

# PET TALES

## Feline mysteries

BY DR. MARTY BECKER & GINA SPADAFORI  
Universal Press Syndicate

Do you pause when a black cat crosses your path? Even pet experts sometimes do, and then laugh for being influenced by such a silly old myth, even for a second. But that's the funny thing about cats — more than any other domestic animal, they are the subject of countless myths, legends and old wives' tales.

While some stories about cats are harmless, others are too dangerous not to debunk. Here, from our archives, are some stubborn old myths about cats — and the facts to counter them.

• **Black cats are bad luck.** Black may be an unlucky color all right, mostly for cats themselves. Black may be an unfortunate color for the reason of visibility. Countless cats are killed by cars every year, and the difference between a hit or a near miss may be the driver's ability to see the cat darting across the road. At night, patches of light-colored fur are a distinct advantage.

• **Cats need to drink milk.** Is cow's milk the perfect food for cats? Not at all! On the contrary, some cats (like some people) can't tolerate milk well. For these animals, a saucer of milk means gastric upset. In the wild, kittens never drink milk after they're weaned, and domestic cats have no reason to either. On the other hand, if your cat likes and can tolerate milk, feel free to offer it as an occasional treat. Milk is a good source of protein and other nutrients

for those cats who don't find it upsetting.

• **Cats purr when they're happy.** Expert cat observers know that purring isn't just a sound of contentment. Cats also purr if they're injured, while giving birth — even when dying. British zoologist Desmond Morris has observed that purring is "a sign of friendship — either when (the cat) is contented with a friend or when it is in need of friendship, as with a cat in trouble."

• **Cats are a danger to babies.** So many cats find themselves looking for new homes when a baby is expected that you could put it another way: Babies are a danger to cats. But you don't need to find a new home for your pet if you become pregnant. Cats do not maliciously smother or suck the breath out of babies, as the myths hold. That doesn't mean some considerations aren't in order, however. Pregnant women have to take special precautions when cleaning the litter box (or have someone else do it) because of the risk of disease. And even animal advocates remind new parents that common sense dictates no animal be left unattended with a small child — for the protection of both.

• **A well-fed cat won't hunt.** The ability to hunt is hardwired into all cats, but the level of desire varies by each cat's genetics and early experiences, not



Black cats are hard to see in the dark, making them a more likely casualty of cruising cars at night.

by the rumbling in his belly. The play of kittens — pouncing and leaping on anything that moves — is really hunting behavior. Observers of feline behavior believe that if the mother is an eager hunter, the kittens may be, too. Putting a bell on your cat won't protect wildlife, but keeping him in will.

The rest of the secrets behind those beautiful feline eyes will just have to stay a mystery. And that's just fine with us cat lovers, isn't it? ■

### Pet of the Week



>>**River, Stream, Sassy and Sonny** These 7-week-old puppies are all Labrador/hound mixes. Officers rescued them from a culvert. Available are two brown females, River (#434596) and Stream (#434597); one brown and black female, Sassy (#434910); and one white and brown male, Sonny (#434912).



>>**Hansel and BC** are 3-month-old stray kittens. Both are neutered and ready to go to a new home. If you are looking for an active little kitten, BC is your guy. He would like to be a private investigator when he grows up. If a lover boy is more your type, you must meet Hansel. He's sweet, loving and quiet.

### To adopt a pet

There are many dogs and cats available at the Lee County Animal Services shelter at 5600 Banner Drive, Fort Myers. Call 533-7387 (LEE-PETS) or visit [www.leelostpets.com](http://www.leelostpets.com). Adoption applications may be downloaded or completed at the shelter, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Please use the animal's ID number when inquiring about it. Adoption fees for dogs are \$25-\$95. Cats are \$25-\$75. Adoptions include sterilization, vaccinations, and license if at least 3 months old, flea treatment, a 10-day health guarantee and more. Loving foster homes are needed too. Go online and click on "Foster Homes."

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