

Feline Communication

Body Language



Contact the ASPCA at
outreach@aspca.org

Your Presenters



Trish McMillan Loehr, MSc, CPDT
Director, Applied Research and
Behavior
ASPCA



Natasha Drain, MS
Research Assistant
Shelter Research & Development
ASPCA

Why this series...

- The risk of being a shelter cat
- Why learn to read body language?



<http://favim.com/image/502020/>

Next in the series

- Humane Feline Handling (April 9)
- Shelter Cats: Intake to Adoptions (April 23)



Photo: Meg Allison

Where are we going today?

- Words matter
- Feline body language
- Using your body to communicate with cats



Photo: Aryn Steres

Why is this important?

- 80% of vet staff will get bitten by cats.
- Shelter cat quarantine issues
- Cage presentation



A quick poll – answer in the chat

My organization.....

- A. Provides ongoing, hands-on training in safe and humane feline handling, housing, and welfare for all staff, officers and volunteers.
- B. Provides basic training in safe and humane handling and housing at the time of hire only.
- C. Trains staff, officers and volunteers by having us shadow others and/or learn by trial and error.
- D. Training? We're warned not to get bitten...does that count?

Words matter

OBJECTIVE - not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice; based on facts; unbiased: *an objective opinion*.

- Think: “just the facts” - police **O**fficer



Shakespeare

SUBJECTIVE - based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions: *his views are highly subjective*

- Think: creative writing - **S**hakespeare



Objective or Subjective?



The rock is taller than the vegetation.





Objective or Subjective?



These boots are old and tired.



lapam04.deviantart.com



Objective or Subjective?



This cat's tail is above spine level.





Objective or Subjective?



This friendly cat is waving “hello”



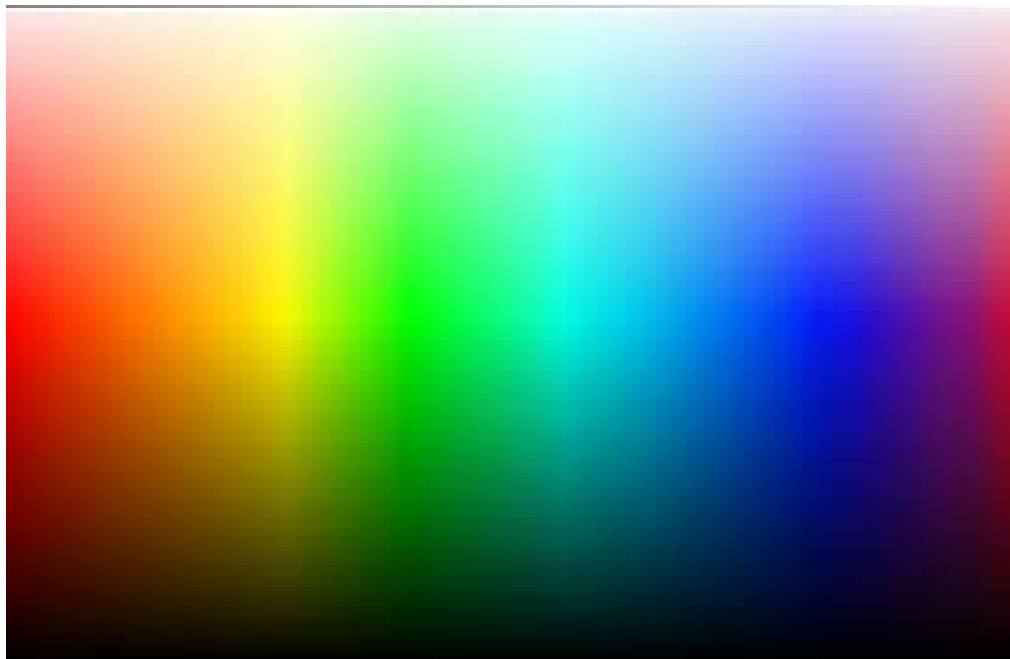
Feline Body Language

- Body parts
- Postures
- Putting it all together
(movement and context)



Photo: Meg Allison

Behavior is on a spectrum



Terminology – arousal



Ears



Relaxed



Alert

Ears – startled, fearful, defensive threat



Eyes – shape



Eyes – pupils



1



2



3



5



4

Eyes – direction of gaze



1



2



3

Blinking



Whiskers



1



2



3



4



5



6

Mouth

- Relaxed
- Open
- Flehmen
- Teeth exposed
- Panting
- Vocalizing



1



2



3



5



4

Photos: Meg Allison

Vocalizations

- Meow
- Purr
- Chirp
- Chatter
- Hiss
- Growl
- Yowl
- Spit



Paws

- Kneading
- Tense
- Tucked
- Marking
- Paw raise
- Claws exposed
- Defensive threat



What is this cat doing?



