

# Would you eat your pet cat?

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In most Western cultures cats are simply feline pet companions eager to greet us at the end of the day. In continents such as Asia and Africa, the social norms surrounding cats are very different; our furry friends commonly double up as dinner for a number of reasons ranging from food insecurity, simple preference or superstition. It is estimated that 4 million cats are consumed annually in Asia alone. Raymond Czaja et al recently conducted research on cat consumption in Anthrozoös. Their study reveals motives for, prevalence and methods of cat consumption in Madagascar and resulting public health implications for Malagasy citizens and beyond.

Cats and humans have interactions dating back 8,000 years. From ancient civilization until today they have served many and varied roles; deity, devil, pest controller, status symbol and straight forward household pet. Cat consumption though known is little understood, Czaja et al set out to illuminate causes and practices of eating [cats](#) in Madagascar. This Indian Ocean Island has weathered a HIV epidemic, a coup d'état and widespread economic instability within the last decade. Nevertheless the population steadily rises and malnutrition and poverty are rife. Cats are widespread across Madagascar and have few predators, indicating them as a good protein supplement for the economically challenged population. Czaja conducted interviews on 512 randomly selected Malagasy citizens. They were questioned about general meat consumption habits to assess food security and more specifically about cat consumption, if they'd eaten it and if so when and why. 34% of interviewees had consumed cat, though none stated a preference for it. Most had eaten their household pet cat because it was old, fat or

naughty, a high percentage trapped and ate cats and a few ate road killed cats. Few cited [food insecurity](#) as motivation for eating cat, suggesting opportunistic reasons prevail; cat is a cheap source of protein. A minimal few preferred not to eat cat due to taboos, distaste or for ethical reasons.

Though cat consumption provides useful protein supplementation in poor diets, it has major public health implications. Dead and road-killed cats are perfect hosts for parasitic diseases such as Lyme disease or relapsing fever, a real mortal danger to pregnant women and infants. Cats are primary hosts to the parasite causing toxoplasmosis; a fatal disease to immunosuppressed HIV infected patients and threat of serious deformities in infants. Cat meat also threatens transmission of bacterial infections such as *Clostridium botulinum*. With such high stakes, the authors urge for further research on consumption of dogs, as few are vaccinated against rabies. They conclude "widespread though infrequent consumption of cat meat in Madagascar, coupled with the likely heightened susceptibility of the population to disease, suggests a need for further study into the public health consequences of handling and consuming cat in the country."

**More information:** Raymond Czaja et al. Consumption of Domestic Cat in Madagascar: Frequency, Purpose, and Health Implications, *Anthrozoös* (2015). [DOI: 10.1080/08927936.2015.1052280](https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2015.1052280)

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