



Alley Cat Rescue
The U.S. Cats Protection Association
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Cats vs Birds: Finding a Compromise

*"It's not about birds versus cats; it's about protecting birds and cats."
-- 2008 press release from the Audubon Society of Portland in Oregon.*

The Debate:

For years, those who promote trap-neuter-return (TNR) for feral cats have argued with wildlife conservationists who support bird populations. The thing we need to realize is that both sides present valid arguments and both sides are compassionate about saving animals. Arguing over cats versus birds belittles the bigger picture, by taking attention away from more important issues that are really affecting wild animals.

Argument 1:

Most conservationists agree that feral cats should be trapped and removed to protect wild animals from being hunted and eaten or competing with them for food. On the other hand, TNR supporters say that cats are made scapegoats for much larger problems caused by humans.

Argument 2:

Conservationists try to use "fake science" to exaggerate feline predation on birds and other wildlife, while some TNR supporters refuse to acknowledge that cats may significantly impact some (local) bird populations. Bryan Kortis, cofounder of Neighborhood Cats in New York City and TNR advocate, says, "Even if it's 10th on the list, there is still some impact from cat predation."

Argument 3:

Many opponents of TNR say that the practice creates and enables feral cat colonies, but TNR advocates say that the cats are already there and most people that are trying to help the cats do not know about TNR or have accessibility to such a resource.

Another part to this argument is that opponents to TNR believe that all feral cats should be trapped and removed or relocated, but those who practice TNR know feral sanctuaries are far and few between and this notion is not ideal. "At the same time," HSUS and Kortis point out that, "cat advocates need to recognize that TNR may not be appropriate in certain circumstances, such as in the middle of a sensitive bird sanctuary where attrition over time is too slow. Though relocating feral cats is difficult, it should be considered in these rare situations. Those who insist that cats stay in an area where they could have a genuine impact on a threatened species are simply exacerbating 'the no TNR anywhere sentiment that cripples the larger effort.'"

Finding a Compromise:

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.”

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.

ACR also 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.” Therefore, let us, **together**, combine our efforts and resources to save the cats and the birds:

- Caring for stray and feral cats **MUST** be decriminalized
- Government-funded shelters **NEED** to provide spay/neuter programs and support TNR efforts - affordable spay/neuter and TNR programs **MUST** be more readily available
- Public education on sterilizing cats and keeping cats indoors **MUST** be advocated
- Wildlife conservationists **NEED** to accept that not all cats should be removed/relocated, while TNR advocates **NEED** to realize that in certain circumstances, cats should be removed/relocated
- Wildlife conservationist **MUST** stop using exaggerated figures to portray cat predation on birds and other wildlife, while TNR advocates **NEED** to accept that cats do kill birds and can affect wildlife populations

In the end, 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 point out human impacts), 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, nonlethal 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. Please refer to ACR's factsheets on creating bird-friendly gardens and on how to keep cats and other wildlife out of your yard. By utilizing a few simply tricks, both birds and cats can cohabitate in the same environment.