Tails



1



3



2



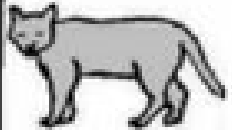

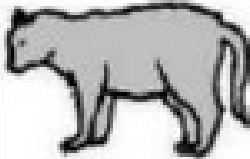
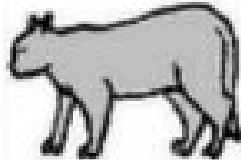
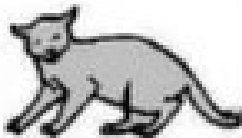

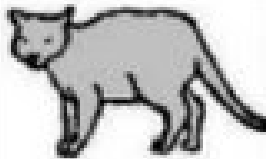
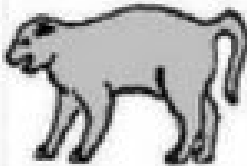


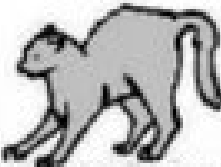




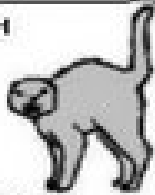
4

Tail movement

- Twitching
- Lashing
- Quivering
- Wrapped



Body postures

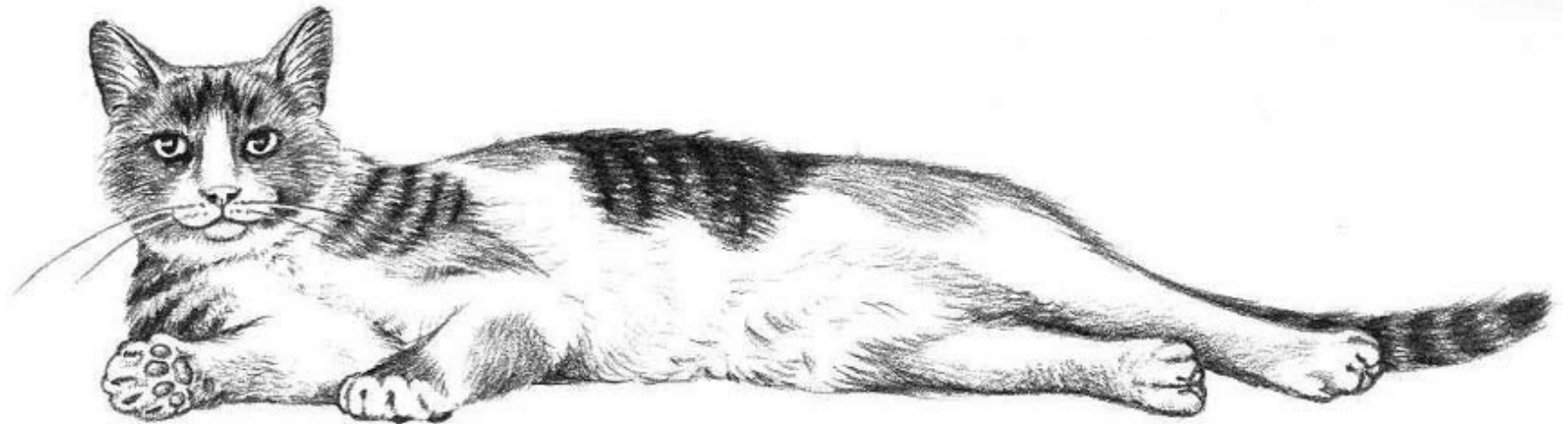
	MORE AGGRESSIVE →			
↑ MORE SUBMISSIVE OR MORE FEARFUL ↓	 TAIL MAY BE HELD ALOFT			
		 FLATTER TO THE GROUND		
	 MAY EVEN FALL OVER IN SUBMISSIVE FEAR		 MUSTN'T CONFUSE THIS WITH STRETCHING	 POSTURE ALSO SEEN WHEN CATS SPRAY
	 TAIL TUCKED UNDER TOTALLY WITHDRAWN	 TAIL TUCKED UNDER		 LAST DITCH SCARED ANGRY

