

## **Feral Cats have a Disastrous Impact on Bird Species in North America**

By Mark Stephenson with information from the American Bird Conservancy



We all love our pets! Our family has a Golden Retriever and a Yellow Lab and we love them to death! My sister and our grandparents have had cats that were literally members of their family, appearing in many of their family portraits! We all know that domestic cats make wonderful pets! However, mixing cats

and birds is a dangerous combination! When allowed to roam freely outdoors, cats are a non-native and invasive species that threaten birds and other wildlife and disrupt local ecosystems. Introduced to the United States with European colonists, the number of domestic cats has tripled in the past 40 years. Today, more than 100 million feral and outdoor cats function as an invasive species with enormous ecological impacts. Outdoor domestic cats have now been recognized as a threat to global biodiversity. Every year in the United States, it is estimated that cats kill well over 1 billion birds. Although this number may seem unbelievable, it represents the combined impact of tens of millions of outdoor cats. Every outdoor cat plays a part. Even well-fed cats will hunt and kill. Upon reflection, most cat owners will have observed this behavior when a family cat attacks a feather or toy. They are actually practicing predatory behaviors. When these behaviors continue outdoors, the results are deadly for birds and other wildlife. Cat caused injuries are one of the most common causes for birds being brought into our Napa Wildlife Rescue Center. Imagine how many are killed and eaten without anyone's knowledge! Unfortunately, even the mere presence of cats outdoors is enough to cause significant impacts to birds. Because cats are recognizable predators, their presence near nesting birds has been shown to reduce the health of chicks and to a decrease in successful nesting. Cats have contributed to the extinction of 63 species of birds, mammals, and reptiles in the wild and continue to adversely impact a wide variety of other species, including those with declining numbers such as the Wood Thrush or at risk of extinction, including woodland birds such as the Bicknell's Thrush, Black-capped Vireo, and Kirtland's Warbler, grassland birds like the Bachman's, Five-striped, Henslow's and Saltmarsh Sparrows, and even shorebirds like the Snowy and Piping Plovers.

Hawai'i is a poignant example of the impact of cats (as well as rats) on birds. Hawai'i was originally a paradise for birds. Geographic isolation and the absence of mammalian predators resulted in remarkable biodiversity, including such iconic species as the 'I'iwi and Maui Parrotbill. Unfortunately, the introduction of cats to the Hawaiian Islands in the late 1700s has resulted in the widespread predation of unique native birds and broad environmental contamination affecting people and wildlife alike." (Quote and Research from American Bird Conservancy)

On behalf of Napa-Solano Audubon, we implore all cat owners to keep their cats inside to avoid unnecessary bird kills. If it is absolutely necessary for owners to allow their cats to go outside, the best option is to provide a fenced in area in your yard that

separates your cat from birds and other wildlife. Please monitor your cat's behavior while it is outside. Alternatively, outdoor cats should be given a brightly colored, bell collar to warn birds of their presence.

**Napa County**, “does not admit healthy, free roaming, (feral) cats into their shelters... (They advise people finding a feral cat to) “put it back where you found it/leave it where it is.” The **Solano County** website has a diagram that shows that a healthy pair of feral cats can produce over an astonishing 10 million offspring in 10 years! As a result, Solano County has adopted the Trap, Neuter and Release Program. Although this is a better approach than simply leaving them in the wild to reproduce, according to the American Bird Conservancy, the “TNR Program by which feral cats are trapped, spayed or neutered, and then released back into the environment, has had limited effect on reducing the numbers of feral cats.” Instead, these cats are abandoned back into the environment to continue a feral existence and to hunt birds for years to come. The scientific evidence regarding TNR clearly indicates that TNR programs are not an effective tool to reduce feral cat populations. Rather than slowly disappearing, studies have shown that feral cat colonies persist and may actually increase in size. Not only is this systematic abandonment inhumane to the cats, it perpetuates numerous problems including wildlife predation, transmission of disease, and property destruction.”

In the last decade we have lost over 10 Billion birds and many more species will soon be extinct unless we all do our part to control the hazards that birds face in the wild. We ask that animal shelters sequester all cats in custody until they locate their owners or until an adoptive home is found. Feral cats that are neutered should not be returned to the wild and are an extreme danger to birds. We hope that our community agencies will listen carefully to this information and reexamine their policies. The American Bird Conservancy Conservation website, an agency that has studied this issue in great depth has much more information on this topic.. Much of the information in this article has come from the ABC Website. For more details visit: <https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/cats-and-birds/> .]



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