



## OHIO BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

### Talking Points on Outdoor Cats

- Domestic cats (*Felis catus*) originated from the European and African wild cat (*Felis silvestris*) and are not native to North America. Domestic cats can now be found on all 7 continents.
- It is estimated that there are currently 148-188 million cats in the U.S., and an estimated 70 to 100 million are free-ranging or feral.

Sources: The Wildlife Society Final Position Statement on Feral and Free-Ranging Domestic Cats: <http://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/28-Feral-Free-Ranging-Cats.pdf>. Levy, J.K. and P. C. Crawford. (2004). Humane strategies for controlling feral cat populations. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 225:1354–1360, and Robertson S.J. (2008). A review of feral cat control. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* 10: 366–375.)

- It is estimated that free-ranging domestic cats kill 1.4–3.7 billion birds and 6.9–20.7 billion mammals each year in the U.S.

Source: Loss, S. R., T. Will, and P. P. Mara. (2013). The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife in the United States. *Nature Communications* 4:1396 (DOI:10.1038/ncomms2380).

- Cats don't just kill birds because they're hungry. Even well-fed cats follow their instincts to hunt and kill wildlife, so outdoor cats that are fed still pose a significant threat to birds and other wildlife

Source: Adamec, R.E., and D. G. Smith. (1976). The interaction of hunger and preying in the domestic cat (*Felis catus*): an adaptive hierarchy? *Behavioral Biology* 18: 263-272.

- Free-ranging cats act as sources of dangerous diseases that can infect humans. Through feces, fleas, bites, or scratches, cats have the potential to spread many diseases to humans, including rabies, tularemia, hook worms, or toxoplasmosis.

Source: Gerhold, R. (2011). "Cats as Carriers of Disease: The potential to spread a host of diseases to humans and wildlife." *The Wildlife Professional* 5(1): 58-61.

- A recent study in Northeastern Ohio found more than half of sampled free-roaming cats were infected with *Toxoplasma gondii*, the parasite that causes toxoplasmosis. Toxoplasmosis is a disease that can cause flu-like symptoms for some, but can potentially be very dangerous for pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems.

Source: Ballash, G. A., Dubey, J. P., Kwok, O. C. H., Shoben, A. B., Robison, T. L., Kraft T. J., and P. M. Dennis. (2014). Seroprevalence of *Toxoplasma gondii* in White-Tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

and Free-Roaming Cats (*Felis catus*) Across a Suburban to Urban Gradient in Northeastern Ohio. EcoHealth (DOI: 10.1007/s10393-014-0975-2).

- A recent study in Northeastern Ohio found more than half of sampled free-roaming cats were infected with *Toxoplasma gondii*, the parasite that causes toxoplasmosis. This should be of particular concern to deer hunters, as the parasite can also be transferred from cats to white-tailed deer, which in turn can infect humans through foodborne infection.

Source: Ballash, G. A., Dubey, J. P., Kwok, O. C. H., Shoben, A. B., Robison, T. L., Kraft T. J., and P. M. Dennis. (2014). Seroprevalence of *Toxoplasma gondii* in White-Tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and Free-Roaming Cats (*Felis catus*) Across a Suburban to Urban Gradient in Northeastern Ohio. EcoHealth (DOI: 10.1007/s10393-014-0975-2).

- Keeping cats indoors is best for cats as well. Sadly, the life expectancy for a feral cat is just half that of an indoor cat, and kittens born in an outdoor environment have a 75% mortality rate.

Sources: Stoskopf, M.K. and F. B. Nutter. (2004). Analyzing approaches to feral cat management – one size does not fit all. . Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association 225:1361–1364, and AVMA. Position on abandoned and feral cats. In: 2003 AVMA directory and resource manual. Schaumburg, Ill: AVMA 2003;73.

- Managed cat colonies and trap-neuter-release (TNR) programs are often instituted to improve the quality of life for feral cats while leading to the elimination of the colony over time. Unfortunately, TNR programs leave cats at risk because they remain in the outdoor environment where they continue to face a multitude of hazards and diseases, and in almost all cases, TNR programs have failed to substantially reduce cat numbers or eliminate feral cat populations.

Source: Longcore, T., Rich, C. and L. M. Sullivan. (2009). Critical Assessment of Claims Regarding Management of Feral Cats by Trap–Neuter–Return. Conservation Biology 23:887-894, and American Bird Conservancy (2011). TRAP, NEUTER, RELEASE: The Wrong Solution to a Tragic Problem. Retrieved at [http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/materials/TNR\\_the%20wrong%20solution2011.pdf](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/materials/TNR_the%20wrong%20solution2011.pdf)

- Ideas for keeping your cat happy indoors (From the American Bird Conservancy):
  - Provide window shelves to permit your pet to monitor the outdoors from the safety of your home.
  - Play with your cat each day. Paper bags, tissue paper, and cardboard boxes are sources of unending delight when you are away.
  - Plant kitty grass (available in pet supply stores) in indoor pots so your cat can graze.
  - If you can, provide a safe, outside enclosure, such as a screened porch
  - Clean litter boxes regularly.
  - Spay or neuter your kitten as early as eight weeks of age.
- Even your neighborhood can be a dangerous place for your cat. Many cats, seeking warmth while outdoors, curl up on car engines and are killed or injured when the car is started.
  - Source: American Bird Conservancy