



The Cat vs Bird Debate: Where ACR Stands and Where Conservationists Stand

Alley Cat Rescue's Stance:

Wildlife societies and bird conservationists continue to use exaggerated figures of “millions” and “billions” as the number of birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians killed each year by cats. However, they also state that it is difficult to come up with “solid” numbers to support their claims, so they use estimates. ACR understands that it is difficult to know exactly how many cats (pets and ferals) are roaming free, but again, the fact is that few scientific studies have been conducted to accurately portray cat predation, and the two studies commonly referred to by conservation groups are the Churcher/Lawton study and the Coleman/Temple study or “Wisconsin study”. But both studies have been criticized for basing their estimates on very limited data and unpublished data. So, until more studies are conducted and more accurate numbers are gathered, let us take responsibility for our (human) contributions (habitat destruction, development, and pollution) to the decline of bird populations instead of blaming cats. Gary J. Patronek, VMD, Ph.D. Tufts University says this about bird predation statistics, “**Whittling down guesses or extrapolations from limited observations by a factor of 10 or even 100 does not make these estimates any more credible**, and the fact that they are the best available data is not sufficient to justify their use when the consequences may be extermination for cats...What I find inconsistent in an otherwise scientific debate about biodiversity is how indictment of cats has been pursued almost in spite of the evidence.”¹

Yes, there is no denying cats kill birds (and small mammals and reptiles). They are predators, they hunt, and they do so out of instinct just as other mammals do. But that does not mean we should round up all predators and decide who we should kill and who should live. Not to mention, many zoologists have observed that feral **cats are more scavengers than predators**. Their begging and opportunistic behavior “has enabled many feral cats almost to give up hunting altogether,”² says Peter Neville, a UK biologist; this behavior has contributed to their being domesticated in the first place over 5,000 years ago. Roger Tabor, also a UK biologist, adds, “Although cats are superb hunters, it is their scavenging ability that allows them to survive as feral-living animals and live with us eating food off a saucer...”³ Feral cats are very resourceful and have been able to survive on garbage and food scraps for centuries.

When not begging for handouts or digging through garbage, cats mostly prey on rodents (mammals). “The famous German ethologist and biologist Paul Leyhausen was one of the first scientists to note that **the domestic cat is a rodent specialist**. The cat’s ability to sit and wait is better suited to catching rodents than to catching birds. Anyone who has watched feral cats over time has seen



them sitting in front of an opening in the ground or in a building waiting for rodents to emerge. Cats have the patience to wait for hours. They have a predilection for ambush as a hunting skill. When birds take off, they can fly in any direction, which surprises the cat and makes them more difficult to catch. Some cats, however, do become specialists at catching birds.”⁴ Numerous studies on the stomach analysis and fecal analysis of feral and rural cats have been conducted; several examples are listed below:⁵

- 1940, Oregon: A study on the stomach analysis of 80 feral cat and rural cats concluded: mammals made up 61.8% of the stomach contents by volume; birds 18.9%; carrion 10.7%; garbage 6.3%; cereal 2%.
- 1941, Oklahoma: The examination of 107 cat stomachs concluded: mammals 55% by volume; garbage 26.5%; insects 12.5%; birds 4%; reptiles 2%. Frank McMurry and Charles Sperry states “the data not justify the common belief that every roadside or field-roaming cat is in search of avian food.”
- 1949, Michigan: “In his article ‘Farm Cat as Predator,’ the head of a wildlife experiment station described exactly that: *one* farm cat and the total prey it brought home over a period of eighteen months – 1,628 mammals and 62 birds. With restrained triumph, the article suggested that this ‘positive statistical record,’ while perhaps not typical, casts doubt on the negative reputation of the domestic cat, ‘a scapegoat with few to speak up on his behalf.’”
- 1951, California: Food habits of the feral house cat of the Sacramento Valley found: “mammals were clearly the primary source of food (64.1% by volume), although birds were substantially represented (25.2%).”
- 1957, Missouri: “The stomachs of 110 cats killed on highways, away from towns or farm dwellings, showed that the primary foods were ‘injurious rodents’ and that ‘the house cat’s feeding is largely beneficial to man’s interests.’ These hunting house cats were found to feed upon small rodents ‘more than four times as often as upon rabbit, the second most important food, and nearly nine times as often as upon birds.’”
- Although these findings have been from early studies in the US, many studies on cat predation have also been conducted in New Zealand, Australia, and various islands around the world. The study in New Zealand’s Orongorongo Valley of feral house cats found (by fecal analysis) that mammals accounted for 93% of the food, by weight and birds 5.2%. And a study by Coman and Brunner, in Australia, found (by stomach analysis) that mammals made up 88% of cats’ diets, by volume and birds made up 5.2%.



