

Bird Conservation Network Position on Free-roaming Cats

At a time when nearly a third of North American bird species are in documented decline, releasing additional cats into the wild is a practice in direct opposition to the many attempts by conservation organizations to turn the tide on these declines¹.

Conservative estimates put the number of birds killed by free-roaming cats at 1.4 billion in the United States every year, with that number possibly as high as 4 billion; the number for small native mammals killed is even higher².

Cats are also one of the main vectors for several diseases that affect people, including rabies. Toxoplasmosis (for which cats are the leading vector) can cause serious birth defects when a woman is infected during pregnancy and it is the most common cause of certain retinal infections that can lead to blindness. There are increasing concerns with serious infections such as *Pasteurella multocida* that are transmitted through cat bites or scratches.

There are already an estimated 80 million free-roaming cats in North America³. Proposals to establish additional cat colonies will result in even greater devastation of wildlife and more negative health consequences. While “Trap, Neuter and Release/Return” programs may slow the growth of cat colonies in some cases, the released cats will continue to kill wildlife throughout the course of their lives. While rat control is often the rationale for the establishment of feral cat colonies, in an outdoor setting, there is no scientific evidence that free-roaming cats control rat populations.

Because of free-roaming cats' impact on native wildlife populations and their potential as disease vectors, the Bird Conservation Network:

- > Strongly opposes the establishment of new outdoor cat colonies.
- > Strongly opposes the maintenance of outdoor cats whether individuals or colonies.
- > Supports programs to urge owners to keep their cats indoors, the adoption of un-owned cats and the humane removal of free-roaming cats from the outdoors.

¹North American Bird Conservation Initiative, State of North American Birds, 2016:
<http://www.stateofthebirds.org/2016/overview/results-summary/>

²Loss, S., T. Will, and P. Marra. 2013. The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States. *Nature Communications* 4:1396:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235382340_The_impact_of_free-ranging_domestic_cats_on_wildlife_of_the_United_States

³American Bird Conservancy – Cats Indoors! <https://abcbirds.org/threat/cats-and-other-invasives/>

Other useful references:

Wildlife Society: <http://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/28-Feral-Free-Ranging-Cats.pdf>

American Veterinary Medical Association: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Free-roaming-Abandoned-and-Feral-Cats.aspx>

Florida Fish and Game: http://myfwc.com/media/1348637/Domestic_Cats_whitepaper.pdf

Longcore, T., C. Rich, and L. M. Sullivan. 2009. Critical assessment of claims regarding management of feral cats by trap-neuter-return. *Conservation Biology* 23:887-894.:
<http://www.urbanwildlands.org/Resources/2009LongcoreetalConBio.pdf>