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The features marked with a star (*) are based entirely on material taken straight from standard research (and other Official and Therefore Always Correct) literature. Many of the other articles are genuine, too, but we don't know which ones.

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On the Front Cover

Symbolic depiction of a waiter delivering a measure of justice, even while several hands tip the scale.
Photo: A.S. Kaswell



Some Coming Events

The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced excitingly boundless uncertainty as to whether, when, where, and how various public activities will happen in the near future. In 2021 most (but not all?) will happen teledistantly.

See [IMPROBABLE.COM](https://improbable.com) for details of these and other events:

September 9, 2021

The 31st First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony

2021 (Dates TBD, pandemic permitting)
Ig Nobel EuroTour

2021 (Dates TBD, pandemic permitting)
Japan



The Improbable Research podcast is back!

[https://www.improbable.com/
category/the-weekly-improbable-research-podcast/](https://www.improbable.com/category/the-weekly-improbable-research-podcast/)

Where There's More

There's always new improbable — it's not what you expect! — stuff on the **Improbable Research blog** at [IMPROBABLE.COM](https://improbable.com)

CATS RESEARCH REVIEW: DO CATS EAT HUMAN REMAINS?

Research in, on, or about cats

by Stephen Drew, Improbable Research staff

Do Cats Eat Human Remains? (2017)

“Postmortem Scavenging of Human Remains by Domestic Cats,” Ananya Suntirukpong, Robert W. Mann, and John R. DeFreytas, *Siriraj Medical Journal*, vol. 69, no. 6, 2017, pp. 384–387. The authors, at Mahidol University, Thailand, and the University of Hawaii, report:

The authors present a case report of a partially skeletonized adult male found dead after more than three months in his apartment in Thailand. The body was in an advanced stage of decomposition with nearly complete skeletonization of the head, neck, hands, and feet.... Examination of the hand and foot bones revealed canine tooth puncture marks. Evidence of chewing indicated that one or more of the decedent’s three house cats had fed on the body after death.

A comparison of antemortem dental records with a thorough postmortem dental examination positively identified the decedent.



Fig 1. Hand and foot bones (yellow) scattered on the floor around the decedent’s bed by his cats. The brownish-gray dust-like substance on the floor is frass (feces) from the dermestid beetles that fed on the decedent.

Forensic anthropological analysis of the skeletonized remains concomitant with the examination for perimortem trauma revealed robust male features in the crania, pelvis, and long bones. These features consisted of a sloping frontal bone, developed nuchal crests, large mastoid processes, blunt orbital rims, and a developed brow ridge and glabella.^{13,14,15} The anthroposcopic (visual) traits of the pelvis supported the attribution of sex as male. The



Fig 2. Hand and foot bones recovered from the floor around the decedent’s bed, some of which exhibit evidence (circles) of chewing by cats.



Fig 3. Hand bones, some with canine/cuspid puncture marks (circles) and some without evidence of chewing by one or more of the decedent’s cats.

Detail from the study “Postmortem Scavenging of Human Remains by Domestic Cats.”

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CATS RESEARCH REVIEW: DO CATS EAT HUMAN REMAINS?

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Postmortem Scavenging of Human Remains by Domestic Cats

Ananya Suntirukpong, M.D.*, Robert W. Mann, Ph.D.**, John R. DeFreitas, M.S., M.A.***

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Crime scene investigators, forensic medicine doctors and pathologists, and forensic anthropologists frequently encounter postmortem scavenging of human remains by household pets.

Case presentation: The authors present a case report of a partially skeletonized adult male found dead after more than three months in his apartment in Thailand. The body was in an advanced stage of decomposition with nearly

Do Cats Eat Human Remains? (2020)

“The Scavenging Patterns of Feral Cats on Human Remains in an Outdoor Setting,” Sara Garcia, Alexander Smith, Christiane Baigent, and Melissa Connor, *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2020, pp. 948-952. The authors, at Colorado Mesa University, report:

Two cases of feral cat (*Felis catus*) scavenging were documented at the Forensic Investigation Research Station in Whitewater, Colorado. Human remains at the facility are placed outside, observed daily, documented with field notes, and photographed; decomposition is scored on a Likert scale.



Sara Garcia, co-author of the study “The Scavenging Patterns of Feral Cats on Human Remains in an Outdoor Setting.” Drawing by Nan Swift.

AIR Teachers' Guide

Three out of five teachers agree: curiosity is a dangerous thing, especially in students. If you are one of the other two teachers, *AIR* and *mini-AIR* can be powerful tools. Choose your favorite *hAIR*-raising article and give copies to your students. The approach is simple. The scientist thinks that he (or she, or whatever), of all people, has discovered something about how the universe behaves. So:

- Is this scientist right—and what does “right” mean, anyway?
- Can you think of even one different explanation that works as well or better?
- Did the test really, really, truly, unquestionably, completely test what the author thought he was testing?
- Is the scientist ruthlessly honest with himself about how well his idea explains everything, or could he be suffering from wishful thinking?
- Some people might say this is foolish. Should you take their word for it?
- Other people might say this is absolutely correct and important. Should you take their word for it?

Kids are naturally good scientists. Help them stay that way.