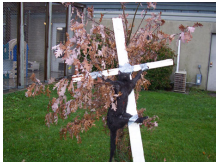


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By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor



The dead cat encountered crucified with duct tape on November 1, 2002, in front of the Iowa City Animal Care and Adoption Center
Misha Goodman

Black Cats and Halloween: Urban Legend or Reality?

Religion or just desire to show off?

Black cat owners, beware! Here comes the Halloween! The time when the mind of many crazy people out there gets... unleashed. At the Iowa City Animal Care and Adoption Center, people are still shocked by what they saw the day after the 2004 Halloween: a black cat duct-taped to an 8-ft (2.5 m)-tall crucifix.

These rare events fuel the myth of the black cats' satanic sacrifice connected to Halloween, and a general fright amongst U.S. animal shelters that caused stopping black-cat adoptions during the period before Halloween, in the middle of a strife attempting to remove this urban legend from people's minds. "The incident in Iowa wasn't carried out as part of a ritualistic mutilation. Instead it was done by a single disturbed adolescent who told friends he thought it would be funny.", said shelter director Misha Goodman.

"I think it's random acts of unkindness. Such misdeeds are likely committed by budding psychopaths or teenage pranksters", said Janja Lalich, an associate professor of sociology at California State University in Chico, an expert on cults.

Adolescents coquetting with satanism commit these atrocities rather to shock the others than for any religious thrill. "In addition there aren't enough satanic believers to cause such concern," said Lalich, who believes that the overall number of organized satanic worshipers in the US does not overcome a few hundreds. "No confirmed statistics, court cases, or studies support the idea that serious satanic cult crime even exists. It turns out that most of the devil-worshipping activity reported in the media is perpetrated by teenagers based on what they've read in church literature or seen in movies," wrote Lesley Bannatyne in a book about Halloween.

Recently, five cats were killed in San Antonio, Texas; they had either missing limbs or the killer cut them off in two; these events boosted speculations about religious ritual-linked animal killings. The clean cuts clearly revealed human work, not attacks from wild animals. The city-run shelter annually halts black cat adoptions before the Halloween. "The reason is to prevent cats from being harmed by religious cults or demented individuals. A recent mutilation case involved an aspiring forensic investigator who practiced on felines," said Elizabeth Brown of the city's Animal Care Services.

"I wasn't aware of any local cases involving cat-killing cults. The temporary suspension of adoptions is an issue of being safe rather than sorry. It's not because we expect something to happen. It's because we want to prevent something from happening.", said Lisa Norwood, a San Antonio shelter spokesperson.

"Denying adoptions only gives the public the wrong idea about black cats. It makes people believe these kitties are evil, and they're not", said Michael Arms, who runs animal adoption workshops throughout US.