

Cat Behavior

Cats are known as solitary animals. They don't hunt communally or share the spoils of a hunt. Sometimes cats with adjoining territories will get together for a pleasant evening grooming session, but on the whole they are not the most social creatures with others of their kind. This general wisdom does not always seem to hold up.

My barn cats are a single family descended from a lone female who wandered onto our place one day and decided to stay. She and her children and grandchildren police the local rodent population. Their behavior doesn't always match the solitary hunter of common wisdom.

The original female, Patch, used to like to take her kittens for daytrips around the area. I've watched her bring her little brood back from wherever they've been in the evenings. One evening I watched her stop and sit down near the edge of a small, lightly used road running next to our farm. Two of her kittens stopped next to her. As she turned her head one way and then the other, carefully looking for traffic, the kittens mimicked her actions. The only one who didn't was the little orange tiger who became distracted by a butterfly. Patch retrieved her wandering kitten and brought the whole family home. Walks are still a part of kitten lessons.

I recently watched Patch, her daughter and three of their kittens taking a walk around the boundaries of our farm. Patch and her daughter led the way. The two younger kittens were in the middle. The oldest kitten, not quite a year old brought up the rear. When one of the younger kittens stopped too long, he tried to move them along. If he couldn't then one of the mother cats would come back and get the little guy

moving. I've wondered what this little jaunt was about. Possibly Patch was showing the newest members of her family where their territorial boundaries were?

Some of the most interesting behavior I've seen regards family member who were injured. One of Patches' sons is a big burley black and white adult tom. A very handsome and friendly boy, he unfortunately has a talent for trouble. One day he came limping heavily into the yard wailing at the top of his lungs. His mother and sisters raced up to him as fast as they could. While he continued to cry, Patch began washing his face and ears while his sisters lay down over top of him. They stayed that way for some time while I called the vet. I'm happy to report that he recovered just fine with only a hitch in his giddyup to remember his adventure by.

Another of Patches sons, a brown and white tom just under a year old, got into a fight with his eldest brother. During the fight his foot was injured and began to swell. I found him limping along on three legs the following morning. I brought him onto our porch where I could keep a close eye on him and he could recover without further injuring his foot. While he was recuperating, various members of the family perched outside the porch windows, keeping him company.

These are just a few examples I've seen among my cats. Maybe they are unusual. I've certainly never seen cats act this way before. Or maybe, just maybe, cats aren't such social isolates as everyone's always thought!