Numerous studies have also shown the “variation [of the cat’s diet] is seasonal with any geographic area...Writes Hubbs: ‘This seasonal variability of the cat’s diet suggests a constant adjustment to availability of various types of prey and is not necessarily a direct reflection of preference.’ The cat’s only preference is for staying alive. It will eat what it can and must; it will kill when it can and must.”⁶ It has also been noted that “even when feral cats (along with other predators) take almost every last mouse, as in the California area studies by Oliver Pearson [(who studies the complex interaction between predator and prey)], it is wrong to assume permanent damage...**the predators don’t destroy the prey population;** when the mouse population comes back up again in a few years, the carnivores also breed up high numbers again, Pearson explains.”⁷ Again, it is hard to estimate how many “kills” cats make per year, with little research, but studies do show that cats prey mostly on rodents (mammals), not birds, and their diets vary by season and geographic area; which depend upon the availability of prey.

As mentioned, cats naturally keep rodent populations in check, so as far as being public health risks (some argue to kill cats because they are disease carriers), cats are just the opposite. In some instances, **cats assist in preventing the spread of certain diseases by keeping rodent populations in check.** Australian Environmentalist Frankie Seymour explains the important role cats have in preventing disease as seen in history. Due to the Witch hunts, “by the late Middle Ages, cats in Europe had been hunted, hanged and burned almost to extinction. Then, of course, the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) arrived in Europe and 25 million people...died in five years because, for several hundred years before, there hadn’t been enough cats to keep the rat population healthy. For the next couple of centuries after ‘the Death’ – centuries which just happened to coincide with the Age of Exploration - cats became popular again. Ships traveling to Asia and Africa were particularly vulnerable to pick up Plague – so cats on ships were considered lucky and necessary.”⁸ This is why travelers used to keep cats aboard ships and take them to whatever new lands they were discovering—to control rodents and prevent disease. And they do it *naturally*; they don’t use poisons or traps like humans, and they get a meal out of it.

And as for spreading rabies and transmitting other diseases, cats that are TNRed receive vaccinations to prevent the spread/transmission of such diseases, to humans and to other cats. Feral cats receive a three-year rabies vaccine; which in studies has shown to be effective for longer than three years. Vaccinated cats provide a buffer zone between wildlife and humans. Feral cats also receive a distemper vaccine, to prevent transmission to other cats, and TNR prevents the transmission of feline leukemia (FeLV), which can be transmitted through breeding, by stopping the breeding cycle (via sterilization). Lastly, **sterilized cats are healthier cats.** Sterilization greatly reduces the risks of female cats developing uterine, ovarian, or mammary cancer, and reduces the risk of testicular tumors or prostate problems in male cats. Not to mention, neutering male cats greatly reduces their “urge” to roam (because they no longer have an interest in mating), they are less aggressive (because of a hormonal change), so they tend to fight less (which prevents injuries and the spread of diseases, such as FIV).



Conservationists also argue that TNR promotes the “dumping” of cats; when exactly the opposite is true. Through TNR programs, the public is educated on the importance of spay/neuter, keeping cats indoors, and responsible ways to care for cats; individuals are instructed, when necessary, to surrender a cat to a shelter instead of dumping or abandoning him. Unfortunately, despite education programs, some individuals will continue to dump their cat. Because people will never stop dumping/abandoning/forcing out cats, there will always be feral cat colonies, but TNR does not promote it. And when individuals dump a cat, they do so where ever; most do not search out a colony to introduce him to. Unless a feral colony consists of a lot of friendly, socialized housecats, most feral colonies go unseen by the majority of the public. Feral cats are more nocturnal and come out at night, hiding during the day and running from humans. Alan Hopkins of Audubon's San Francisco Save the Quail campaign believes that, “If people think that the cats in a particular colony lead a happy life, there's nothing to keep them from putting their cats out there.” But I think it is safe to say that most individuals do not look at a feral cat colony and think, “aw, those cats look so happy. I think I want my cat to join them.” Life for a feral cat may not be an easy one, but just because they face hardships, does not mean they do not live content happy lives either.