Modified from "Cat Behavior: The Predatory and Social Behavior of Domestic and Wild Cats" by Paul Leyhausen 1979

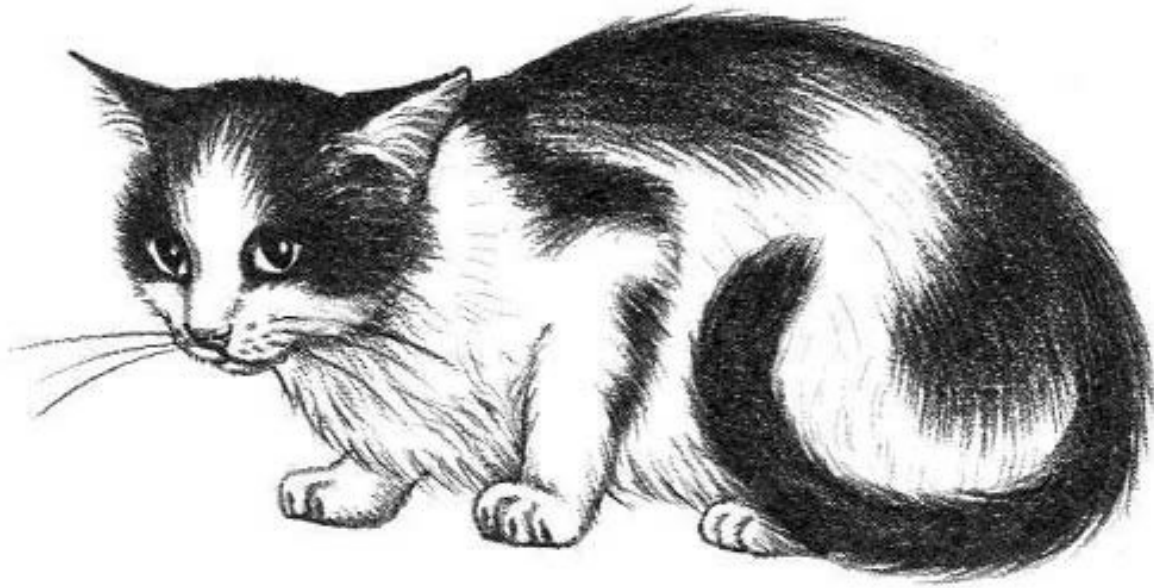
Body postures



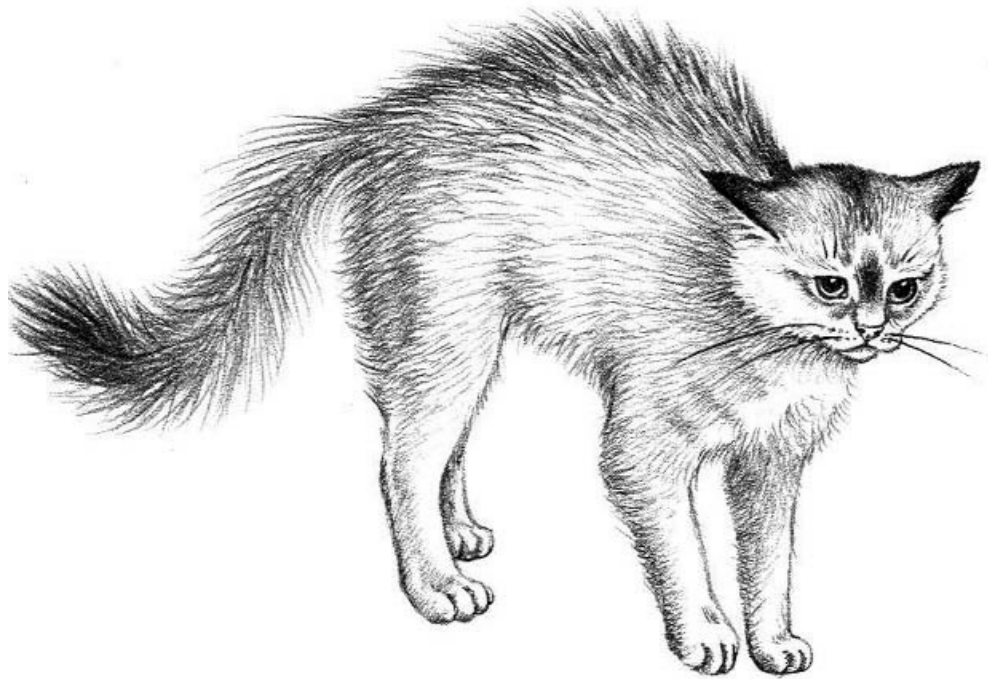
Relaxed



Tense/fearful



Aroused/defensive



Defensive threat posture



Body tension



1



3



2



4

Photos: Meg Allison

Where's the weight?

