

# Thwarting the Alarm Clock Cat

Taken from article by: Dr. Nicholas Dodman; PetPlace.com

Dealing with cats that wake you up before the alarm clock is frustrating, especially you want to sleep! Contrary to popular belief, cats are not nocturnal. They sleep at night as we do, just not for quite as long. Cats are "crepuscular," which means they are most active at dawn and dusk. This is because their ancestors' prey was most active at these times, so it made sense for them to adjust to that schedule. It's pitch black in the middle of the night, and although cats' night vision is very good, they can't see without light. Instead, they sleep.

And herein lies the problem of the chronic "alarm clock" cat. Two things combine to make this phenomenon possible:

- **Nature.** Your cat's internal clock and crepuscular nature tells her that it's time to get up at around dawn. Depending on the time of sunrise, cats will become active sooner or later. During summer in lands of midnight sun, cats may not be triggered by the dawn. During the long, dark, sunless winters of the Antarctic, a cat would probably sleep till lunchtime every day.
- **Training.** This is where the cat's owner comes in. Let's say your cat becomes active first thing in the morning. She quickly becomes bored because there's nothing going on. If you so much as look at this cat, rewarding her with your attention, you may well get more of the same in days to come. Worse still, if you assume that your cat is pacing around and scratching your furniture because she's hungry, and you get up and feed her, then you have really made a bed upon which you must lie (awake).

At this stage, pretending to be asleep, yelling at the cat, rolling over, and other forms of stubborn resistance usually do not work. The cat continues her (no doubt) occasionally successful quests. And remember, occasional reward is a powerful reinforce. Some of the things you do may even amuse and entertain the bored cat. You may, in effect, become a big squeaky toy for your cat.

## Suggestions to prevent early awakenings:

### Highly Recommended

- Understand your cat and don't blame her for the way that nature designed her. Have some patience and forbearance as you try to realign her habits.
- Fit thick, lightproof curtains in your bedroom and hallways so that your whole sleeping area is totally dark at night.
- Do not respond (in any way) to your cat's dawn-time demands ... ever.
- Feed your cat twice daily on a set schedule, but do not feed her first thing in the morning.
- Keep the cat occupied during the day (exercise, games, toys, bring her to your place of work, etc.)

### Things That Might Help

- Feed your cat her last meal of the day at bedtime, which may help her sleep
- Get a cat for your cat so that you are no longer her sole source of entertainment.

