

Spitz-Like Tail Carriage in Two Domestic Cats: Implications for Communication

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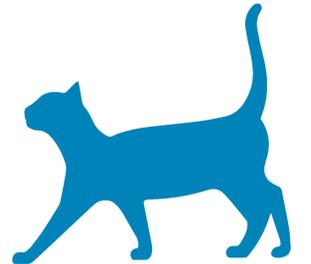
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Introduction

- Domestic cats use various communicative cues (visual, olfactory, auditory, tactile) when interacting with other cats and humans.
- During physical proximity, visual communication predominates, including body postures, facial behaviour and tail positions.
- A frequently mentioned visual cue is 'tail up', which signals affiliative intentions during encounters^{1,2}.
- We present details of two cats unable to display 'tail up' due to a tail that curls over the back (i.e. Spitz-like tail). Furthermore, we assess how this might impact the cats' communicative abilities during intraspecific interactions with a cohoused cat.



Methods

Survey for caregivers

- Cat characteristics (signalment, health, history)
- Intraspecific social behaviour and social bond with cohoused cat

Home videos

- Standardised protocol for recording intraspecific interactions^{3,4}
- Videos recorded by caregiver with their own device

Behavioural observations

- One-zero sampling per clip
- Occurrence of tail movements⁵
- Occurrence of allogrooming, head rubbing, sleeping together and social play³

Domestic Longhair (Fn, 8.5y)

Caregiver report

- Spitz-like tail present since adoption (3y old), acquired from a rescue organisation
- Cat-cat affiliative interactions occur at least monthly
- Cat-cat bond rated as moderate

Video analysis

- 17 home videos collected (36.7min)
- Normal tail movements when tail is hanging down (tail wave, tail swish, tail twitch), Spitz-like tail during social approach (Fig. 1)
- Affiliative interactions with cohoused cat including social play, allogrooming and sleeping together

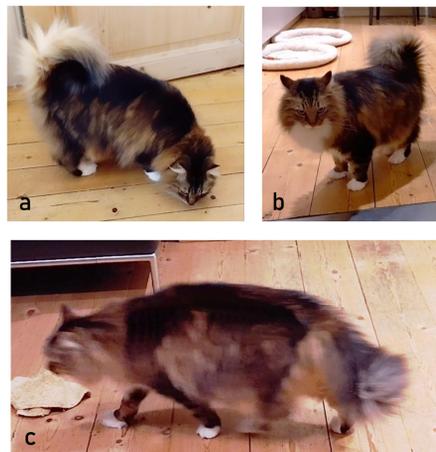


Fig 1: Domestic Longhair cat with tail curled in Spitz-like position (a and b) and hanging down (c).

British Shorthair (Mn, 2y)

Caregiver report

- Spitz-like tail present since adoption (14w old), acquired from a breeder
- Cat-cat affiliative interactions occur at least weekly
- Cat-cat bond rated as strong

Video analysis

- 27 home videos collected (48.8min)
- Normal tail movements when tail is hanging down (tail wave, tail swish, tail twitch, tail slap), Spitz-like tail during social approach (Fig. 2)
- Affiliative interactions with cohoused cat including head rubbing, social play, allogrooming and sleeping together



Fig 2: British Shorthair with Spitz-like tail position as an adult (a,b) and as a 14-week old kitten (c) compared with a tail hanging down (d).

Discussion

Spitz-like tail

- We hypothesize that the Spitz-like tail is caused by an anomaly related to the tail tendons and muscles.
- Anecdotal reports exist about its occurrence in other breeds (Ocicat, Chartreux, Abessijn etc.), and some people tend to breed towards this feature, labelling the cats as 'American Ringtails'⁶. However, this is not a recognised breed and is not supported by International Cat Care⁷.

Communication

- The 'tail up' signal is possibly not deterministic for social interaction, as intraspecific interaction and social bond formation are possible.
- Other communicative cues (e.g. olfactory signals, vocalisations, facial behaviour), multimodal communication, relatedness and familiarity^{8,9} play an important role during social interactions.

Conclusion

This documentation of the Spitz-like tail in cats extends awareness of this feature as a spontaneous anomaly and indicates that cats may function socially with this detail. This emphasises how social signals are often processed holistically and cautions against deterministic interpretation of individual signals, i.e. that a certain signal necessarily communicates a particular message, or its absence means that effective communication is not possible.

References

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