

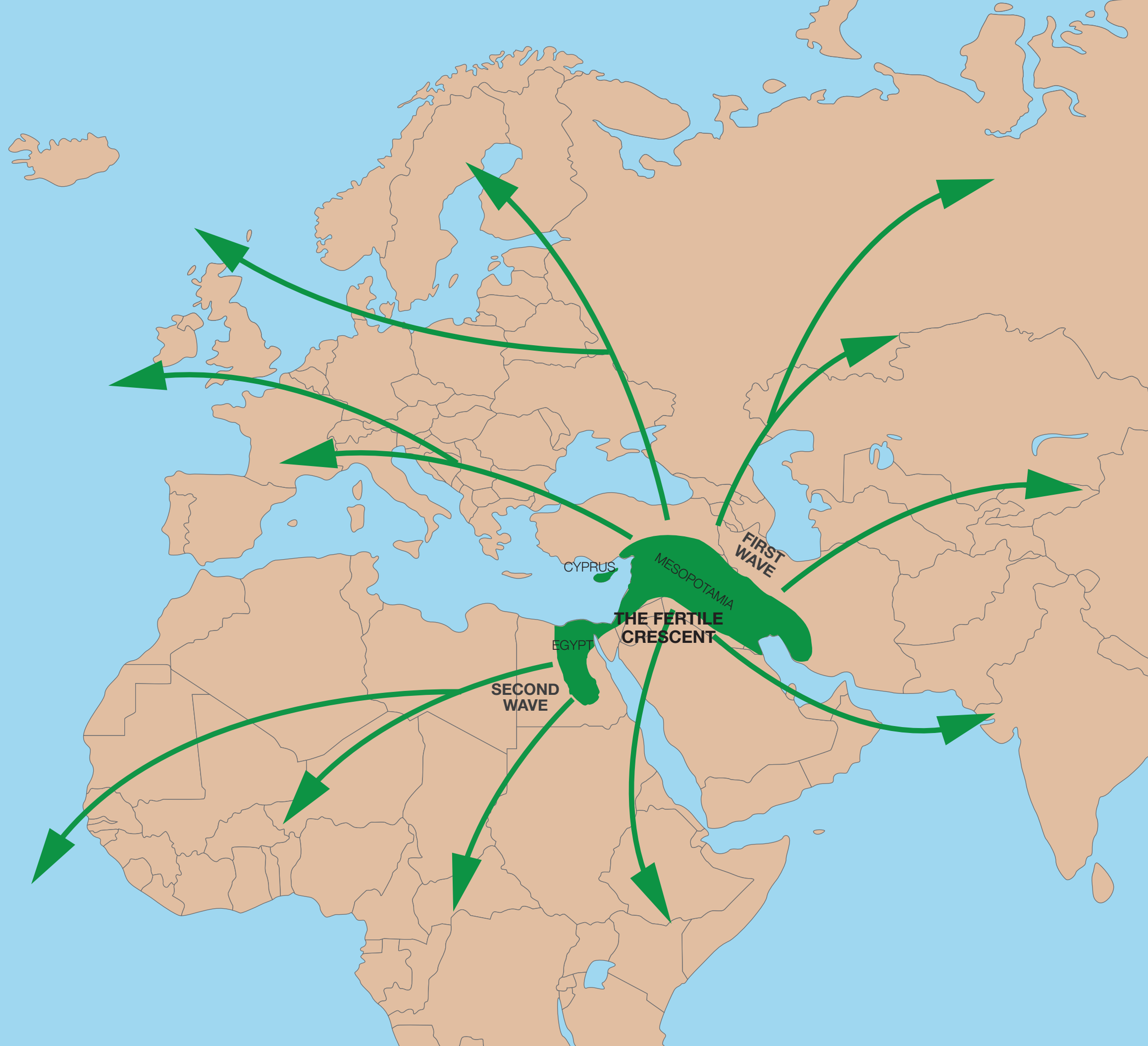
Expansion of Domestic Cats

Cats began their unique relationship with humans 10,000 to 12,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent, the geographic region where some of the earliest developments in human civilization occurred (encompassing modern day parts of West Asia). One such development was agriculture. As people abandoned their nomadic lifestyle and settled permanently to farm the land, stored grain attracted rodents. Taking advantage of this new, abundant food source, Middle Eastern wildcats, or *felix silvestris lybica*, preyed on the rodents and decided to stick around these early towns, scavenging the garbage that all human societies inevitably produce—just as feral cats do today.

After cats befriended Near East farmers, and the farmers recognized their use, they began to crop up along the path of the farming movement. Some 6,000 years ago, after Neolithic farming practices began spreading, it seems that these people-friendly felines foraged northward and westward with humans into Bulgaria and Romania.

Thousands of years after cats in the Near East caught on, a second wave of cats began cohabitating with humans in Egypt. As we know from archeological evidence, cats began living with Ancient Egyptians from at least the 4th century B.C. But DNA shows that during Roman times, these Egyptian felines also began expanding through the Mediterranean, mixing with the Near East cats, and then heading up through the Baltics. Around the fifth and 13th centuries, they ventured through Europe and into Southwest Asia.

It seems cats had hit upon a winning strategy: Stick with humans. When the Viking era began, the expansion of Egyptian felines exploded, likely due to the popularity of ship cats that traveled along the trade routes keeping pests in check. For thousands of years, these furry globetrotters have followed humans wherever they went, conquering every continent except for Antarctica. A new species of cat eventually evolved that naturally made its home around people: *felix catus*. Today, pet, stray, and feral cats belong to this species that we call the domestic cat.



Domestic Cats in Civilizations

