

Fetching in cats is more common than previously thought, researchers find

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Although it is more common in dogs, 4 in 10 pet cats also choose to play fetch with their owners, [report](#) Mikel Delgado from Purdue University, US, and colleagues in *PLOS ONE*.

Dogs are well-known for playing fetch, but some cats also engage in fetching behavior. Fetching may have its roots in the natural [hunting](#) behaviors of cats and dogs, but how it was shaped by [domestication](#) into the playful actions we see in our pets today is unclear. Researchers analyzed data from online surveys of cat (*Felis catus*) and dog (*Canis familiaris*) owners conducted between 2015 and 2023, which included questions about the fetching behavior of their pets.

Among over 8,000 cat owners surveyed, 41% reported that their cat would sometimes, frequently or always retrieve toys or objects that they threw—significantly higher than previous estimates. They found that cats are more likely to display fetching behavior if they are generally more active and playful, and if they live indoors.

Although cats of all breeds sometimes engage in fetching, it is more common in Burmese, Siamese, and Tonkinese cats. These breeds originated from cats that were taken to the Far East early during cat domestication, making them genetically distinct from other cat breeds.

Of nearly 74,000 [dog owners](#) surveyed, 78% said that their dog would sometimes, frequently or always attempt to fetch sticks, balls or other objects. They found that dogs that fetch tend to also have a higher overall trainability score.

Fetching was reported for most dog breeds, but some are more likely than others to fetch, including Labrador and Golden Retrievers, Border Collies and English Cocker Spaniels. Dog breeds that were developed to herd livestock or as hunting companions are more likely to fetch than other breeds. In both cats and dogs, fetching behavior is less common in females, older animals, and individuals with health conditions.

The study is the first to estimate how common fetching behavior is in dogs. It also shows that fetching is more common in cats than previously

thought. Although fetching shows many similarities to natural hunting behavior, the results suggest that it is more closely related to play than predation, the authors say. The domestication process selected for many juvenile behaviors to be retained into adulthood, and this might also have been the case for playful fetching behaviors that would have helped [wild animals](#) learn how to hunt.

The authors add, "Although cats and dogs are very different in many aspects of their behavior and in how they ended up being [companion animals](#), we find it fascinating that so many of them share this very interesting behavior—fetching. We hope that our study will encourage further exploration of how fetching is related to play, hunting and social interactions in both [cats](#) and [dogs](#)."

More information: Mikel M. Delgado et al, Making fetch happen: Prevalence and characteristics of fetching behavior in owned domestic cats (*Felis catus*) and dogs (*Canis familiaris*), *PLOS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0309068](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0309068)

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