



## Territorial Behavior

*Unlike dogs who establish relationships based on a dominance hierarchy, cats establish relationships based on their control of territory.*

Cats protect territories for themselves and their families large enough to supply the family with food and shelter. The size of the territory is influenced both by the number of cats sharing the area, and the characteristics of the cats themselves.

Female cats are likely to share territories with their mothers, female siblings and offspring, and are comfortable in a smaller territory than males. At about 8-10 months of age, young male siblings begin fighting and will disperse to new areas.

### Identifying Territory with Scent

Cats identify their territories with scent marks. These marks can be made by:

**Scratching** – By scratching with their claws cats leave scent marks and get exercise that keeps claws healthy.

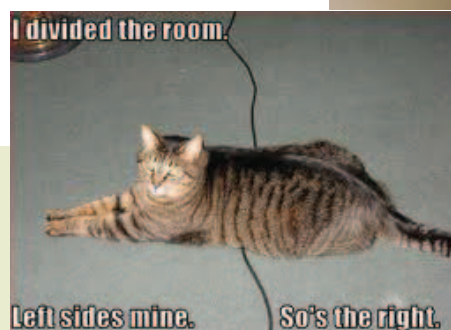
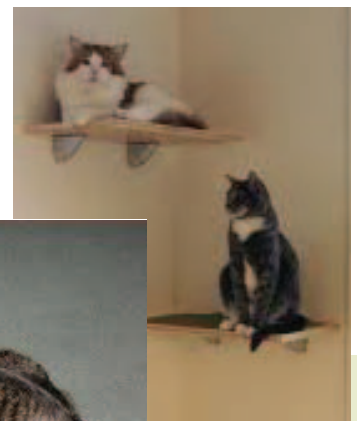
**Rubbing** – Cats also leave scent marks by rubbing their cheeks on prominent items in the territory.

**Urination** – When territorial disputes occur, many cats mark the borders of their territory with small amounts of urine. This can be a problem if it occurs indoors. Setting up sub-territories inside the house to reduce contact between cats can be helpful in reducing this behavior. Keeping litter boxes clean, accessible and attractive to the cat will also help prevent litter box avoidance, which contributes to elimination problems.

Behaviorists believe that cats can tell what time territorial scent marks were left and can tell who left the mark if the

marker is known to them. If the mark is from a stranger, cats may be able to detect information about the cat that made the mark, such as his breeding status. This allows cats to avoid confrontations while traveling through new territory. This also allows cats to meet up for breeding. As long as the area is large enough, confrontations can easily be kept to a minimum. Confrontations between cats may still occur however, with newcomers who are learning the routine or with those who wish to challenge the existing order.

Indoor cats can run into problems avoiding each other, which often leads to misunderstandings. One cat may bully another for failing to leave the area when the other has no choice. Using magnetic cat doors (which open only for a cat with a key-collar) can assist you in setting up sub-territories and resolving territorial disputes. Simply separating cats within a household can do the same—if it's a feasible option. Having multiple litter boxes and elevated perches may also work if the cats cannot be separated. Finally, don't forget to give each cat plenty of individual attention and exercise. Sometimes the solution can be as simple as paying a bit more attention to your cats' needs.



### Additional resources (click on links for more info)

<http://www.humanesociety.org>

<http://www.americanhumane.org>

<http://cats.about.com>