

## **In Defense of Outdoor Cats**

A recent small study of 55 outside (all “owned”) cats by the University of Georgia has once again caused anti-“outside cat” groups to launch a campaign claiming that cats are the leading cause of bird decline. Some bird enthusiasts and wildlife rehabbers believe all outdoor cats should either be put in a sanctuary, adopted into indoor only homes, or be killed. Realistically we know that indoor homes are not appropriate for feral cats, there are not enough sanctuaries to house all of the feral cats, and, well, we don’t believe in killing healthy cats.

Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) is a HUMANE and viable solution for reducing the number of feral cats living among the wildlife. Common sense tells us that if we reduce future populations of feral cats through spay/neuter, we will reduce the feral cat impact on wildlife.

Obviously, we love cats. Many of us also love, and feed, birds! We recognize that yes, cats do kill birds, but there are multiple studies showing that hundreds of millions of birds are killed every year by objects humans have put in the birds’ paths: cars, windows, transmission lines and towers. In addition, human destruction of bird habitat and the application of poisonous pesticides and herbicide have led to the further decline of bird populations. It’s clear from these many studies that huge numbers of birds are being killed each year by human activity. So why are cats being targeted as the main cause of bird decline and extinction and being vilified again and again in the press? Because they are an easy target. It’s much simpler to blame cats and whip up angry sentiment against them than to reflect on what humans as a species are doing to our environment.

It is estimated that there are between 23,000 and 63,000 feral, stray and free-roaming cats in Centre County alone. (Source: Best Friends Animal Society Community Cat Program study; PetSmart Charities). HCF and other humane groups in Centre County work tirelessly to lessen the problem through low-cost spay/neuter clinics and financial subsidies toward the cost of spay/neuter surgeries at local veterinarians, reducing the cat population over time. Additionally, the cats that are spayed and neutered through our TNR program are also rabies-vaccinated, addressing another concern in our community.

Please help us spread the TNR message. People created the free-roaming cat problem by irresponsibly allowing their unaltered pets to roam, or by abandoning them at farms or in the countryside. It is now up to us to work to solve the problem HUMANELY! If you see or hear groups spreading misinformation about outside cats, whether owned or unowned, politely but firmly tell them that you will not support groups that advocate the killing of one species to benefit another.

Our friends at Alley Cat Allies summed it up quite eloquently: *“Cats have always been part of the natural environment—they have lived outdoors for over 10,000 years. While they have adapted to the changes people brought about in the environment, their biological instincts and interactions with their surroundings have not changed.*

*What has changed in the last 10,000 years is how people have impacted the environment. Our unrestrained use of natural resources has damaged the crucial habitats and resources species need to survive.*

*Instead of pointing a finger at cats, we must take a hard look at what we can do to change the way we impact our world and the animals we share it with. We have the ability to conserve our natural places, minimize our impact on wildlife habitat, and build responsibly. To make a difference, we must align our attention and resources to offset the biggest offender in habitat destruction and species decline—ourselves.”* (<http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=325>)

## **Running the Numbers – What Kills Birds Other than Cats**

**Habitat Destruction (land development, logging, mining):** no exact estimates are given but **The National Audubon Society** says loss of bird habitat is the greatest threat to bird populations worldwide (not CATS)

**Glass Windows:** 100 – 900 million+ (Avian Mortality at Windows: The Second Largest Human Source of Bird Mortality on Earth. Proceedings of the Fourth International Partners in Flight Conference: Tundra to Tropics. Pgs 244-251, Dr Daniel Klem, Muhlenberg College, 2010 - [aco.muhlenberg.edu/documents/Klem\\_PIF09-Final-rec-1-XII-09.pdf](http://aco.muhlenberg.edu/documents/Klem_PIF09-Final-rec-1-XII-09.pdf)) From the study: *“A vast and growing amount of evidence supports the interpretation that, except for habitat destruction, collisions with clear and reflective sheet glass and plastic cause the death of more birds than any other human-related avian mortality factor. From published estimates, an upper level of 1 billion annual kills in the U.S. alone is likely conservative; the worldwide toll is expected to be billions”*

**Electric Transmission Line Collisions:** up to 174 million (estimates from US Fish & Wildlife Service)

**Automobiles & Trucks:** 50 – 100 Million (reports published by National Institute for Urban Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

**Agriculture:** 67 million via pesticides, herbicides, and land use such as mowing and plowing (Smithsonian Institution study)

**Communication Towers:** 4-10 million (estimates from US Fish & Wildlife Service)

**Oil & Gas Extraction:** 1-2 million per year (estimates from US Fish & Wildlife Service)

**Wind Turbines:** 440,000 (2009 estimates from US Fish & Wildlife Service)

The National Audubon Society estimates that cats kill 100 million birds per year. Interestingly, bird deaths from legal HUMAN hunting activities run in excess of 100 million per year (estimates from US Fish & Wildlife Service).

As you can see from these various studies, placing the primary blame on cats for bird decline and extinction is simply FALSE.