Mr. Hopkins also calls TNR “a feel-good agenda that's misguided.” He goes on to say that “[TNR advocates] are consciously making the decision that a cat's life is worth more than all the animals it will kill.” No, we are not. Those who promote TNR are not killing any animals (they are reducing numbers over time by stopping the breeding cycle). The game of “cat and mouse or bird” has long been the ways of nature; cat rescuers cannot control this and neither can conservationists. It is the conservationists and the wildlife biologists who support and advocate the eradication of one species over another, when deciding how the natural world should “look.” In reaching a compromise both TNR advocates and wildlife conservationist can live with, we all must ask ourselves “why are we (humans) so obsessed with managing the natural world?” As the Rev. Professor Andrew Linzey of University of Oxford, England puts it, **“In the name of biodiversity, these ‘managers’ regularly kill one form of life in order to ‘allow’ another to survive...perhaps populations rise and crash as a matter of course...we seem to have forgotten...that it is a self-regulating system. [And] in the end, everything depends upon our own moral vision of ourselves in the world of nature. I believe that we should be not the master species, but the servant species. That means as little interference as possible, and only then with genuinely benign intentions. Biodiversity is a classic tale of how an idealized view of the world can result in individual harm.”**⁹ In a nutshell, in protecting a particular species, we need to be sensitive to other species within the ecosystem that may be affected either directly or indirectly. We should not be acting as Professor Linzey put as the “master species” but rather as the “servant species.” We should not be deciding who lives and who dies; instead, we should be implementing practices that ensure the survival of all species. ACR understands that this is easier said than done, for ecosystems are highly complex and sensitive to outside disturbance, but we also believe that the cat versus bird debate holds great promise in finding the middle ground.



Conservationists are also saying that because people feed and vaccinate feral cats, they are making the cats an “even more potent force and give them an advantage” over other “natural” predators. They also argue that birds and mammals have to struggle to adapt to a new environment/landscape, and that they are not only losing their habitat (thanks to over-developed land), but now “they face new predators in the form of roving house cats.” **Feral cats in urban environments are simply filling the niche of natural predators not present in urban environments**; not many foxes, hawks, and owls reside in cities, so feral cats fill that void and keep the rodent populations in check. This also goes back to what Peter Neville and Roger Tabor state that feral cats are more scavengers than predators. In urban environments, cats are eating from garbage, handouts, and rodent populations; birds are not ideal dinners for cats. **Feral cats also fill niches in other environments, where native predators have been driven to extinction by humans**. “The once common *native* cat (*Dasyurus viverrinus*) is now either rare or extinct in most parts of Victoria [Australia], and introduced feral cats may be doing little more than filling an ecological niche left vacant by the near disappearance of the indigenous carnivore.’ The niche is neutral, not caring how it is filled...The introduction of bounties on these native cats in the early days of Australian settlement surely helped the native cat to disappear, as it helped the feral cat to thrive.”¹⁰

This also leads into the argument that habitat destruction, radio towers, pesticides, pollution, and window and airplane collisions are the main causes for the decline in bird populations, not cat predation. According to an article published by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, “experts estimate that **each minute, 11 football fields of forest are cleared**, a truly frightening figure. With all the environmental and ecological consequences, one must question the motives of not only the Brazilian government [referring to clearing the Amazon], which has tolerated such a destructive development model, but also **its endorsement by the international community which has jeopardized the future of mankind**.”¹¹ Migrating birds depend on these rainforests year after year, and as they decline, so do the birds; not to mention, the growing sprawl of the cityscape in the US and Canada. Conservationists state they are not saying cats are the number one cause of bird deaths, but they also say that it is too late to find solutions to or stop (at least slow down) land development, and it is easier to kill cats...so let us take that approach. The director of the American Bird Conservancy's Cats Indoors! Campaign, Linda Winter puts it simply, “we know cats kill [birds], and it's an unnecessary and easily avoidable loss.” So, to the conservationists that say “feral cat advocates often argue that cats are made the scapegoat for our environmental woes,” we say, “yes, that is true and there is the evidence.”

In an essay, Frankie Seymour discusses the “ungentle art of scape-goating and witch hunting” and points out “a number of sociological hallmarks that...give the whole business [of eradicating feral cats] away as a con job—and, indeed, as a classic witch hunt. One hallmark is the targeting of cats themselves. European culture has a long history of demonizing cats. Dogs copped it too, but never to the same extent as cats. Demonizing the pets of single, propertied women was just one of a



number of standard ploys for proving the women were witches so that the State could seize their property. You just decided a woman's dog or cat was a familiar and there you had it, instant proof.

