

BETABUNNY'S GUIDE TO FAMILIARS



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Betabunny's Guide To Familiars

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Introduction

A familiar is an integral part of a wizard's or a sorcerer's capabilities. They grant numerous powers and capabilities that afford the arcane spellcaster significant advantages. A familiar can act as a spy, a scout, a servant, or a guardian. It can be a messenger, a thief, or another pair of eyes, ears, and hands. In essence, a familiar is an extension of the arcane spellcaster's own self and is his/her closest friend and companion.

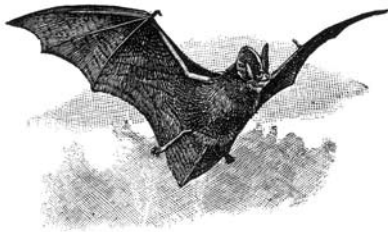
Considering the potential importance familiars can have in a campaign, the rules on familiars in the Player's Handbook and the DMG are surprisingly sparse, fractured, even incomplete. This guide provides thorough coverage of the subject of familiars. The existing rules for familiars have been reorganized, and clarifications are given where necessary. Additionally, a number of variant and supplemental rules are offered to give you a better framework for using familiars in your game. This guide is intended both as a stand-alone product and as a supplement to Betabunny Publishing's range of Bestiaries.

Happy Gaming,

Sean Butcher
January 2007



NORTHERN GOSHAWK



LONG-EARED BAT

Section I: Acquiring a Familiar

A. General Rules

i. A 1st level sorcerer or 1st level wizard gains the special ability to summon a familiar.

Though the Player's Handbook talks of summoning a familiar, this term is somewhat misleading, since it gives the impression that summoning a familiar works in the same way as the *summon monster* spell. This is not the case. The wizard or sorcerer does not in fact summon the creature he wishes to make a familiar, nor is the familiar a conjured creature as is the case with the *summon monster* spell. The sorcerer or wizard must already have the creature that he wishes to make his familiar on hand at the time that he performs the *summon familiar* ritual. It is perhaps more accurate to think in terms of the wizard's or sorcerer's binding the familiar rather than summoning the familiar.

ii. A character may have only one familiar at a time.

Gaining levels in more than one class that grants a familiar does not allow the character to have more than one familiar. They may only have one familiar at a time.

iii. A familiar can only ever have one master.

A creature that already is (or has ever been) another character's familiar cannot become the familiar of a new master. This is the case even if the master dies or dismisses the familiar.

iv. The familiar must be a normal, unmodified animal, unless the character has the Improved Familiar feat.

The familiar must be of an animal type. In general animals are living creatures with no magical ability and an Intelligence score of 1 or 2. Examples include cats, birds, reptiles, etc. Dire animals are not considered to be normal animals. An animal companion cannot also function as a familiar.

The basic list of familiars included in the Player's Handbook includes those animals listed in Table: Basic Familiars (see this page), hereafter referred to as *basic familiars*. This list should not be considered exhaustive. Any normal, unmodified animal of the appropriate size (see

section I.A.vii on page 5) can be used as a familiar.

If the wizard or sorcerer has the Improved Familiar feat, he may have a non-animal familiar (see next section).

v. Characters with the Improved Familiar feat can choose familiars from an extended list of creatures.

If the character has the Improved Familiar feat, he can choose familiars other than normal, unmodified animals. The Improved Familiar feat provides an extended list of creatures that are available for use as familiars, hereafter referred to as *improved familiars*.

The Improved Familiar feat provides one list of improved familiars that are available based on the master's arcane spellcaster level and alignment (see Table: Improved Familiar by Alignment below). The master's arcane spellcaster level is the sum of all levels in any class that can summon a familiar (see Rules Clarification: Arcane Spellcaster Level on page 5). The spellcaster can choose any familiar for which he has the requisite number of arcane spellcaster levels, and which has an alignment up to one step away on each of the alignment axes (lawful through chaotic, good through evil).

The Improved Familiar feat provides a second list of improved familiars that are available based on the master's type/subtype (see Table: Improved Familiar by Master's Type/Subtype below).

Table: Basic Familiars

Bat
Cat
Hawk
Lizard
Owl
Rat
Raven
Snake (Tiny viper)
Toad
Weasel

Table: Improved Familiar by Alignment

Familiar	Alignment	Arcane Spellcaster Level
Shocker lizard	Neutral	5 th
Stirge	Neutral	5 th
Formian worker	Lawful neutral	7 th
Imp	Lawful evil	7 th
Pseudodragon	Neutral good	7 th
Quasit	Chaotic evil	7 th

Table: Improved Familiar by Master's Type/Subtype

Familiar	Master's Type/Subtype	Arcane Spellcaster Level
Celestial hawk ¹	Good	3 rd
Fiendish Tiny viper snake ²	Evil	3 rd
Air elemental, Small	Air	5 th
Earth elemental, Small	Earth	5 th
Fire elemental, Small	Fire	5 th
Shocker lizard	Electricity	5 th
Water elemental, Small	Water	5 th
Homunculus ³	Undead	7 th
Ice mephit	Cold	7 th

¹ Or other celestrial animal from the standard familiar list.

