

TITANTONKS

Tonkinese Cats



How Many Signals Does a Cat Tail Make?

From *CatWatching* by Dr Desmond Morris

Tail curves gently down and then up again at the tip

This is a relaxed cat at peace with the world

Tail raised slightly and softly curved.

The cat is becoming interested in something

Tail held erect but with the tip tilted over.

The cat is becoming very interested and is in a friendly, greeting mood, but with slight reservations.

Tail fully erect with the tip stiffly vertical.

An intense greeting display with no reservations. In adult cats, this posture is 'borrowed' from the action of a kitten greeting its mother. The kitten's signal is an invitation to the mother cat to inspect its rear end, so there is an element of subordination in this display, as there is in most greeting ceremonies.

Tail fully lowered and possibly even tucked between the hind legs.

This is a signal of a defeated or totally submissive cat that wishes to stress its lowly social status.

Tail lowered and fluffed out.

This cat is indicating fear.

Tail swished violently from side to side.

This is the conflict signal of tail-wagging, in its most angry version. If the tail swings very vigorously from side to side it usually means the animal is about to attack, if it can summon up that last ounce of aggression.

Tail held still, but with tip swishing.

This is the version of tail-wagging that indicates only mild irritation. But if the tip-twitching becomes more powerful, then it can act as a clue that a swipe from a bad tempered paw is imminent.

Tail held erect with its whole length quivered.

This gentle quivering action is often seen after the cat has been greeted by its owner. It is the same action that is observed when urine-spraying is taking place out of doors but in this case there is no urine produced. Whether some slight, invisible scent is expelled is unclear, but the gesture appears to have a meaning of friendly 'personal identification' as if the cat is saying "Yes, this is me!"

Tail held to one side.

This is the sexual invitation signal of the female cat on heat. When she is ready to be mounted by the male she conspicuously moves her tail over to one side. When he sees this, the tom-cat knows he can mount her without being attacked.

Tail held straight and fully bristled.

This is the signal of an aggressive cat.

Tail arched and bristled.

This is the signal of a defensive cat, but one that may attack if provoked further. The bristling of the fur makes the animal look bigger, a 'transformation display' that may deter an enemy if the defensive cat is lucky.