By the late Middle Ages, cats in Europe had been hunted, hanged and burned almost to extinction."¹² Seymour goes on to say that "Witch hunts had another purpose besides stealing property from defenseless women. Witchcraft beliefs, even in pre-literate and non-Christian societies, exist for no other purpose than as a mechanism for blaming someone else, someone who can't defend themselves, for one's own failures. As such, throughout history, they have been used by those in power to distract attention from the failures of the State to fix the problems of the people... The underlying motive of gaining or maintaining wealth or power is the same as ever... governments have found themselves in a no-win situation. They cannot fix a problem their electorates expect them to fix (in this case the environment) without either disadvantaging a large portion of their support base... or else paying vast amounts of taxpayers' money in compensation. So they revert to a tried and true strategy: choose a scapegoat, whip up community hysteria and then have a nice therapeutic 'witch hunt' – and hope, when the madness has run its course, that the original problem will have gone away - or at least that they will have got safely through the next election."¹³

Subsequently, those who blame cats for killing birds also believe eradication programs work and are necessary in controlling cat (and other species) populations; however, history has shown us that complete **eradication attempts fail and in some cases are counterproductive.** Eradication does not work because it causes a "**vacuum effect,**" meaning, with a few short months, other stray cats quickly move in and fill the vacated territories and start the breeding process over again. Roger Tabor discusses this phenomenon saying, "Although a total 'wipe-out' often appeals to authorities due to its apparent simplicity, it normally fails, as it does not allow for biological reality, and worse, is often counter productive."¹⁴ Here are a few examples of eradication programs gone wrong (when humans try to play the "master species"):

Macquarie Island (near Antarctica)

During the 1800s, sailors occupied the island because of the fur and blubber trade. Of course, the ships brought rats to the island, so the sailors brought cats to the island; (they also brought rabbits for a source of food). In 1997, the island was deemed a world heritage site, and by 2000, all feral cats were eradicated. Today, with no cats, the rabbits are destroying the island's vegetation, and leaving the native penguin population more susceptible to predators. Conservationists are now eradicating the rabbits; which is estimated to cost \$17 million.¹⁵

Cape May, New Jersey

In 2008, a colony of feral cats were trapped and relocated because of concerns for the local shore birds. However, after removing the cats, the town quickly faced an even bigger problem... skunks! The cats' presence was keeping the skunks away, but now with no cats in town, the skunks are free



to roam. Cape May is now deciding what to do about their “skunk problem,” as well as continuing to debate over how to manage feral cat populations.¹⁶

Wake Atoll (part of the Pacific Islands)

In the 1960s, cats were introduced for rodent control on the US military base. From 1996 to 2004, most of the cats were eradicated, allowing the local rodent population to increase “quickly to the point of becoming a conspicuous nuisance.” The study also suggested the increase in the rat population was “enhanced by wet season conditions.” Today, rodents continue to be “controlled” and two cats have since been sighted on the island; although, no reproduction has been reported.¹⁷

Australian Environmentalist Frankie Seymour also explains that, “Reducing a population of mislocated animals is a complete waste of time (and money) unless you are prepared to keep on reducing it—killing and killing and killing, generation after generation. The moment you turn your back for a year or a season, the population will return to full occupation of all available niches.” In addition, Seymour points out, “What is more, when you kill animals to control their numbers, you are constantly culling for individuals who are clever or fast or strong enough to thwart your attempts to kill them - and they pass those faster, smarter, stronger genes (as well as their experiential knowledge) on to their offspring. This is basic Darwinianism – survival of the fittest – yet the thought of it does not seem to have entered the heads of those who advocate lethal control of ‘feral’ animals.”¹⁸

Eradication attempts are also a waste of taxpayer money and are cruel to the animals being culled.

A new study commissioned by Best Friends Animal Society and funded by Petsmart Charities found that **TNR programs for free-roaming cats can cut costs in half.** The study says that with an estimated 87 million free-roaming, homeless cats in the United States, it would cost governmental entities about \$16 billion to trap and kill these cats as opposed to about \$9 billion for supporting trap-neuter/spay-return (TNR) programs run by rescue organizations and individual volunteers. Why waste taxpayer money to kill the cats, when it doesn’t work and when individuals and rescue organizations are helping to foot the bill humanely? Those who want a “quick fix” to a complex problem and support the removing and killing of cats use an array of methods to do so, including poisoned bait, trapping, gassing, and steel leg-hold traps. Some countries have also invented new ways of killing feral cats. Australia uses “toxic pills” and “poison tunnels” to control feral cat populations; cats are feed baited meat laced with toxic pills and lured into tunnels that spray a toxic substance onto the cat’s stomach. These lethal methods are not only unnecessary and ineffective, they are cruel and inhumane.

