

Resolving conflicts between cats and wildlife

By combining proactive steps to avert conflict with sound mitigation strategies, we can help both cats and wildlife.



PHOTO BY SILKE KLEWITZ-SEEMANN/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The impact that outdoor domestic cats have on wildlife is difficult to measure. Some cats are active predators while others never catch prey at all. Studies suggest that it can be nearly impossible to truly know what a cat does while outside, and cat caregivers aren't always correct in their assumptions.

It may seem that cat and wildlife enthusiasts must be at odds with each other, but there are simple steps everyone can take to increase the well-being of both cats and wild animals. Cats don't need to be euthanized or relocated to reduce conflicts with wildlife, and wild animals can find safe havens in the natural environments we provide.

Strategies for community cats

Humanely reduce community cat populations through TNR. In trap-neuter-return programs, cats are humanely trapped, spayed or neutered and vaccinated at a veterinary office, and returned to their outdoor homes. Effective TNR programs stop the cat breeding cycle and will eventually decrease the number of cats living outside.

Use best practices for feeding community cats. Community cat caretakers can reduce wildlife conflict by feeding cats at a regular time once a day, putting out only as much food as the cats will eat in one sitting, and cleaning up anything that hasn't been eaten after 30 minutes.

Strategies for community cats

(continued)

Install secure feeding stations. If you're unable to limit the time cat food is available, certain types of feeding stations can help prevent wildlife from accessing the food. Feeding stations elevated at least 6 feet above ground by a smooth post (and fitted with a skirt of aluminum flashing) can deter animals such as raccoons and opossums who are unable to jump vertically. These feeding stations can also provide protection for community cats from wildlife if they're positioned at least 6 feet away from trees and other structures and provide two entrances/exits. Covered feeding stations may also protect cat food from vultures, pigeons and inclement weather.

Strategies for pet cats

Keep pet cats indoors. Keeping cats indoors is the best way to prevent them from preying on wildlife, and it helps cats live safer, healthier and significantly longer lives. Outdoor cats face a variety of threats, from cars to diseases to predators. To learn more about transitioning an outdoor cat indoors, go to [humanesociety.org/indoorcats](https://www.humanesociety.org/indoorcats).



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Strategies for pet cats *(continued)*

Provide safe outdoor time. Indoor cats can still enjoy nature! Enclosed cat patios (catios) give cats the opportunity to experience the outdoors in a way that's safe for both cats and wildlife. Catios come in many shapes and sizes and can be purchased or constructed as a DIY project. An alternative (or additional) way to provide indoor cats with outdoor time is to outfit them with a leash and harness and accompany them outside (no walking required!).

Reduce food attractants. Keep cat food inside to avoid attracting wildlife. If you must feed your cat outside, invest in a microchip-enabled bowl or, at a minimum, adhere to the feeding guidelines outlined on p. 1.

Take extra precautions at dawn and dusk. If you must let your cat roam freely outdoors, don't let them outside at dawn and dusk when wild animals are most active. Remove cat doors so that you have control over your cat's comings and goings (if you must have a cat door, use a microchip-enabled cat door that prevents other animals from entering your home).

What about collars? If your cat spends any time outdoors, they should be equipped with an identification collar in case they become lost or injured. Some collars come with bells, but these do little to prevent predation. Certain brands—such as the CatBib or Birdbesafe collar—may make your cat more discernible to prey, but they aren't an effective substitute for keeping your cat indoors (and won't protect your cat from predators).

Strategies for protecting wildlife

Feed birds strategically. Predation on birds can be reduced by placing bird feeders in open areas away from shrubs and bushes, or by hanging feeders at least 8 feet above the ground. Better yet, you can replace feeders with native berry bushes and insect-hosting plants—providing both food and hiding spots for birds and other wildlife and preventing birds from congregating in the same feeding location.

Keep cats away from nesting sites. Young birds and other ground-nesting wildlife (such as rabbits) are particularly vulnerable to predation and injury by cats. If you're aware of a nest site, be sure to keep your pet cats indoors until the animals have grown and left the nest. You can provide further protection by installing motion-activated ultrasonic devices or sprinkler systems. Choose a device that can be adjusted to only activate when triggered by animals above a certain size. This will help to reduce any impact on birds or other small animals.

Create a humane backyard. There are many strategies you can use to turn your backyard into a haven for wildlife. Simple steps like providing a source of water, discontinuing the use of pesticides and replacing a part of your grass turf with native plants can go a long way to helping wildlife flourish. Get tips for building a wildlife-friendly yard at humanesociety.org/humanebackyard.



PHOTO BY CARY SMITH/THE HSUS

Partner for success

Collaboration is essential for effectively resolving conflicts between cats and wildlife. Although it may seem difficult at times, cat and bird lovers *can* work together. One well-known example is the long-standing partnership between the Audubon Society of Portland and the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon, who together host an annual catio tour. Strong alliances between animal welfare groups of all types are instrumental in reducing and preventing conflicts between cats and wildlife.

Learn more at humanepro.org/catsandwildlife.

For more information, visit humanepro.org/catsandwildlife



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