

Cat's Paws

When a gust of wind first blows over the flat calm surface of Biscayne Bay, numerous ruffled patches, or "cats paws," appear on the otherwise smooth surface. A close look at these wrinkled patches reveals a cross-hatched pattern of short wavelets, called "capillary waves."

These tiny waves, with crests often separated by less than half an inch, are kept from wriggling up and down by the water's surface tension, the elasticity of the ocean surface.

