

Library Cats from All Over the World
Brief History- Society- Job Description - Rules

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Library Cats

Brief History – Society- Job Description - Rules

Brief History

While there are undoubtedly those who would disagree, many people find that one or more cats make a valuable and welcome addition to the 'staff' of public libraries. Not only do they keep the establishment rodent-free, but they also have a calming effect and make the reading room feel more like home, especially for younger patrons and senior citizens who may live in accommodations without pets. Many of the library cats make their presence known and enjoy greeting visitors; others prefer more of a 'backroom' role behind the scenes.

Cats in libraries are not a new idea. The libraries of ancient Egypt made the animals welcome - perhaps to be expected in a society that worshipped them; and there has been an 'army' of cats to keep down rodents in Russia's Hermitage Museum and Library for more than 250 years.

"There are, 809 library cats worldwide 664 of which are in the U.S, as well as 507 past felines." Gary Roma

The relationship between cats and libraries is centuries old. The association relates to ancient times when Herodotus described the existence of libraries in Egyptian temples. During this period, some animals were given special training to prevent rodents and serpents from infiltrating temples to preserve papyrus rolls.

Some 1,500 years after cats were first domesticated, in 3rd century BC Egypt, the Library of Alexandria was constructed, it served as the nation's epicenter of scholarship and cats played a central role in its development.

Pestis, a sub-librarian whose job was to sort and organize thousands of manuscripts, most of which were unlabeled and hard to identify due to the nibbling of rogue mice. One day, a small cat approached him, sat by his side for several hours, and followed him back to the library. The smitten Petsis named his new friend Myeo, and he became the world's first "library cat." Almost immediately, Myeo went about eradicating the pesky mice and helping to preserve the manuscripts and soon, Petsis had enlisted a small army of like-minded cats to join him.

In ancient Egypt, cats were a symbol of wisdom; surely enough, Petsis' new felines encouraged a stroke of genius. As he recorded the "kills" of each cat on scraps of papyrus, he found himself left with a disorganized mess of names. His solution led to the first recorded instance of alphabetization.

One evening, Petsis realized that if he put the scraps in alphabetical order by each cat's name he would be able to find, and update, each record more rapidly.

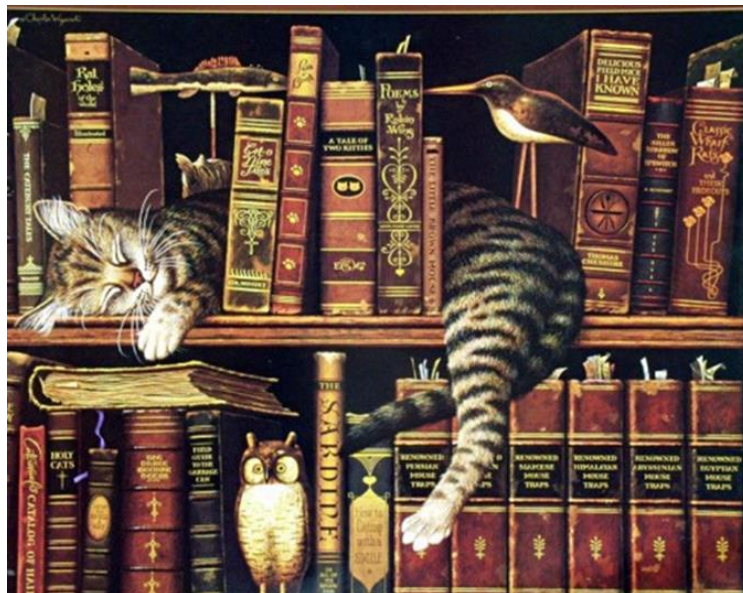
Shortly thereafter, he realized that he could apply the same principle to the organization of the scrolls. Thus, it appears, that Petsis, with major assistance from Myeo was responsible for the introduction of alphabetization for organization, classification, and cataloging. (Gary Roma's *Iron Frog* site)



Monastic records from the Middle Ages indicate cats were utilized in medieval monasteries to stop rats from eating expensive manuscripts.

