

# 10 Myths about matings

By Yorkshire Cat Rescue

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Myths and misconceptions about cat pregnancies, matings and the welfare of both males and females

## 1. Cats should have one litter/they should be able to experience motherhood

There is no medical evidence to suggest that cats should have one litter. Even if **you** want them to experience motherhood **they** will not remember the experience. Mating is also a very painful experience for a female cat: the tom cat's penis has little barbs which catch on her vagina as he withdraws after mating. This promotes ovulation (release of eggs). Because cats do not ovulate until they are mated, the queen will continue to call even after she has been mated, and will remain in season for several days. It is not uncommon for a cat to be mated 10-20 times on the first day she is calling and then several times over the next few days. The screams that are heard when cats mate are the female cats screaming in pain as the tom cat withdraws.

## 2. She won't get pregnant, she's under a year old

Cats can come into season, get mated and get pregnant from when they are just five months old. She may not be mature enough to successfully raise the litter, and therefore abandon them or fail to socialise them properly. Likewise, because she is not yet fully grown, she could struggle to deliver them safely. A five-month old cat having kittens is the equivalent of a human teenager having a baby.

## 3. My cats won't mate because they are brother and sister

This is a common misconception, but cats will in fact mate with their siblings, their parents and even with their own offspring. They simply don't recognise those boundaries. Once a female cat comes into season, her body is hard-wired to mate and reproduce. She will choose the best tom cat(s) she can find. If she is unable to go outside but is locked indoors with her brother, she will almost certainly mate with him. Kittens born from such matings may suffer severe deformities and often don't survive.

## 4. Neutering is cruel, it hurts the cats

Neutering is done under general anaesthetic and can only be undertaken by a registered veterinary surgeon. Painkillers are administered before the cat wakes up and these last for several days. Cats heal very quickly and by the time the painkiller wears off, the healing process is very much underway. Most cats are sleepy the day of the operation due to the anaesthetic, but return to normal the next day – playing, eating and sleeping. Neutered queens (female cats) can continue to feed their kittens almost as soon as they wake up from the operation. Neutered kittens usually bounce around very quickly afterwards too and show no signs of pain or slowing down. Again, it is in fact mating that really hurts the cats!

## **5. I've got a male cat so it doesn't matter, I won't end up with kittens/I want my cat to keep his 'manhood'**

If you let your male cat outside, even if he has access to his home, food and bed, he will start to wander in search of female cats coming into season. A male cat can stray for many miles in the search of a female ready to mate. Male cats fight each other to show the queen that they are the strongest – picking up injuries and diseases as a result. They may also become injured by cars, dogs and so on, lose their way and lose weight as a result of their wandering. If you intend to keep your un-neutered male cat indoors, he will become very frustrated and probably begin to either self-harm (over-groom) or attack other members of the household – people as well as animals. He will spray urine on the furniture, walls and doors and he will frequently attempt to escape. Your male cat simply won't be able to help it; it is his hormones taking over. The smell of 'spray' is a very unpleasant pungent odour that is very difficult to remove – even from wipeable surfaces. It is almost impossible to remove from soft furnishings. Cats don't know they are neutered or un-neutered. They simply respond to the hormones produced by their bodies in either circumstance. So an un-neutered male cat will find himself outside in all weathers fighting, mating, starving and getting lost. A neutered male won't have any of those urges or instincts. Instead he will be tucked up warm and dry at home with a full tummy and a healthy body.

## **6. She has already had a litter of kittens, she won't want any more/she is nursing kittens so she can't get pregnant again**

Female cats can come into season when their kittens are about five weeks old, and can successfully mate while still feeding their current litter. As well as creating too many kittens, allowing her to have litter after litter will stop her regaining her weight and health after each litter, and she will become very thin. Constant mating will also expose her to a whole host of viruses and bacterial infections brought in by the tom cats she mates with.

## **7. Watching the birth is educational for my children**

This is a great reason to offer your services as a fosterer carer for your local cat rescue. It is a wonderful experience, but also one that is shortly followed by lots of work – cleaning litter trays for a mother cat and her six kittens is no easy task. Sometimes kittens don't make it and in rare circumstances they are born with deformities. Be prepared to explain the loss to your children as well. Ultimately, wouldn't it be better to explain to them how there are too many unwanted and homeless cats in the world, and neutering them stops kittens being killed unnecessarily.



## 8. I can find homes for all the kittens and make money selling them

Maybe you can for some of them, but in time all your friends will have cats and if they don't neuter them, they will also be looking for homes for their kittens. If you breed responsibly which includes having the kittens vet-checked, wormed, treated for fleas, vaccinated, microchipped and raised until they are properly old enough to leave their mum (10 weeks minimum) and maybe have them neutered, you will in fact end up making a financial loss. Kittens are very expensive. Most rescue centres charge an adoption fee, but it does not come anywhere close to covering the cost of the veterinary treatment the kitten has had, never mind the food and care. Most responsible owners these days go to a cat rescue if they want to adopt a cat or kitten, so the private market for kittens is shrinking. If you rehome to just anyone, your kittens may not have the best home which isn't really what you want for those little furry faces you watched come into the world. Even if you do find wonderful homes for your kittens, that means there are now fewer homes to go round for the UK's many abandoned kittens.

## 9. My cat is an indoor only cat – it won't get out

Male and female cats cannot help coming into season and needing to mate. When they do, they will stop at nothing to do so – rushing out of the door as you come in. Cats have even been known to get out of a window that is only open an inch or so. If this happens, the chances are that your cat won't return as it is will be on unknown territory the minute its paws hit the ground. Female cats often get chased away from their immediate garden and tom cats will wander off to look for females. At Yorkshire Cat Rescue we get a lot of lost cat reports; those un-neutered cats who have managed to escape for the first time are rarely found again. We equally get a lot of young cats with kittens and no owners. These might often have been former indoor-cats who got out. Sadly, we rarely match the lost with the found.

## 10 What's wrong with it? Cats are great mothers and kittens are cute

The reason there are too many cats is because cats ARE good mothers. However, once they have a second litter they will push their first one away. Some may not make it. Cats are usually only good mothers to their current litter and those are often rejected once they reach a certain age, regardless of whether they are pregnant again or have given birth to more kittens. Kitten hood only lasts a short time. Being responsible lasts a lifetime.

**Yorkshire Cat Rescue**

Registered charity 1058218

**01535 647184**

**[www.yorkshirecatrescue.org](http://www.yorkshirecatrescue.org)**

**[mail@yorkshirecatrescue.org](mailto:mail@yorkshirecatrescue.org)**

**The Farm, Lower Pierce Close, Cross  
Roads, Keighley BD22 9AQ**