Therefore, instead of eradicating a colony and killing feral cats, sterilization through TNR programs should be practiced. Roger Tabor adds that, **“if a colony is neutered and returned to its area it will continue to hold the location and keep other cats out by its presence.** The group’s population will gradually decline over a few years.”¹⁹ **TNR stabilizes populations at manageable levels, eliminates “annoying” mating behaviors, is more effective/less costly than repeated eradication**



attempts, is humane to the animals, and fosters compassion in the community. ACR understands this is not a simple issue nor is there a "simple" solution, but if people are willing to help the community and get involved (which they are doing), then why not ban together and implement nation-wide TNR programs? There is no guaranteed way to "get rid" of the cats, instead a long-term management plan needs to be implemented.

And by imposing pointless laws and ordinances, like prohibiting individuals from feeding strays/ferals, will not solve the problem. Where there is a large number of people living (food source), there will be cats. Individuals who feed stray/feral cats should not be blamed or penalized for the problem, but rather encouraged for their acts of compassion. City officials should be assisting them with the resources and information available to care for and sterilize these animals. After all, it is not necessarily their fault the cats are homeless; they are just trying to be upstanding citizens and do good for their community and for the cats. Caretakers use their own money to feed and sterilize feral cats, so it makes no sense to use tax-payer money to hand out fines and take people to court (or put elderly ladies in jail). Under current laws, individuals and rescue organizations work everyday in a shadow of fear from being persecuted for helping animals, and we are tired of working this way. Again, it makes no sense to penalize people who are trying to improve the situation for homeless animals and for being involved in their communities. Out-dated laws HAVE to change and compassionate people should be encouraged to continue to take care of feral colonies. Not to mention, **“starving out” cats will only make the situation worse for a community and for the cats.** Feral cats are territorial animals who can survive for weeks without food and will not easily or quickly leave their territory to search for new food sources. Instead, they tend to move closer into human habitations as they grow hungrier and more desperate. Their malnourished condition will also make them more susceptible to parasitic infestations, such as fleas and roundworms. Plus, feeding bans do nothing to stop reproduction, so malnourished cats will continue to give birth, resulting in the visible deaths of many kittens. Feeding cats is part of proper TNR programs; providing food ensures cats are healthy, less prone to diseases and parasites, and is a necessary part of the trapping procedure in order to sterilize them.

ACR does support the American Bird Conservancy's Cats Indoors! Campaign and believes that housecats should be kept indoors or only permitted outside if confined to an area or if supervised. We educate the public that keeping cats indoors is safer for the cats and other wildlife. We also strongly advocate spay/neuter programs for housecats and for feral cats. TNR programs should be practiced to assist cats already living outdoors. ACR believes that sterilization and education are the keys to combating cat homelessness; these key elements help both cats already on the streets and cats living indoors by keeping them indoors. ACR, however, does NOT agree with groups like, the National Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Federation, or the American Bird Conservancy, in that, cats should be removed and/or killed.



Ultimately, we need to work together to control cat homelessness. Using cats as scapegoats is very dangerous; it fosters cruelty to animals and the time spent placing blame is only time wasted. In the end, ACR agrees with HSUS in that “The enemies of cat defenders and bird protectors aren't each other, but the portion of the public that considers these issues too trivial for serious consideration. People who care about animals—domestic, wild, or in-between—**can't afford to be divided.**”²⁰ If we are to work together to make our planet a better place to live (for all), the wildlife conservationists need to stop blaming the cats as a major cause for the decline of bird populations, and TNR advocates need to be more sensitive to the fact that cats are predators and do affect local wildlife populations. Conservationists need to accept TNR as the preferred, non-lethal method of controlling stray and feral cat populations, and TNR advocates need to be aware of specified wildlife sanctuaries. Subsequently, conservationists and birders need to support cat caretakers and cat caretakers need to support conservationists and birders. But until individuals like Ted Williams and organizations like the National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation STOP equating TNR with not caring about birds and wildlife and STOP promoting the “cat **VERSUS** bird” debate, **the only ones truly losing out are the animals!** We need to work TOGETHER! Non-lethal methods for controlling cat populations exist and should be advocated by all who are trying to instill a more compassionate ethic towards the earth and ALL its inhabitants. There should be NO debate, just simply “cats **AND** birds.”