In 1745, Russian Empress Elisabeth published an order to transport cats to her court. The descendants of these cats now patrol the State Hermitage museums. Under the

directive of Empress Elizabeth, cats were employed to roam the halls of Russia's Hermitage Museum library. "Find the best and biggest cats, capable of catching mice," she ordered in 1745, "and send them by a cart with sufficient food immediately."



During the nineteenth century, the British government compensated libraries housing cats that kept rodents away from books. In 19th century Britain, librarians were paid extra to employ cats as a natural form of rodent control.

Records of cats in American libraries date back at least 150 years.





Not so many years ago there were thought to be several hundred cats in libraries around the world, many of them being in the United States of America, but exact numbers were hard to come by and anyway constantly changed, as some cats died and others, new ones might have been taken on - or not. There are undoubtedly fewer library cats these days, and there could be several reasons for this. Budget cuts might have played some part, although usually the cats aren't on any official payroll but are fed and cared for by staff and patron contributions. The presence of cats must of course be approved by the library Board, and it seems that in many cases they are more reluctant than in the past to give that approval. One reason for this has probably to do with the question of some clients suffering from allergies to felines (or at least claiming to); the Board should take such matters seriously and it can lead to a cat not being replaced when it dies or, in extreme cases, being 'evicted' and having to be rehomed. In contrast, some libraries deal with the problem effectively while keeping a cat. It can be done; we certainly feel it's the best solution.

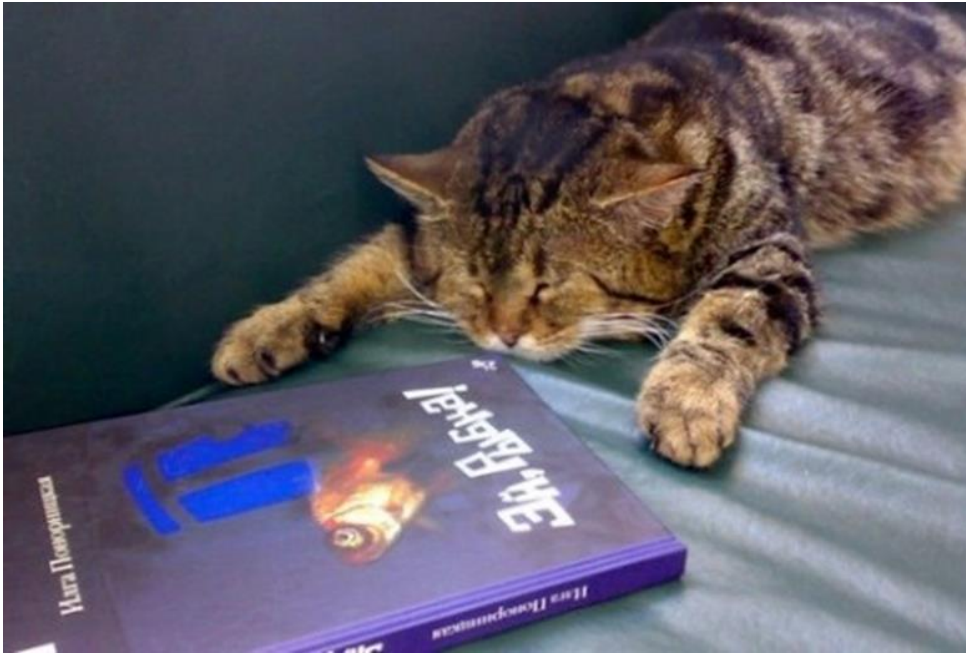
For very many years there was a remarkable database of worldwide library cats to be found at Gary Roma's *Iron Frog* site, an excellent resource for anyone interested in these felines. **(2)**



Dewey, the most famous library cat of all, died in 2006 but has left us his job description and rules for library cats, which are reproduced below. His own story, with photos and links, is told in our *Famous Felines* section. We should also not forget Baker and Taylor of a couple of decades earlier at A small Nevada library; they also enjoyed huge fame in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Society

In 1987, Phyllis Lahti, a librarian in Minnesota, started the Library Cat Society. Her goals were twofold: to encourage the integration of cats at libraries, to improve the well-being and image of library cats, and to encourage library staff to recognize the advantages of a feline 'literary presence' and to respect the animals and to tout the advantages of a “feline literary presence” catching. For years, Lahti produced a little-known newsletter and attempted to compile a list of all known library cats in the United States.



