



## Position Statement on Free-Roaming Domestic and Feral Cats

Background: The domestic cat (*Felis catus*) is a beloved house pet with over 77 million pet cats nationwide. Of these, currently about 43 million spend some time outside. Additionally there may be 60 to 100 million homeless stray and feral cats. Domestic cats have become a common feature not only of our backyards and city streets but also of our parks and other wild lands. *Felis catus* is not native to Colorado; domestic cats are not part of our natural ecosystems. Animal behavior experts note that cats will hunt and kill even if well fed, and it is not true that they only hunt at night so are not a threat to birds.



Many groups wish to help feral cats, and their compassion and energy are to be admired. Unfortunately being feral creates an unsafe situation for cats and wildlife and even poses a threat to human health. The Denver Audubon Board recognizes the science-based conclusions of the adverse impacts of free-roaming domestic and feral cats on humans, birds and other wildlife and on the cats themselves:

- A Smithsonian/US Fish and Wildlife Service study estimated that free-ranging domestic cats kill 1.3 to 4.0 billion birds and 6.3 to 22.3 billion mammals annually.
- Up to 74% of domestic cats in the US will be infected at some point in their lives with *Toxoplasmosis gondi*, an infectious parasite that can be passed on to humans, causing spontaneous abortions, birth defects and deterioration of memory functions in seniors.
- Domestic cats risk death by predation (Great horned owls, coyotes, foxes, dogs) diseases such as rabies, feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus, accidental collision with automobiles, poisons, and traps.
- Trap/neuter/release (TNR) programs do not work unless accompanied by intensive adoption efforts.

Denver Audubon therefore:

1. Urges cat owners to keep all cats indoors whenever possible unless on harness and leash or in a safe enclosed outdoor structure.
2. Opposes human behavior permitting cats to roam free.
3. Supports programs to neuter or spay cats before they reach reproductive age, and to vaccinate and register cats.
4. Opposes "managed" outdoor cat colonies and TNR programs unless accompanied by an intensive adoption program, monitoring of feral cat colonies, public

education on the need to keep cats indoors, and public involvement in reducing/eliminating cat colonies.

5. Is willing to work with the scientific, conservation and animal welfare communities to educate the public about the dangers that free-roaming domestic and feral cats pose to humans, birds and other wildlife, as well as the dangers to cats from outdoor hazards, diseases, poisons and predators.

6. Urges local, state and federal wildlife agencies, public health organizations, local governments and the public to identify outdoor cat colonies that may threaten native wildlife and open spaces and make it a high priority to reduce and ultimately eliminate them, and to ban and eliminate free-roaming domestic cats and lower-priority feral cat colonies through humane capture by individuals, animal services and/or control facilities, and ultimate adoption whenever possible.

#### References:

- Loss, Scott R. , Tom Will and Peter P. Marra. The Impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States. Nature Communications: Jan. 29, 2013.
- New Research Suggests Outdoor Cats Kill More Wildlife than Previously Thought. Wildlife Management Institute: Outdoor News Bulletin, 2014.
- American Bird Conservancy: New Study: "Remarkable Deterioration in Memory Functions of Seniors infected by Common Parasite Found in Free-Roaming Cats" cites *Brain, Behavior and Immunity* report. 2/20/2014.
- University of Georgia and the National Geographic Society's Crittercam program, [www.kittycams.uga.edu](http://www.kittycams.uga.edu).

#### Materials provided by:

- Fort Collins Audubon Society, TNR Policy
- Saint Petersburg Audubon Society, TNR Policy
- American Bird Conservancy: Resolution on Free-Roaming Cats
- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)
- Defenders of Wildlife
- National Audubon Society
- State of New Mexico, Dept. of Game and Fish, Letter of Sept. 16, 2013