

Are cats really as domesticated as we think they are?

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

At first, the cat was yet another opportunistic creature that evolved to take advantage of civilization. It was essentially a larger version of the rodents it caught. Somewhere along the line, people shifted from tolerating cats to welcoming them, providing extra food and a warm place to sleep. Why? Perhaps because of the cat's innate predisposition to tameness and its inherent faunal charm—what the Japanese would call *kawaii*. Look up photos of the thirty-eight or so wildcat species and you might be surprised at how easy it is to picture one curled up on the couch. Dogs likely initiated their own domestication, too, by prowling around campfires in search of food scraps. Whereas our ancestors quickly harnessed dogs to useful tasks, breeding them to guard, hunt, and herd, they never asked much of cats. We have also been slow to diversify cat breeds. Many dog, horse, and cattle breeds are more than five hundred years old, but the first documented cat fanciers' show didn't take place until 1871.

This relatively short and lenient period of selective breeding is manifest in the cat genome, Wesley Warren, a geneticist at Washington University in St. Louis*, said. In a study published last year, Warren and his colleagues analyzed DNA from several wildcats and domestic cat breeds, including an Abyssinian named Cinnamon. They confirmed that, genetically, cats have diverged much less from their wildcat ancestors than dogs have from wolves, and that the cat genome has much more modest signatures of artificial selection.

Read full, original post: [Are cats domesticated?](#)