The Library Cat Society was established to encourage the establishment, respect, and recognition of library cats. The society included dozens of member libraries that exchanged information about their cats and published a newsletter about them.

In the late 1990s, Gary Roma tell: “I was doing research in a library for another project, and the Encyclopedia of Associations, I came across a listing for the Library Cat Society. So, I went through an archive of all the past newsletters came up with a list of library cats, and went on a road trip from Massachusetts to North Dakota to document all the library cats I could find.”

The ongoing relationship between cats and libraries has been chronicled in the anthology *Cats, Librarians, and Libraries: Essays for and About the Library Cat Society*.

The story of the Society began during a Minnesota winter blizzard when Phyllis heard a cat mewing piteously outside the door of her home. She recognized him as one of the street cats she had been feeding, but he was distressed and suffering from bites and sores. She took him in and gave him 'first aid', but her own two cats made it clear they weren't about to welcome any newcomer — so she took him to her workplace at the Bryant Public Library. Given the name Royal Reggie, 'because of his regal bearing', this feline soon established himself as Cat in Residence, his preferred spot to hang out is the reference room.



Job Description

1. Reducing stress for all humans who pay attention to him.
2. Sitting by the front door every morning at 9:00 am to greet the public as they enter the library.
3. Sampling all boxes that enter the library for security problems and comfort level.
4. Attending all meetings in the Round Room as the official library ambassador.
5. Providing comic relief for staff and visitors whenever possible.
6. Climbing in book bags and briefcases while patrons are studying or trying to retrieve needed papers underneath him.
7. Generating free national and worldwide publicity for Spencer Public Library. (This entails sitting still for photographs, smiling for the camera, and generally being cute.)
8. Working toward status as the world's most finicky cat by refusing all but the most expensive, delectable foods — and even turning up his nose at those most of the time.

Rules

1. Staff: If you are feeling particularly lonely and want more attention from the staff, sit on whatever papers, project, or computer they happen to be working on at the time - but sit with your back to the person and act aloof, so as not to appear too needy. Also, for

maximum effect, be sure to continually rub against the leg of the staff person who is wearing dark brown, blue, or black.

2. Patrons: No matter how long the patron plans on staying at the library, climb into their briefcase or bookbag for a long, comfortable sleep until they must dump you out on the table to leave.

3. Ladders: Never miss an opportunity to climb on ladders. It does not matter which human is on the ladder. It only matters that you get to the top and stay there.

4. Closing time: Wait until 10 minutes before closing time to get up from your nap. Just as the staff is getting ready to turn out the lights and lock the door, do all your cutest tricks to get them to stay and play with you. (Although this doesn't work very often, sometimes they can't resist giving in to one short game of hide-and-seek.)

5. Boxes: Your humans must realize that all boxes which enter the library are yours. It doesn't matter how large, how small, or how full the box should be - it is yours! If you cannot fit your entire body into the box, then use whatever part of your body fits to assume ownership for naptime. (I have used one or two paws, my head, or even just my tail to gain entry, and each works equally well for a truly restful sleep.)

6. Meetings: No matter the group, timing, or subject matter, if there is a meeting scheduled in the meeting room — you must attend. If they have shut you out by closing the door, cry pitifully until they let you in or until someone opens the door to use the restroom or get a drink of water. After you gain entry, be sure to go around the room and greet each attendee. If there is a film showing or a slide show, climb on any table close to the screen, settle in, and watch the film to the conclusion. As the credits roll, feign extreme boredom and leave the meeting before it concludes.

