

## **BIRDS AND CATS**

Whether you keep your cat indoors or outdoors, their lifestyle, health and wellbeing are important. At the same time, doing what we can to minimize any negative effects to wild bird populations is critical. Cats are a recognized threat to global biodiversity and are the number one human (anthropogenic) cause of death for birds in Canada (CBC News 2017; ABC Birds 2020).

### *A Global and Canadian Problem*

Globally, cats have contributed to the extinction of at least 36 species of birds. It's estimated that between 100 and 350 million birds are killed by domestic and feral cats in Canada annually; while these are national numbers and bird mortality by cats in the Yukon is quite low in comparison, every individual, free-roaming outdoor cat will likely contribute to total bird deaths (Loss, Will and Warra, 2013; ABC Birds 2020).

### *The Nature of Cats*

Cats that are well-fed, domesticated and have lots of toys to play with still have a powerful natural instinct to hunt birds, whether or not they eat them. Putting a bell on your cat's collar will unfortunately not prevent them from killing birds. Studies have shown that bells are not an effective solution (Birds Canada 2020).

Keeping cats indoors feels unacceptable and unethical to many cat owners. Cat owners often let their cats outside with only the best of intentions: to prevent their cat from facing boredom, and to give them fresh air and exercise that will help prevent obesity and other health issues. For many cat owners, it's cruel to withhold the great outdoors from their cats, especially if their cats are already used to being outdoors. Unfortunately, the reality is that cats face many risks when allowed to roam free outdoors. Many beloved cats have been lost to foxes, coyotes, dogs, hawks, eagles, parasites, illness, cold temperatures, traffic or by eating poison.

Cats don't tend to stick close to home, especially if they're allowed to be outdoors at night when their natural instinct to roam is strong (this urge can be even stronger if your cat has not been spayed or neutered). Cats that are allowed outside can roam an average area of 8 hectares at night (Barratt 1997). Outdoor cats have an average lifespan of only 2 to 5 years, while indoors cats live much longer – on average 14 years (CBC News 2017).

### *Suggestions*

The suggestions below are based on those of Whitehorse Bylaw Services and Humane Societies in Canada and the U.S.

1. Try to make your cat an indoor cat if they aren't already, or an indoor/outdoor cat that's on a leash or in an outdoor pen. Cat owners have quite successfully been able to change their cats from being outdoors-only to outdoors/indoors or indoors-only cats. You can get tips on how to do this from the US Humane Society and most strategies focus on training your cat

to stay indoors over time using incentives and gentle deterrents not to go outside. Visit <https://www.humanesociety.org> for more information.

2. Spay or neuter your cat so they don't feel the urge to roam as much.
3. Make your house as interesting or more attractive than the outdoors. Introduce toys, hiding and lounging areas, cat grass, catnip, dedicated play time, treats and scratching posts. You might want to consider introducing a companion for your cat, such as another cat or a dog.
4. Start training your cat on a harness and leash at 6 to 7 months of age. Older cats can be trained but may require more time to adapt. Visit the Whitehorse Bylaw website page to learn how to harness train your cat.  
<https://www.whitehorse.ca/home/showdocument?id=1580>
5. Build an outdoor cat enclosure that keeps your cat and local wildlife safe. Explore Pinterest and Google Images to find lots of great ideas.

If you have other ideas that could work well to keep your cat and our wild birds safe, please reach out to the Yukon Bird Club at [yukonbirdclub@yukonbirds.ca](mailto:yukonbirdclub@yukonbirds.ca).

#### *Information Sources*

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