The National Audubon Society's Stance:

The following information is found in the National Audubon Society's Resolution; which was approved by the Board of Directors on Dec. 7, 1997, Regarding Control and Management of Feral and Free-Ranging Domestic Cats (to view the complete Resolution, please visit <http://www.audubon.org/local/cn/98march/nasr.html>):

- WHEREAS feral and free-ranging domestic cats are estimated to kill hundreds of millions of native birds and other small animals annually in the United States; and
- WHEREAS it has been estimated that birds represent 20-30% of the prey of feral and free-ranging domestic cats; and
- WHEREAS feral cat colony programs, wherein feral cats are captured, trapped, vaccinated, neutered and fed, **do not eliminate predation on native wildlife or reduce the size of feral cat colonies**; and
- WHEREAS scientific research on feral and free-ranging domestic cats has shown that such cats can have a significant, negative impact on bird populations, and
- WHEREAS the American Ornithologists' Union, American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc., and the Cooper Ornithological Society have concluded that feral and free-ranging domestic cats can have a significant negative impact on bird populations; and
- WHEREAS the American Bird Conservancy has concluded that feral free-ranging domestic cats can have a significant impact on local bird populations; and
- WHEREAS the American Bird Conservancy has initiated a national campaign to limit the impacts of free-ranging and feral domestic cats on bird populations;
- BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Audubon Society will convey such science-based conclusions to its chapters so that they, if they so wish, will be in a position to advocate that local and state wildlife agencies, public health organizations and legislative bodies **restrict and regulate the maintenance and movement of feral and free-ranging domestic cats out-of-doors** and to support programs to vaccinate cats and to neuter or spay cats;



National Wildlife Federation's Stance:

The following information is found in the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Habitat™ segment, in the article "Why Curtailing Your Cat Is for the Birds" by Heidi Ridgley (to read the complete article, please visit <http://www.nwf.org/NationalWildlife/article.cfm?issueID=61&articleID=768>):

- "These cats could easily be killing 100 million songbirds a year," says Al Manville, wildlife biologist at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Management Office.
- Cats on the prowl primarily kill small mammals, but according to multiple scientific studies, an estimated 20 to 30 percent of their kills are birds. And that they mostly kill rodents is not necessarily a good thing. "Cats compete with owls, hawks, weasels and other important native predators that aren't subsidized by people and that need these creatures to survive," says Ed Clark, director of the Wildlife Center of Virginia, the nation's largest wildlife hospital.
- That people protect free-roaming cats from disease and starvation makes them an even more potent force and gives them an advantage that truly wild predators—which become scarce as their prey declines—don't have.
- But in reality, says Alan Hopkins of Audubon's San Francisco Save the Quail campaign, it promotes more dumping of animals. "If people think that the cats in a particular colony lead a happy life, there's nothing to keep them from putting their cats out there," he says. "I do understand that people who 'manage' feral cat colonies are trying to do the right thing, but it's a feel-good agenda that's misguided. They don't understand the impact the cats are having on wildlife, and they are consciously making the decision that a cat's life is worth more than all the animals it will kill." Another problem with the managed colony approach, adds Temple, is that it often establishes a higher density of predators than would be there naturally.
- Feral cat advocates often argue that cats are made the scapegoat for our environmental woes—that habitat destruction, radio towers, pesticides and window collisions kill more birds and that human life-styles have far greater impacts on birds and wildlife. "Many of us sympathize with the cause—no one wants to hear that millions of cats are killed in animal shelters every year—and no one is saying that cats are the biggest threat to birds," says Temple. "But cats are a significant threat in the little habitat that remains."
- Even if cats killed only a few animals a month, it adds up, says Linda Winter, director of the American Bird Conservancy's Cats Indoors! campaign. "We may not know the exact numbers of birds that cats kill, but we know cats kill them, and it's an unnecessary and easily avoidable loss," she says.



- While rural cats—with the most access to wildlife—might be doing the most damage, suburban and city cats are no less a problem. Birds and mammals struggling to adapt to a new subdivision not only lose habitat, they face new predators in the form of roving house cats. Birds also migrate through cities, making pit stops in street trees and backyard gardens. "But even if a city had no native wildlife, outside cats are still a concern because it's not just a conservation issue, it's an animal welfare issue," says Winter.

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