

## The Feral Cat Epidemic

Every year in Canada, an estimated 1 million cats end up homeless. They are either born feral or abandoned by their owners. These cats have a devastating impact on birds and wildlife.

- Never abandon an unwanted cat or kitten outdoors. Take them to a shelter to give them the best chance at finding a safe home.
- Resist feeding unowned or feral cats unless you can commit to finding them a permanent indoor home.



## What can we do to reduce cat overpopulation?

There are an estimated 10.2 million unowned cats in Canada. Animal welfare groups and shelters become easily overwhelmed as only 47% of cats are adopted to new homes. Only 5% of the clearly-owned cats that end up in shelters are claimed by owners. This is a tragedy for cats and for communities.

- Adopt from your local shelter. Cats come spayed and neutered and there are all ages and temperaments to choose from.
- Always have your cats spayed or neutered to prevent unwanted kittens.
- Respect and follow animal bylaws in your municipality.

**Fact: Spaying female cats before one year old reduces the rate of mammary cancer by 80-90%. Neutered male cats are less aggressive and they spray less often than intact males.**

## Isn't it cruel to keep a cat indoors?

Because they are smart and independent, we think cats can look after themselves, but they are not wild animals. For thousands of years they have been bred to be pampered domestic companions. Outdoor cats are exposed to the risks of predation, parasites, diseases, trauma and toxins. When raised indoors, many cats show little desire to go outside, and even outdoor cats can adapt to being indoor pets with patience, alternative activities, and time. Most cat welfare groups recommend keeping cats indoors with only supervised outdoor access (e.g. screened porch, leash and harness).

## Tips for Happy Indoor Cats

- Provide window spots so your cat can look outdoors and watch the neighbourhood.
- Cats love to perch up high. Install a cat post or shelves to give your cat "a bird's eye view."
- Cats prefer two litter boxes with daily cleaning. Litter type, depth, and smell all make a big difference.
- Spay or neuter your cat at 4-6 months.
- Play with your cat and encourage their urge to chase and pounce with toys.
- Provide comfortable beds. Cats spend an average of 15 hours per day sleeping.
- Provide your cat's favourite type of scratching posts such as vertical or horizontal posts of cardboard, carpet or natural fibre.
- Use food puzzles to make cats think their way to dinner.
- Provide multiple hiding spots in your home.
- Provide access to outdoors with a screened porch and an enclosed outdoor run (catio).
- If trained when young, cats enjoy walking with a leash and harness.

Art by Manda Maggs. Photos from Ted Ardley, Jared Hobbs, and Wikimedia Commons.



# The Happy Cat

## Tips for Responsible Pet Ownership



STEWARDSHIP CENTRE  
FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Stewardship Centre for BC urges you to keep your feline family members indoors and adopt these tips. It's better for cats and better for birds, bats and, other wildlife.

For further information go to:  
[www.stewardshipcentrebc.ca](http://www.stewardshipcentrebc.ca)  
1-866-456-7222

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## What is a responsible cat owner?

Being a good guardian isn't just about keeping your cat fed and healthy. It is also your job to keep your cat safe and be responsible for your pet's behaviour.

### DO

- ✓ Keep your cat indoors, with only supervised outdoor access.
- ✓ Ensure your pet is spayed or neutered, even if it's an indoor cat.
- ✓ Identify your cat with permanent identification, so it can be returned to you if lost.
- ✓ Take your cat to the vet for annual check-ups and vaccinations.

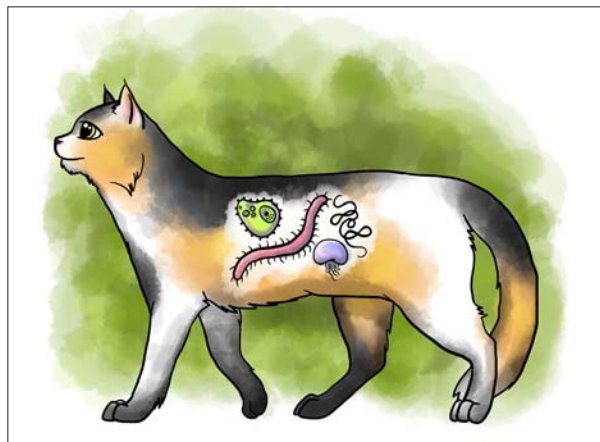
### DON'T

- ✗ Let your unsterilized cat roam where it may meet other cats or predators.
- ✗ Let your cat cross roads where it could get hit.
- ✗ Let your cat use neighbours' gardens and children's play areas as a litter box.
- ✗ Let your cat chase and kill birds, bats, or other wildlife.



**Fact: An indoor cat's life expectancy is 10 - 20 years, but outdoor cats live 2 - 5 years on average.**

## Look what the cat brought in!



Outdoor cats can bring home diseases that are picked up from other cats, wildlife that are caught and eaten, and from the soil. Fleas are easily picked up and easily multiply in your home. Feline leukemia is life-threatening to your pet. Cat scratch disease, rabies, flea-borne typhus, plague, roundworms, and toxoplasmosis are serious diseases that can be transferred from cats to humans.

**Fact: Did you know that over 60% of cat owners in Canada keep their cats indoors?**

## Cats are natural hunters

Cats can have a devastating impact outdoors because of their powerful hunting instinct. Studies have demonstrated that cats may only bring home about 20% of their wildlife prey. Even if they leave the house on full stomachs, cats will still seek out and kill birds, bats and other wildlife.

It is unfair and irresponsible to let wild animals suffer for our pet's brief entertainment. As their caregivers, we need to replace that hunting activity with stimulating play activities.

## Wildlife in Canada need your help

Birds play an important role in all ecosystems and brighten up our lives with their colourful beauty, bird song and activity. The #1 direct source of bird deaths in the country is hunting by domestic and feral cats. Cats are estimated to kill 100-350 million birds every year in Canada, many of them nestlings.

Bats can eat their body weight in insects every night and are vital to control insect pests. Cats may hunt bats as they swoop out of their roost to forage, or prey on sick bats that may have ended up on the ground. Visit [www.bcbats.ca](http://www.bcbats.ca) for more information.

**Let's keep birds safe from free-roaming cats.**

## Cats and birds don't mix!

If you feed birds, make sure feeders are located away from places where cats can hide.

- Keep your cat inside.
- Don't put out bird feeders if you have cats coming into your yard.
- Bells or collars will not prevent wildlife mortalities.



**Fact: Canada's songbird population is in serious decline. Many bats are now at risk like this endangered Little Brown Myotis.**