² Or other fiendish animal from the standard familiar list.

³ The master must first create the homunculus, substituting ichor, or another part of the master's body for blood if necessary.

RULES CLARIFICATION: ARCANE SPELLCASTER LEVEL

§§§ The basic rules on familiars refer to the master's class level, which is used to determine the abilities of the familiar. The master's class level is defined as being the sum of all levels in any classes that grant the ability to summon a familiar. The Improved Familiar feat instead refers to the master's arcane spellcaster level. No definition is provided for arcane spellcaster levels, but the term would seem to imply that it would include levels in any class capable of casting arcane spells, not just those classes that are able to summon a familiar. There does not appear to be any reason why the master's level should be calculated in one way for the Improved Familiar feat and in another way for determining the familiar's abilities. It seems unlikely that the rules' authors intended there to be a distinction. We use the term arcane spellcaster level instead of master class level throughout this work. Any reference in this work to arcane spellcaster level or class level refers only to levels in classes that grant the ability to summon a familiar unless otherwise specified. §§§

Type/Subtype on the previous page). To choose one of these creatures as a familiar, the master must have the same type/subtype as the creature, as well as having the requisite number of arcane spellcaster levels.

The list of improved familiars provided should not be regarded as exhaustive. Almost any creature of the same general size and power as those provided in the lists will make a suitable familiar.

Improved familiars otherwise use the same rules as basic familiars, with two exceptions: If the creature's type is something other than animal, its type does not change; and improved familiars do not gain the ability to speak with other creatures of their kind (although many of them already have the ability to communicate in some language).

vi. The familiar's alignment must be compatible with its master.

The familiar's alignment may only be one step away from its master's on each of the alignment axes (lawful through chaotic, good through evil). A creature retains its original alignment when it becomes a familiar. For instance, it is not possible for a chaotic-evil familiar to serve a lawful-good master.

This requirement is not an issue for animal familiars,

Table: Familiar Sizes

Familiar	Familiars List	Size
Bat	Basic	Diminutive
Toad	Basic	Diminutive
Cat	Basic	Tiny
Celestial hawk	Improved	Tiny
Fiendish Tiny viper snake	Improved	Tiny
Hawk	Basic	Tiny
Homunculus	Improved	Tiny
Imp	Improved	Tiny
Lizard	Basic	Tiny
Owl	Basic	Tiny
Pseudodragon	Improved	Tiny
Quasit	Improved	Tiny
Rat	Basic	Tiny
Raven	Basic	Tiny
Snake (Tiny viper)	Basic	Tiny
Stirge	Improved	Tiny
Weasel	Basic	Tiny
Air elemental	Improved	Small
Earth elemental	Improved	Small
Fire elemental, Small	Improved	Small
Formian worker	Improved	Small
Ice mephit	Improved	Small
Shocker lizard	Improved	Small
Water elemental, Small	Improved	Small

since all animals have a neutral alignment. It can, however, be an issue with improved familiars.

vii. To be suitable as a familiar for a Small to Large size character, the creature must be similar in size to those creatures listed in the basic and improved familiar lists.

All creatures are divided into 9 size categories, typically based on their height/length and weight (see Table: Size Categories on the next page). Only creatures of similar size to those creatures listed in the basic and improved familiar lists will be suitable for use as familiars by Small to Large sized characters. The animals listed in the basic familiars list (see Table: Familiar Sizes on this page) are all Tiny and Diminutive. The creatures in the Improved Familiar list (see Table: Familiar Sizes) are all Small or Tiny.

SUPPLEMENTAL RULE: FAMILIAR'S SIZE

The creatures listed in the basic and improved familiar lists range from Diminutive to Small in size. We are told that these creatures are suitable for characters of Small to Large size. However, it is doubtful that it is intended that a Small sized character should be able to have a Small sized familiar. A familiar should always be smaller than its master. Also, the creatures in the basic familiars list are all of Tiny or Diminutive size, while those in the improved familiar lists are Tiny or Small. It hence appears that the Improved Familiar feat allows the master to have a slightly larger familiar. The following supplemental rule provides a clearer guideline on what sized familiars are suitable for a master of a given size.

§§§ Masters with the Improved Familiar feat may have familiars that are 1-3 size categories smaller than they are. Masters without

the Improved Familiar feat may have familiars that are 2-3 size categories smaller than themselves.

Characters that are in the Medium size category may only have familiars that are Diminutive and Tiny, or Small, Diminutive, and Tiny if they have the Improved Familiar feat. Of the basic character races, humans, elves, dwarves, half-orcs, and half-elves are of Medium size. Characters who are in the Small size category may only have Fine and Diminutive familiars, or Fine, Diminutive, and Tiny if they have the Improved Familiar feat. Of the basic character races gnomes and halflings are of Small size. A Large size character may only have familiars that are Small and Tiny, or Small, Tiny, and Medium if they have the Improved Familiar feat. None of the basic character races are of Large size. §§§

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