers colours, but for the most part gryseld...Albertus compareth their eye-sight to carbuncles in darke places, because in the night, they can see perfectly to kill Rattes and Myce...

The tongue of a cat is very attractive, and forcible like a file, attenuating by licking the flesh of a man, for which cause, when she is come neere to the blood, so that her own spittle be mingled therewith, she falleth mad. Her teeth are like a saw, and if the long haire growing about her mouth...be cut away, she looseth hir corage. Her nailes sheathed like the nailes of a Lyon, striking with her forefeete, both Dogs and other things, as a man doth with his hand.

This beast is woonderfull nimble...

To keep Cats from hunting of Hens, they use to tie a litle wild rew under their wings, and so likewise from Dove-coates, if they set it in the windowes, they dare not approach unto it for some secret in nature. Some have said that cats will fight with Serpentes, and Toads, and kill them, and perceiving that she is hurt by them, she presently drinketh water is cured: but I cannot consent unto this opinion: it being rather true of the Weasell...

Cats will also hunt Apes...

The nature of this Beast is, to love the place of her breeding, neither will she tarry in any strange place...most contrary to the nature of a Dogge, who will travaile abroad with his maister...Those which will keepe their Cattes within doores...must cut off their ears, for they cannot endure to have drops of raine distil into them...It is a neate and cleanly creature...They love fire and warme places...They desire to lie softe

They cannot abide the savour of oyntments but fall madde

thereby...It is needeles to spend any time about her loving nature to man...

...the breath...of cats...destroys the lungs...

The haire...of a cat being eaten unawares, stoppeth the artery and causeth suffocation...

In Spain...they eat cats, but first...take away their head and taile, and hang the prepared flesh a night or two in the open cold are, to exhale the savour and poyson from it...

...For the paine and blindnesse in the eye, by reason of any skinnes, Webs, or nailes, this is an approved medicine. Take the head of a blacke Cat, which hath not a spot of another colour in it, and burne it to pouders in an earthen pot...then take this pouders and through a quill blow it thrice a day into thy eie...

From Charles Hamilton Smith, Introduction to Mammalia, 1846

The Felidae are, of all the carnassier order, the most completely organized for subsisting on animal food...The whole family is case in the same mould, differing very little except in size, and apparently trivial distinctions; the muzzle is short and round; the jaws short, in which there two false molars both above and below; the superior carnassial tooth has three lobes, and a blunt heel inwards, and the lower two pointed and sharp edged lobes without a heel; behind there is only a small tubercular tooth in the upper, and none corresponding in the lower jaw. Some Felidae have vertically contractile pupils, and in others they remain constantly round, yet all have chiefly nocturnal habits. But what...proves to be a most destructive weapon, is the complete power they have of withdrawing the claws by means of ligaments...giving great efficiency to the stroke of the fore paws...There are many species known...all...are spotted, streaked, or barred...Where so much uniformity of design in their structure exists, it follows, that no characters of real importance can be pointed out, to sub-divide the Felidae into separate genera, though there are distinctions in the markings, and the form of the tail and ears, sufficient to indicate groups.