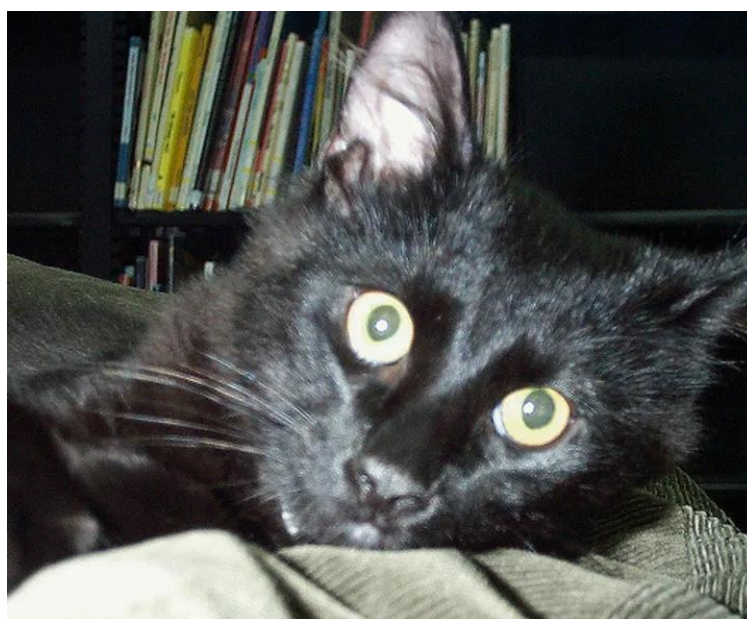
And remember the library cat's golden rule for all time:

"Never forget, nor let humans forget, that you own the joint!" (1)

Who can forget Dewey, the beautiful ginger library resident that touched millions' hearts with his stories? Did you know that there are over 300 known library cats in the world? Currently, there are 235 library cats in the U.S., 21 in the U.K., 12 in Canada, and 6 in Australia.



This is Emma from Lyme Public Library in Lyme Connecticut (U.S.). She was browsing the business and finance books in the 2007 library book sale. [photo credit: Ealling]



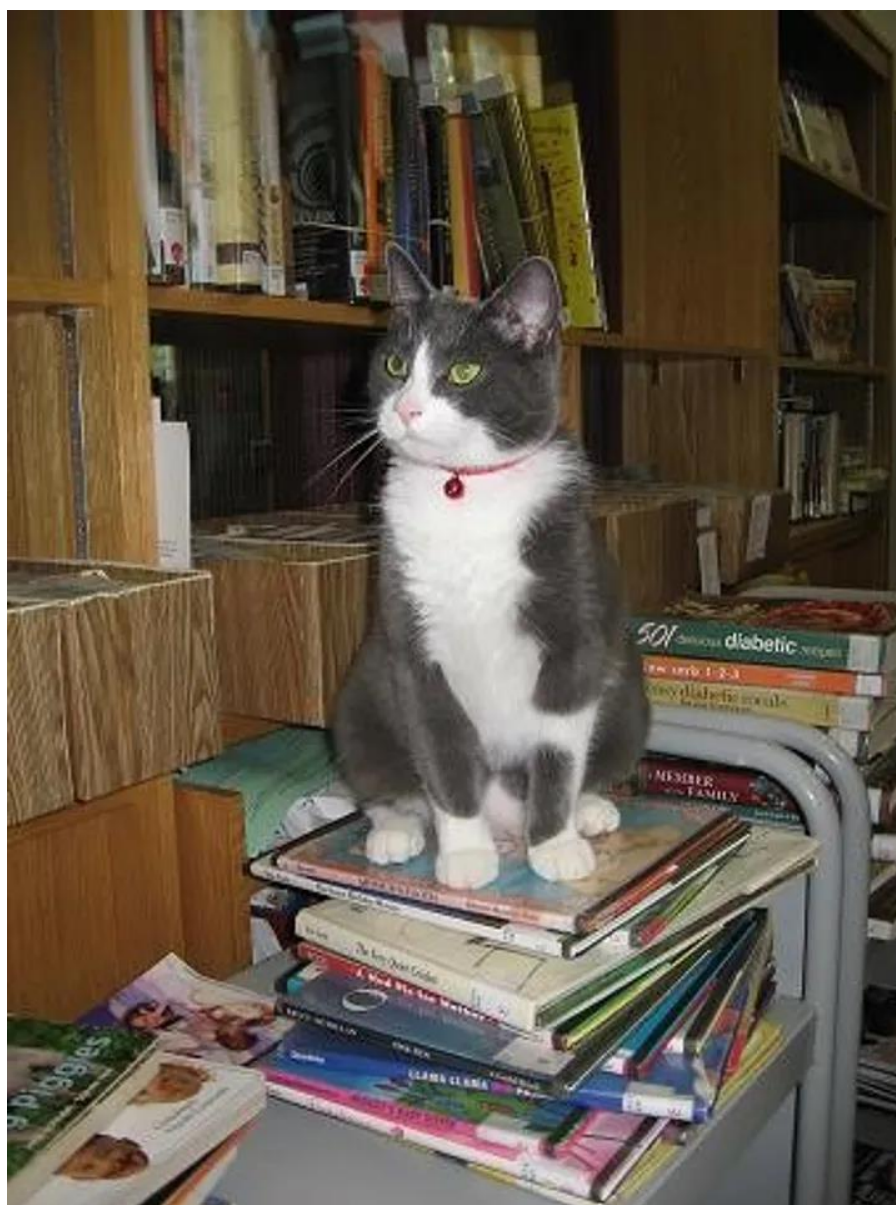
Blacky is a resident of the Montezuma Township Library in Montezuma, Kansas (U.S.). [photo credit: Library]



