



Bringing back the birds

FERAL CATS: CONSEQUENCES FOR HUMANS AND WILDLIFE

The presence of feral domestic cats (*Felis catus*) roaming outdoors creates negative consequences for humans and wildlife. Only by removing these cats from the landscape can communities create a healthier and safer environment for all.

Public Health

- Public health scientists, agencies, and professional organizations, such as the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, recognize that maintaining cats roaming outdoors is harmful for human health.
- Domestic cats are consistently the #1 carrier of rabies among domestic animals and are disproportionately more likely to expose people to the disease than wildlife. Thanks to the post-exposure prophylaxis, most people do not acquire rabies, but exposure is dangerous and costly (estimated at \$3,500 per exposure event).
- Domestic cats are a definitive host for the parasite (*Toxoplasma gondii*) that causes toxoplasmosis. Up to 74% of all cats will host this parasite during their lifetime, and each individual cat may excrete up to hundreds of millions of infectious eggs via their feces, which contaminate the environment. Infection in people can result in blindness, miscarriage, fetal development problems, memory loss, and even death.

Wildlife Conservation

- Cats have contributed to the extinction of 63 species of birds, mammals, and reptiles and are listed among the world's most harmful invasive species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.
- Cats kill an estimated 2.4 billion birds every year in the United States alone and the #1 source of direct, human-caused bird mortality in the United States and Canada.
- Even when cats do not directly kill wildlife, their presence in the environment can lead to indirect effects (e.g., competition with native predators, spread of infectious disease).

Trap, Neuter, Release: Bad Policy

- TNR programs have consistently failed to reduce feral cat populations and purposely keep cats roaming outdoors in unsafe conditions
- TNR programs facilitate the spread of diseases and ongoing harms to wildlife

Solution

To keep cats, wildlife, and people safe, animal control policies should support keeping owned cats under their owner's control (e.g., indoors, on a leash, in a catio) and removing unowned cats from the landscape.