forward



centered



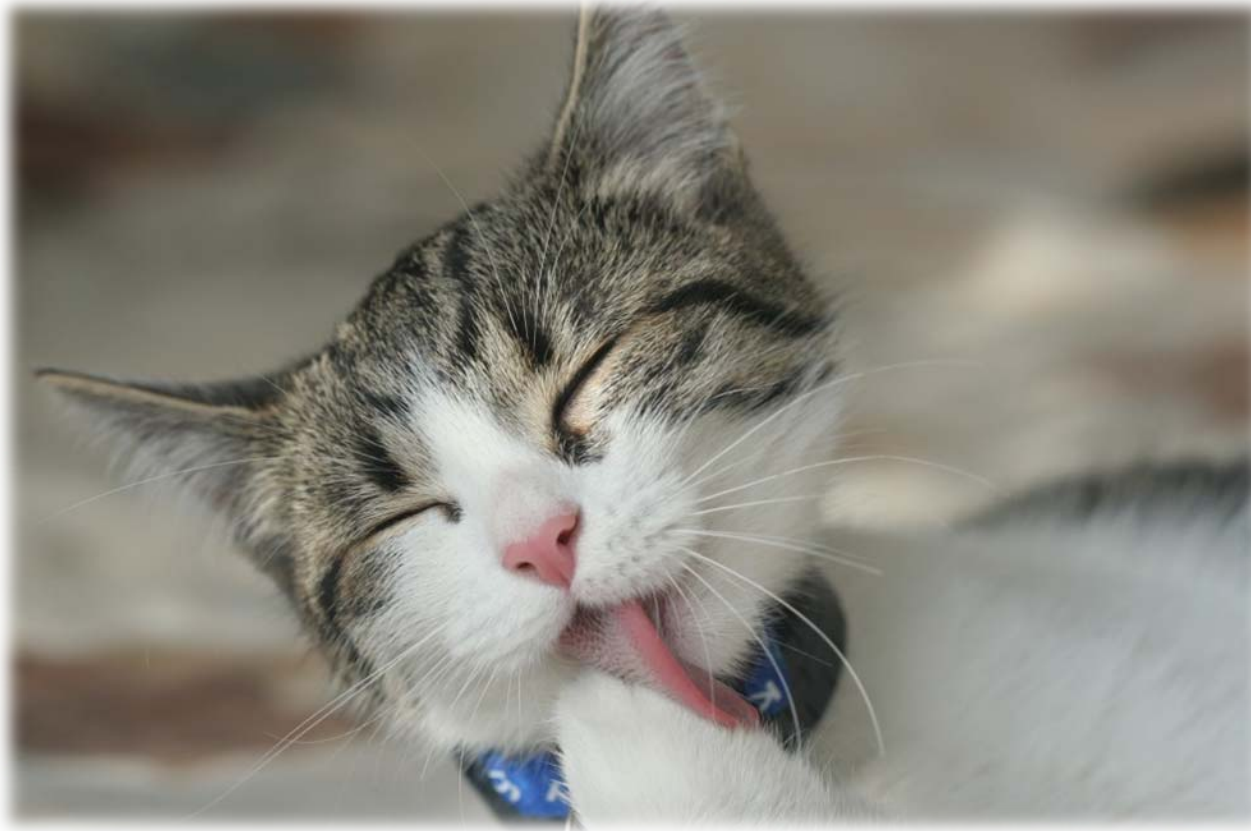
back



Rolling



Grooming



Bunting



What's going on here?



What's going on here?



