

Cats

The number one threat to our nation's wildlife is habitat loss and fragmentation. However, efforts to protect and restore wildlife habitat can only be successful if significant secondary causes of wildlife mortality are also addressed. They include pesticides, invasive plants and wildlife species and impacts from domestic animals such as cats.

At the Living Lab we have developed bird feeding stations and installed plants that attract wildlife, especially birds. We have had to deal with cats that are attracted to the birds that come here to feed. We have successfully live trapped one cat but other cats still frequent the Living Lab.

Scientists estimate that cats kill hundreds of millions of birds each year and billions of small mammals such as chipmunks, squirrels and rabbits. Cats kill common bird species such as wrens but they also kill endangered species such as Piping plover. The Portland Oregon Wildlife Care Center has had over 20,000 cat caused injuries brought into their facility in the last 20 years.

Cat predation bears no resemblance to natural predation. Cats are introduced domestic species and have been able to establish themselves at densities that dwarf all other similarly sized predators combined. Unlike native predator species, studies have shown that domestic cats will continue to hunt regardless of whether they are well fed or not.



Cat on leash.

River Keepers

Cats that kill birds consist of: 1) the feral (wild) cat, 2) lost or strayed cats, and 3) pets that are allowed to wander. All are equally dangerous to wildlife with different solutions needed to curb the problem.

There have been various attempts to reduce wildlife damage caused by cats. Some people have tied bells unto cat collars. The intent is that the sound of the bell will warn the stalked animal. However, that doesn't work. The cat soon learns to hunt silently. Other people feed their cats extra

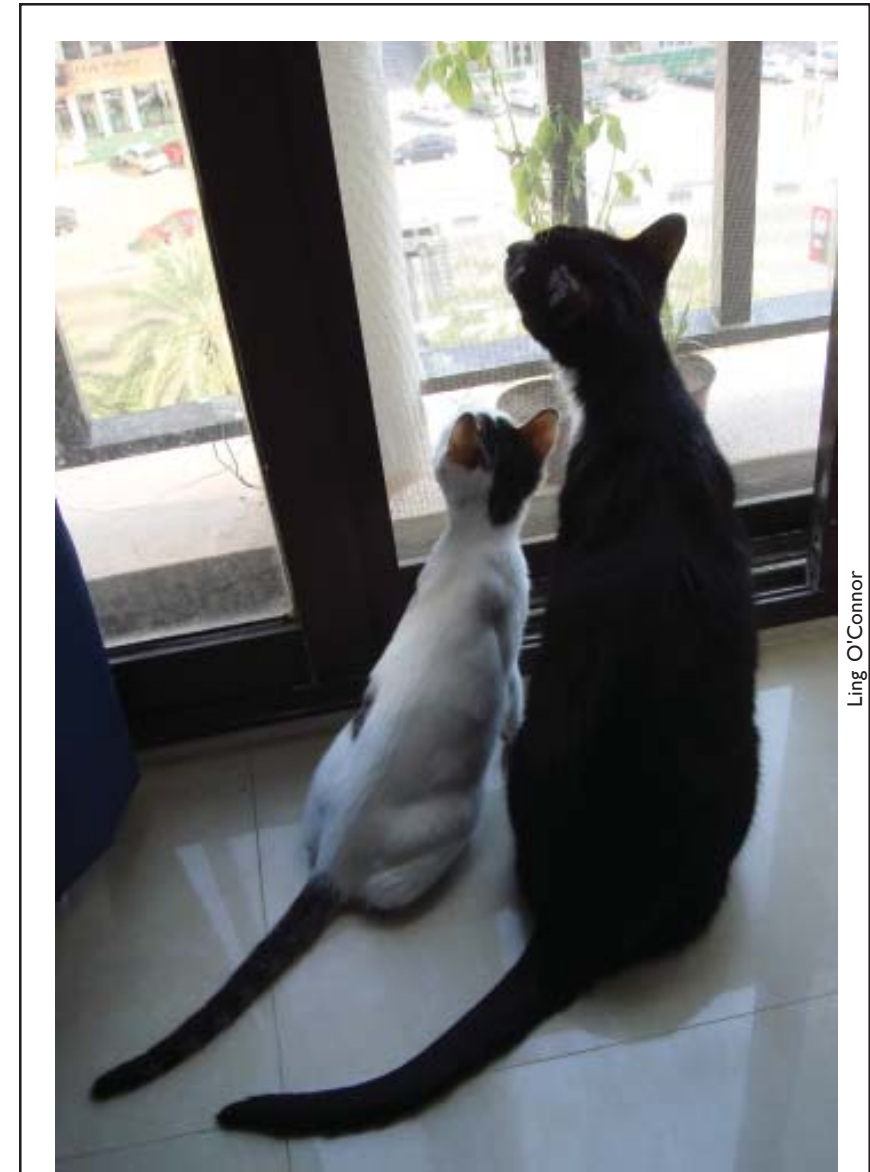
food thinking that a "full" cat will not want to hunt since it isn't hungry. This doesn't work either. Cats hunt instinctively, not just for food.

Outdoors is not a safe place for cats. They are hit by cars, injured by dogs, exposed to ticks, fleas, antifreeze poisoning, and freezing temperatures. Outdoor cats usually live a short life compared to indoor cats.

Cats can be made to feel comfortable indoors, even if they were used to roaming. Some suggestions include.

- Provide a safe outside enclosure such as a screened porch.
- Provide window shelves so the cat can look outdoors.
- Play with your cat each day.
- Plant "kitty" grass (available from pet stores) indoors.
- Clean litter boxes regularly.

For more information contact the American Bird Conservancy at www.abcbirds.org.



Ling O'Connor

Indoor cats enjoy watching birds.