Israeli Library Cat "Israel" in a library in Jerusalem.



Libris is a resident at the Willet Memorial Library of Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia (U.S.). Libris even has his introduction page on the college website. [photo credit: Emcgough]



This is Page, a feline resident at the Cazenovia Public Library in Cazenovia, New York. She is a very friendly and playful kitty that greets everyone that comes into the library. [photo credit: Cazenovia Mummy Blog]

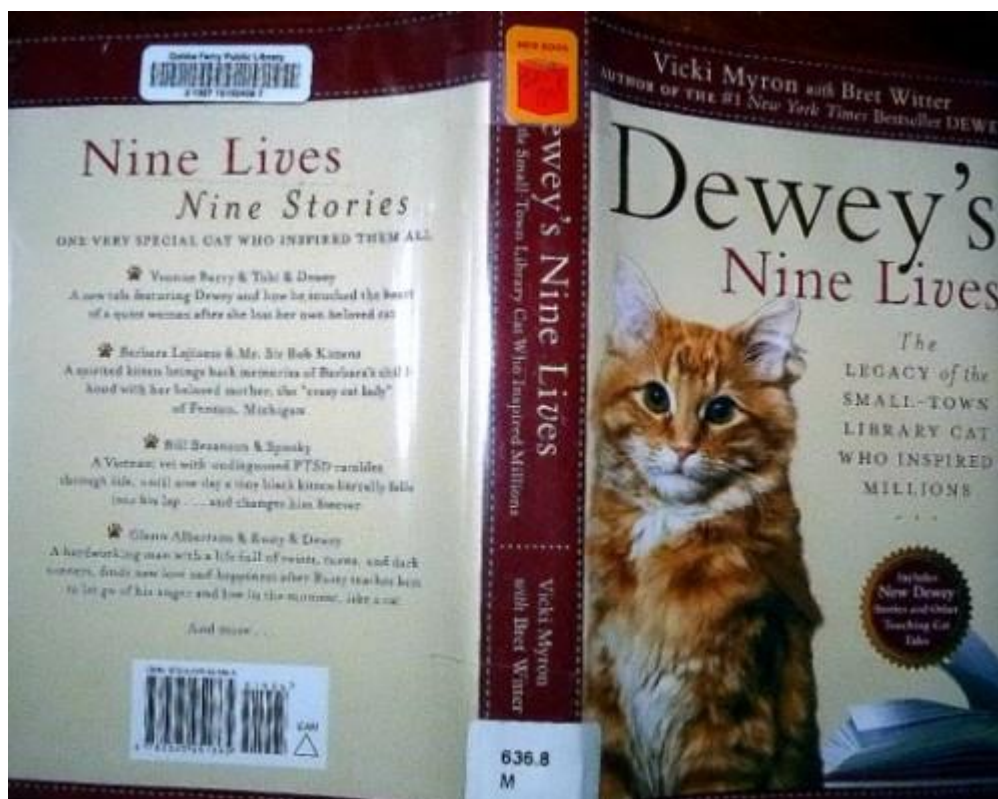
Dewey Readmore Books is perhaps the most famous library cat. He lived in Iowa's Spencer Public Library for 19 years. After his death, a book was published about him.