Feigned sleep



Using your body to communicate

- Working with unknown cats
- Important to appear non-threatening



Talk to the cat first



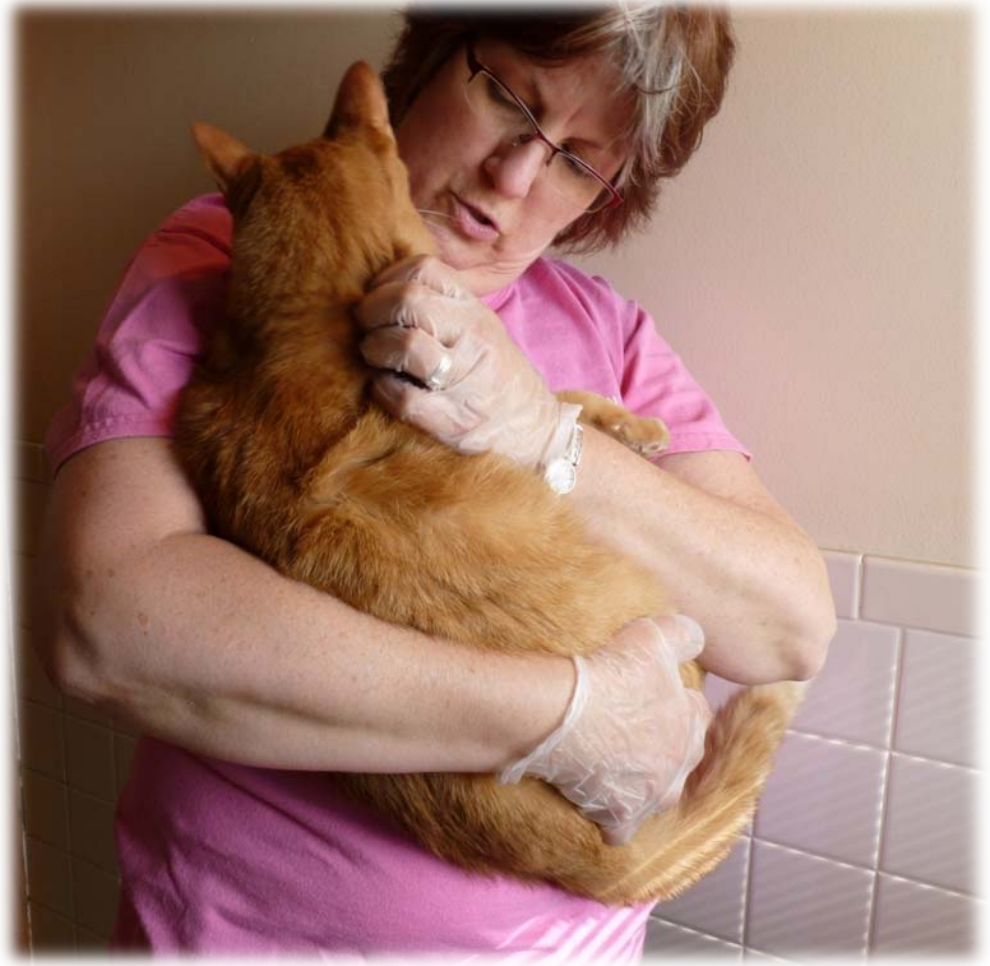
Your body posture

- Turn to side
- Move slowly
- Bring hand from underneath



Blink

- Affiliative signal that you can use too
- Avert eyes
- Look away



First contact



1



2



3



4

Cats and belly rubs



Scent

- Perfume
- Cigarettes
- Dog smells
- Other cat smells
- Pheromones



Escape routes

- Try not to trap cats
- Choice
- Feral box, paper bag



Putting it all together



What have we learned?

- Basic cat body language
- How to use our body language to communicate with cats



What's one new thing you're going to look for or try after this webinar?

Thank you!



Other Resources

Sophia Yin – *Low stress handling, restraint and behavior modification of dogs and cats* (2009)

BC SPCA – Cat Sense book and video

<http://www.aspcapro.org/webinar-shelter-guidelines-animal-handli.php> (goes into both dog and cat handling)

Webinar on Shelter Animal Housing

<http://www.aspcapro.org/webinar-health-wellness-success.php> (housing)

Enrichment presentation from St. Hubert's

https://dl.dropbox.com/u/47635141/Enrichment%20on%20a%20Dime_BeckyBurton_Sept2012-.pdf

Cat stress score:

<http://www.maddiesfund.org/Documents/Resource%20Library/Pet%20Behavior%20Solutions%20-%20Cat%20Stress%20Score.pdf>

Turner and Bateson, *The Domestic Cat, the biology of its behavior* (2000)

Upcoming ASPCApro Webinars

aspcapro.org/webinars

Humane Feline Handling 101

Tuesday, April 9, 3-4pm ET

Shelter Cats: Intake to Adoptions

Tuesday, April 23, 3-4pm ET

Stress Reduction and Enrichment for Shelter Cats

Tuesday, June 18, 3-4:30pm ET

Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC, Animal Alliances, LLC