

Community Cats = Feral Freedom

What are they? Community Cats is the umbrella term for any unowned cat. The cat may be feral or unsocialized. It may have been, at one point in time, a household pet. These animals are often fed by members of that community. Other 'community cats' survive without human intervention. They are free roaming. These cats have feral freedom. They are untouchable.

Wishful thinking...



TNR is the acronym for the Trap Neuter Release program. This is a program that is promoted by domestic animal shelters. National Geographic reported in a December 2012 article titled the threat of invasive species – in an interview with Dr. Michael Hutchins "Cat advocacy groups have sold TNR as an effective way to control feral cat populations". ...the movement is to stop accepting stray and feral cats at shelters, to prevent land owners from controlling feral cats by euthanizing – in essence to treat domestic feral cats as if they were protected wildlife. The motive at animal shelters seems to be to

reduce the population of free roaming domestic cats, therefore allowing the cats they have in their facility a better chance at finding an adoptive home.

The monies to fund such an undertaking is due to a major pet store chain giving grants. More than \$26 million has been given away since 2009. The public funds this mission. The store seems to be only interested in having responsible and proud pet owners buy the products in their store.

Unfortunately, many pet owners do not think their cats are fierce predators. Very few people think of the devastation that wild 'community cats' cause on the native wild life while trying to find food and simply survive.



s. casey photo

Cats Outdoors

What Wilson's Warblers think I do
What House Wrens think I do
What Spotted Towhees think I do
What Blue Tits think I do
What European Robins think I do
What I actually do

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Domestic animal shelters and the TNR campaigns do not address the issues that this cat must face while in the wild. Trap then spay or neuter then release a feral cat back into the wild is not humane! This animal which has been domesticated for thousands of years is still exposed to the harsh environments and temperature changes. A myriad of diseases still exist: Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, Feline Leukemia Virus, Feline Panleukopenia Virus, Rabies, Toxocara, Toxoplasmosis, Hookworm, Murine Typhus, Bartonella henslae. The above list does not include the zoonotic risks. A zoonotic

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disease is one that can be transferred from animal to human. They are Cutaneous Larval Migrans, Toxoplasma gandii, Tularemia, Plague. Zoonotic diseases are those passed from animal to human through direct contact



with fecal matter and other fluids as well as scratches & bites. Severe debilitation and fatalities have been documented. 1/3 of US rabies post exposure prophylactic treatments are due to free roaming cats.

In the course of a day these cats, even though they cannot reproduce are still exposed to dangers while completing simple tasks of survival. Common activities such as crossing roads puts the animal in harm's way to be killed or worse yet maimed and left to suffer until starving to death. Other dangers are the infections inflicted by other feral cats during fights over territory or food. Simple acts such as climbing trees – to find food such as nestling birds may cause the animal to fall from great heights. Even the search to find shelter can be fatal – entering a crawl space which is

inhabited by conspecifics or the soil is contaminated thereby causing poisoning, or being trapped in that space when it collapses. They also become prey to larger predators such as owls and coyotes. Don't forget the biting blood sucking fleas & ticks.

Another issue that neither domestic animals shelters nor pet store chains address is the effect their TNR campaign has on native wildlife. The 5,000 professional wildlife rehabilitators across the nation see the devastating reality of domestic animals preying upon local wildlife. Perform your own internet search: American Bird Conservancy - Cats Indoors! Campaign, Toronto Wildlife Centre - Keep Animals Safe, Avian Haven - The poacher approach, USFWS State of the Birds 2009, National Geographic/Daily News – Hello Kitty please don't kill me. Countless other articles have been written.

Watch the 2012 'kitty cam' from University of Georgia at www.kittycams.uga.edu. Or watch 'a day in the life of a travling feline' from the wildlife society news at <http://news.wildlife.org>. They compiled more than 2,000 hours of video footage. You will see the devastation.

The average house cat kills 2.1 animals per week (each 17 hours outside = 1 death (birds, lizards, snakes, voles, chipmunks, squirrels). Only 23% of the kills were brought back home – hence the misconception that my cat doesn't kill.



That Cuddly Kitty Is Deadlier Than You Think

It is estimated that nearly 4 billion animals are killed annually! The 2013 report by Dr. P. Marra, S. Loss and T. Will estimated up to 3.7 billion birds and 20.7 billion mammals are killed annually. Outdoor cats are the single greatest source of human caused mortality for birds and mammals – Robert Johns 2013 report from smithsonian conservation biology institute & usfws (fws) scientists.

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Hello Kitty! Please Don't Kill Me!

Cats kill billions of birds and mammals every year, new study says.

A domestic cat stalks a mouse in Maine.

Professional wildlife rehabilitation facilities across the nation see the effects of what domestic & feral cats do to the local wildlife. Waste basket full of migratory birds, some young, some adults (possibly leaving their young to starve). All life is sacred – all life is interconnected. Photos by L. Cherrasky.



Sidenote: In England, before World War 2 started, domestic rabbits were valuable and encouraged to be kept since they would in return provide wool and a food source. However, out of fear for the wellbeing of the beloved pets 400,000 dogs and cats were killed. Why do we not show this same level of compassion? The concern for the wellbeing and quality of living seems to have been forgotten.



Cat with American Coot by Debi Sheehan - photo can be used with credit.

Common MYTHs and FACTs

MYTH: It is beneficial for cats to kill small rodents like mice. Truth = rodents are a critical part of the ecosystem. Native predators (owls, hawks, coyotes) rely upon them.

MYTH: It is nature's way for cats to kill. False = Cats have been domesticated four thousand years ago and brought to the western hemisphere from the eastern hemisphere. They are not part of the natural wild species mix in North & South America. Their numbers are exponentially higher than natural. Predation disrupts the balance of wild ecosystems.

MYTH: Well fed cats don't kill wildlife. False. it is hunting instinct, not appetite that leads to the kill.

MYTH: Cats with a bell is enough to deter. False! Cats are capable of moving without alerting prey. Survey showed that belled actually kill more than those without. www.abcbirds.org

MYTH: My cat only plays with the animals. False. Internal hemorrhaging, punctured air sacs, bacteria from bite and claws are all side effects of cat attacks.

MYTH: Neutering stops the killing/They only kill a few – why make an issue. With over 100 million outdoor cats in North America, domestic cat predation has disastrous effects. Even if only a handful each but studies show 50 to 100 per year not unusual.

MYTH: My cat needs to hunt; it's cruel to keep inside. False require stimulation easily met by play.

FACT: the dangers to cats include cars, poisonings, diseases, predation, traps and human abuse, parasites, displacement, overpopulation. Life as 'wild cat' is cruel.

We at American Heritage Wildlife Foundation also find the photos disturbing; we do feel we must present all aspects of what it means to be a *community cat*. It is up to you the reader to decide what you feel is the right course of action.  Information about how we are working to keep North Idaho WILD is found on our webpage www.ahwf.org. You may also speak with one of our volunteers by calling 208.266.1488. If you wish to email do so at ahwf@sandpoint.net. We are 100% community supported with time, talent and treasure.



The Wildlife Society - facts about feral cats