Dewey Readmore Books was the resident cat at Spencer Public Library. He was put in the book return one cold January night in 1988. When the staff found him the next morning, they decided to adopt him. After the library's board of trustees and the city council approved, the kitten was declawed, neutered, and given the proper vaccinations.



A contest was held to pick a name and Dewey Readmore Books were officially added to the staff. Dewey was a video star in "Puss in Books", a documentary about library cats. Of course, Dewey was already the star of the library. Many people came in just to see him. Dewey even had his job description. Dewey passed away on November 29, 2006, he had

become very frail because of hyperthyroid disease for which he was receiving medication. Although Dewey is gone, he will be remembered by thousands of people whom he cheered by simply being a loving presence in the library. Although we may get another library cat, Dewey will never be replaced. The library won't be the same without Dewey.



Dewey's memory lives on. He is an official member of the Library Cat Society and was a contributing author on several occasions using Vicki Myron, the library director, as his scribe. Vicki has written an adult book about her life with Dewey at Spencer Public Library, published on September 24th, 2008. Dewey Readmore Books, the Famous Library Cat.



There's a wonderful Job Description for a Library Cat provided by the Spencer Library of Iowa for their long-serving cat Dewey, or 'Dewey Read more Books' to give him his full name. Dewey made sure to keep up his library duties, which were listed on a placard in his “study” at the back of the building:

1. *Reducing stress for all humans who pay attention to him.*
2. *Sitting by the front door every morning at 9:00 am to greet the public as they enter the library.*
3. *Sampling all boxes that enter the library for security problems and comfort level.*
4. *Attending all meetings in the Round Room as the official library ambassador.*
5. *Providing comic relief for staff and visitors whenever possible.*
6. *Climbing in book bags and briefcases while patrons are studying.*
7. *Generating free national and worldwide publicity for Spencer Public Library. (This entails sitting still for photographs, smiling for the camera, and generally being cute.)*
8. *Working toward status as the world's most finicky cat by refusing all but the most expensive, delectable foods — and even turning up his nose at those most of the time. (4)*

Browser the library cat will not be facing unemployment after all.

The beloved feline, who was adopted by the White Settlement Public Library in Texas six years ago to help with a rodent problem, will remain in his home, despite a previous motion to remove him. The White Settlement city council voted unanimously on Friday to reverse its decision after its initial movement to evict the cat a few weeks ago received an incredible amount of backlash.



Browser the cat sits among a group of children being read to in the city's public library, June 30, 2016, in White Settlement, Texas.

Ron White, the mayor of White Settlement, told ABC News that since the original motion to remove Browser, he has received more than 1,500 emails in support of Browser staying at the library. The emails came from all 50 states, Australia, Canada, Iceland, France, Germany, England, Guam, Malaysia, and Singapore, according to White.

White himself has never been in favor of removing Browser and it remains unclear why the councilmen suddenly took issue with the cat.

One of the largest arguments against Browser was the inconvenience he presents for community members with a cat allergy. White maintains that an air purifier in the library removes over 99 percent of allergens from the air.

The motion to reinstate Browser was introduced by Elzie Clements, the very councilman that initially led the movement against the cat. White said he does not think the councilmen who motioned to oust Browser realized the amount of backlash it would elicit. “I don’t think they understood what they had done, to begin with, and how it would affect everybody,” he said. **(5)**

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Amy Bojo
Jan 05 10

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(4) Beloved Cat Will Keep His Job at the Local Library After International Backlash

The Texas city council reversed its decision to evict the feline Friday.

By RICKI HARRIS

July 5, 2016, 7:31 PM

<https://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/beloved-cat-job-local-library-international-backlash/story?id=40351635>