



The Power of Claws

When you think of claws you probably think of cats—from wild cats like lions and tigers to domestic cats that people keep as pets. But cats aren't the only animals that have claws, and animals do more with their claws than you probably think they do.

Though both grow from the ends of digits, and are made of the same thing (keratin), claws and fingernails are not the same. Nails are flat and dull on the ends, while claws are sharp and pointed. Hundreds of different animals have claws—bears, cats, dogs, rodents, birds of prey, even pigs and raccoons! Carnivores almost always have claws. They use them to hold prey, climb trees, and dig for food. The biggest carnivore with claws is an elephant seal.

The claws of a cat are different from the claws of other mammals because they are retractable. This means that they can have their claws out only when they need to use them, for instance, to hunt or to climb trees. This feature helps to protect claws from everyday wear and tear. The Cheetah's claws, though, are only partly retractable. Because a cat's claws help them to keep from slipping when running, a Cheetah's claws need to be ready to go at all times, so a part of their claws is always out.

Most clawed animals use their claws for hunting, digging, or self-defense. But there is a different kind of claw called a "toilet claw". It is flatter and duller than other claws and is used only for grooming. The Bushbaby is an example of a mammal with a "toilet claw". Another kind of claw is called a "dew claw". You may have noticed that dogs and many other hoofed animals have what looks like an extra toe with a claw on it on the back of their legs, too far up to touch the ground. Cats sometimes use dew claws when attacking prey, but dogs and most hoofed animals don't use them for anything. They are just what's left of what was once probably a useful body part that is no longer used for anything.

1. The word *domestic* means:

- A. friendly
- B. no longer wild
- C. adaptable

2. In the context of this article, a *digit* is:

- A. a number
- B. a foot
- C. a finger or a toe

3. Which two words in the article are antonyms?

- A. hunting and digging
- B. flat and dull
- C. dull and sharp

4. Retractable means:

- A. able to be withdrawn
- B. able to be regrown
- C. useful