

Halloween – Spooky Season



My old black cat snoozing.

It's October, which means it is spooky season. October marks the middle of autumn, with winter approaching and nights getting longer, most people are starting to wrap up warm and get cosy. Animals too will be doing the same, preparing for the winter. Many will be getting ready for hibernation, eating, and storing food away. Outdoor cats may not be as keen to go outside as they are during the spring and summer.

Everyone knows that the 31st of October is Halloween, which is celebrated by dressing up in costume, eating copious amounts of sugar and watching scary movies or reading scary stories. The holiday has quite a long history though, and originates from the Celtic festival of Samhain. Samhain was a festival where people would dress up in costumes to ward off spirits and light bonfires. The time of year was often associated with death, and that the ghosts of the dead would return to earth on the night of Samhain. Sacrifices were made on large bonfires, and it was believed that the Druids could make prophecies of the future on this night. Eventually the Romans, and later the Catholic Church would introduce changes to this festival, resulting in the day after being named All Saints Day, and Samhain becoming All Hallows Eve, and eventually Halloween.

Animals do play a significant role in many traditional Halloween activities and imagery. It is associated with all sorts of spooky and supernatural things, such as witchcraft, the undead, vampires and ghosts. Witches are very often associated with cats, black cats especially, as they are often depicted as a witchs' familiar. Bats are associated with vampires, and with scary places in general. Elsewhere in the world other species are associated with death and spirits.

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One interesting example comes from east Asia, particularly from Japanese folklore. The kitsune, fox spirits believed to possess long lives and supernatural abilities. They are a type of youkai, and some are thought to be friendly and others not so much. They are described as having up to nine tails, sometimes it is said that they grow additional tails as they live longer. Eventually they turn a white or golden colour once they reach 1000 years of age and become a celestial fox, or tenko. They are also said to have the ability to take on human form, and sometimes the ability to possess, produce fire and create illusions. Anyone who was ever a Pokémon fan will recognise these descriptions as the inspiration for Vulpix and Ninetails, fire-type foxes with multiple tails. There are many tales and folklore around the kitsune.

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There are many superstitions across the world, and a few around animals. Halloween particularly involves cats, especially black cats. Many parts of Europe describe black cats as being witches' companions and are thought to bring bad luck if they cross your path. This is the case in England, as well as several other European countries. In Scotland and Japan they are considered good luck. Cats have long been associated with magic and with deities. They were worshipped in ancient Egypt and represented the goddess Bastet. They also symbolised the Greek goddess Hecate, who was associated with magic, witchcraft and the moon, particularly the Crone form of the Triple Goddess. They have been declared as an incarnation of Satan by the Pope in the 13th Century. This link to Satan and witches has led to a lot of persecution of black cats.

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This is largely the reason that black cats are much harder to re-home than other cats. My first cat was all black, and she was older. She was rescued by a colleague and re-homed to me, as her previous owner was unable to keep her any longer but there were no rescues able to take her. She would have been too difficult to re-home due to her age and colour, even with no underlying health conditions. She was one of the sweetest cats I've ever known. The photo above is of her snoozing.

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How are you celebrating Halloween this year? Feel free to share any spooky animal stories or let us know if you have a sweet black cat.

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