



responsible cat ownership



PHOTO: SPCA

Domestic cats

Cats are popular pets. Approximately 47% of New Zealand households own cats. There are also large populations of stray and feral cats in New Zealand. Cats are natural predators and can pose a risk to our threatened native species. However, by following some straightforward guidelines, you can minimise the impact that your cat has on the native wildlife around your home.

Firstly, think carefully before you get a cat or any other pet. Consider the cat's needs and be sure that you are committed to caring for it throughout its life, which may be 15 years or more. You should keep only as many pet cats as you can feed and care for.

To reduce hunting, feed your cat well. This means feeding a complete and balanced diet at regular times. Also ensure that you make adequate holiday arrangements for your cat. Forest and Bird strongly recommends that you arrange for care of your cat at home or at a cattery, rather than taking it on holiday with you. Many people like to holiday in conservation areas, where a cat will have a greater impact on wildlife. In some cases cats are left behind at the end of a holiday when their owners are unable to find them when they go to leave.

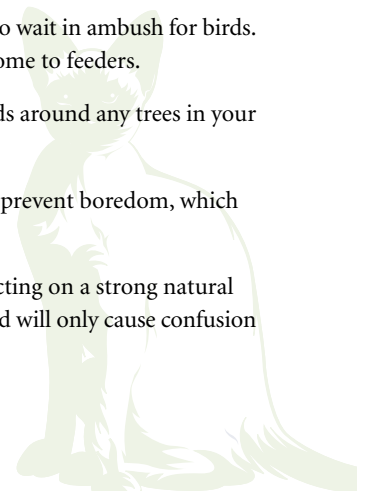
The SPCA do not recommend giving pets as gifts as owning a pet is a big responsibility and hundreds of animals are abandoned each year by people not committed to caring for them. This is both inhumane to the animals and endangers native wildlife by adding to the problem of stray cat populations.

Protecting native wildlife

The Department of Conservation (DOC) recommends keeping your cat indoors at night (including dawn and dusk). This is when the hunting and prowling instinct of a cat is strongest and when birds are sitting on their nests. Keeping your cat indoors also reduces the risk of it picking up diseases from strays or getting injured.

You can also help protect the native wildlife in your garden:

- Locate bird feeders in sites that do not provide cover for cats to wait in ambush for birds. Cats are a significant source of mortality among birds that come to feeders.
- To prevent cats from climbing to bird nests, put animal guards around any trees in your garden that may have nesting birds.
- Provide moving toys for your cat to play with. This will help prevent boredom, which can be a reason for a well-fed cat hunting.
- If your cat does catch a bird or animal, remember that it is acting on a strong natural instinct, not misbehaving. Punishing your cat will not help and will only cause confusion and distress.



Preventing unwanted breeding

Every year the SPCA receives over 7,000 unwanted kittens. In addition, many more are inhumanely killed or abandoned in the wild. This problem can easily be prevented by desexing.

You should have your cat desexed at a young age and encourage others to do the same. Support or initiate efforts requiring desexing of pets. Controlling reproduction and humanely euthanising unwanted cats will keep cat populations from growing too large.

Never dispose of unwanted cats by abandoning them. This practice enlarges stray cat populations and increases wildlife predation. It is an inhumane way of dealing with unwanted cats, as they suffer in an unfamiliar setting even if they are good hunters. Contact the SPCA for help.

Stray and feral cats

Stray or unowned cats are cats that have been abandoned or born to strays. They generally live around humans and rely on food provided or scavenged from people. Populations of stray cats may develop around food sources such as rubbish dumps.

Feral cats are populations of cats that live in the wild and hunt or scavenge for food. They often live in less populated areas and pose a serious threat to native wildlife.

It is important that populations of stray and feral cats are not encouraged. These cats threaten native wildlife and often carry diseases that pose a health risk to pet cats as well as humans. The cats themselves have a greatly reduced life span and suffer because of disease and injury.

Don't feed stray or feral cats, as this maintains high densities of cats that can impact upon native wildlife. Eliminate sources of food, such as garbage or outdoor pet food dishes, that attract cats. If you have a problem with stray or feral cats, contact your local SPCA or council for advice and help.

To ensure your cat is not mistaken for a stray cat, use an adjustable collar with identification tag, including your telephone number.



photo: Rob Slatford, www.naturespic.com

If your cat catches a bird that you think can be saved:

Put the bird in a covered box with a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel. Take the bird (in its box) to your nearest SPCA or vet clinic.

In some areas there are groups that care for injured birds, such as the Auckland SPCA BirdWing.

Remember:

- Desex your cat
- Keep your cat indoors at night
- Never abandon unwanted cats
- Don't give pets as gifts
- Feed your cat indoors
- Don't feed stray or feral cats
- Provide moving toys for your cat
- Protect wildlife in your garden

For more information contact:

Forest and Bird,
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www.forestandbird.org.nz

For details of your local SPCA:
www.rspca.org.nz

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