

Black is the colour?

October is here, heralding in autumn and its longer nights. Now is the time for Halloween with its traditional tales of witches flying with black cats on broomsticks.

The black cat in folklore has often been viewed as unlucky. When the pilgrims arrived in America they brought with them a devout faith in the Bible. They also brought a deepening suspicion of anything deemed of the devil and they viewed the black cat as a companion, or a familiar, to witches. Anyone caught with a black cat would be severely punished or even killed. They viewed the black cat as part demon and part sorcery. During the middle ages these superstitions led people to kill black cats. This had the unintended consequence of increasing the rat population and the spread of the black death and other diseases carried by rodents!

However, the supernatural powers ascribed to black cats were sometimes viewed positively, for example sailors considering a ship's cat would want a black one because it would bring good luck. Sometimes, fishermen's wives would keep black cats at home too, in the hope that they would be able to use their influence to protect their husbands at sea. The view of black cats being favorable creatures is attributed specifically to the Egyptian goddess Bastet, the cat goddess. Egyptian people believed they could gain favor from her by hosting black cats in their household. This view was held in the early 17th century by the English monarch Charles I. Upon the death of his treasured pet black cat, he is said to have lamented that his luck was gone. True to his claim, he was arrested the very next day and charged with high treason!

So is a black cat lucky or unlucky? Statistics would say neither! A survey of cats involved in road traffic accidents found they were no more or less likely than any other cat to be involved in a collision. There were factors that did make a difference to this. Male cats were twice as likely as females to be run over and the older the cat the less likely was it to happen. An accident was more likely to happen at night and also more likely to occur near to where it lives. Un-neutered cats are again more likely than neutered cats to suffer such misfortune.

In fact there is no evidence that a black cat has a longer or shorter lifespan than any other coloured cat. Cats that are kept indoors definitely have a longer average lifespan than those left free to roam. This of course is most likely to be associated with them not suffering from road traffic accidents.

As far as black cats being lucky to you or I that has to be a matter of opinion. However there is no scientific data to support such a hypothesis!

So to keep your cat lucky there are things you can do for it. Keeping it in, especially at night, is a big plus. Having it neutered is another, especially if it is a male cat.

So at this superstitious time of year let's keep our cats lucky. Get it in before dark and, if it's not been neutered, talk to your Veterinary Surgeon now about arranging it. It may save you a lot of heartache!

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