



# CATS and WILDLIFE

## HOW YOU CAN PROTECT BOTH

Where is your cat right now?

Could it be harming native wildlife?

Is it roaming in your neighbour's yard?

Is it crossing a busy road?

Could it be returned to you  
if it got injured or lost?

The information in this booklet will help you  
better care for the health and welfare of both  
your pet cat and Tasmania's native wildlife.

**Biosecurity Tasmania**

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

## What you can do to help

If we want to continue enjoying Tasmania's unique wildlife, we all need to think about how we can reduce our impact on the environment. Here are five ways you can better care for the health and welfare of both your pet cat and Tasmania's native wildlife:

1. **Desex your cat**
2. **Identify your cat as a pet**
3. **Never dump unwanted cats or kittens (this is against the law)**
4. **Prevent your cat from roaming**
5. **Never feed stray cats or kittens**

Prepared by Biosecurity Tasmania

Published by Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment | April 2015

Printed publication ISBN: 978-1-74380-001-0

Online publication ISBN: 978-1-74380-002-7

Images on the following pages courtesy of:

Daryl Panther: front cover, 2, 6    Amanda Smith: 1, 2, 7, 9    S. Stoiloudis: 4    Anne Gigney: 7

## Cats as pets and predators

Cats are present throughout Tasmania, as domestic pets, free-living strays, and as feral animals. As pets, cats are wonderful companion animals and have a range of health benefits for their owners.

As predators, cats are very efficient hunters of Tasmania's native wildlife.

Tasmania's wildlife evolved in an environment that did not include cats. The relatively recent introduction of cats has added a predator with new hunting techniques that has altered the natural balance.

Cats that live close to bushland are likely to kill a wide range of native wildlife. Wildlife that feeds or nests on or near the ground is most at risk.

Cats can be both pets and predators.

Throughout Tasmania, the endangered Eastern barred bandicoot is often found in patches of bush in and around suburban areas. This species is known to be killed by pet cats.

Even pet cats that are well fed will still instinctively hunt. Prey that is not killed will often die later from shock, infection or disease.



## Research tells us cats threaten wildlife

Cats have been shown to prey on at least 400 species of native and introduced vertebrates in Australia, including 123 birds, 157 reptiles, 58 marsupials, 27 rodents and 21 frogs. Camera studies in Tasmania have shown cats are capable of catching and killing wildlife weighing up to four kilograms.

In Australia, cats are listed as a potential threat to the survival of at least 35 bird species, 36 mammal species, seven reptile species and three amphibian species (under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*). Four of those species are critically endangered.

Cats have played a key role in the extinction of at least 20 Australian mammal species and the decline of many others.

On average, a pet cat kills 16 mammals, eight birds and eight reptiles a year according to an Australia-wide study.

Researchers at the University of Georgia and National Geographic found that pet cats only bring home about one in four of their kills.



## Cats and disease

### *Toxoplasmosis*

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. Cats can carry this parasite and are a vital link in its life cycle. Toxoplasmosis is often fatal for infected wildlife, such as the Eastern barred bandicoot, and is the most common cause of infectious miscarriages in sheep.

Humans, particularly those with lowered immune systems and pregnant women, are also at risk from toxoplasmosis, which can affect the brain, eyes and lungs. Infection during pregnancy can cause miscarriage and health problems for the baby. Pregnant women should immediately consult a doctor if they have any concerns about toxoplasmosis.

Tasmania has one of the highest recorded rates of cat-carried *Toxoplasma gondii* infection in the world, according to a CSIRO study in 2014. This study found that over 84% of stray and feral cats carried the parasite.

### *Sarcosystis*

Cats are also known to be a host for the *Sarcosystis* parasite. *Sarcosystis* can affect the body condition of stock and result in meat from infected stock being rejected at the abattoir. In some cases, losses of up to 40% have been recorded for sheep carcasses at Australian abattoirs.

## Five simple ways to protect both your cat and our wildlife

Cat owners have a responsibility to ensure their cats don't kill native wildlife or become a nuisance to others.

Here are five things that you can do to provide better care for both your pet cat and for Tasmania's native wildlife.



### 1. Desex your cat

A desexed cat typically lives longer and is less territorial. It will wander, fight, and spray-mark its territory less, and in general makes a better pet. Desexing also prevents unwanted litters of kittens that may contribute to the feral cat population.

The National Desexing Network (NDN) is a nationwide referral system to help those in financial need with the cost of desexing their pets. The NDN also coordinates a reduced price desexing program during July each year as part of National Desexing Month.

Find out more at [www.ndn.org.au](http://www.ndn.org.au)

### 2. Identify your cat as a pet

Pet cats that are microchipped can easily be identified from stray and feral cats by local councils and animal shelters. This means that if they get injured or lost they can be quickly and safely returned to their owner.

Putting a collar on your cat will also help people identify that your cat is a pet cat and not a feral cat.

### **3. Never dump your unwanted cats or kittens (it is against the law)**

Cats that are dumped or abandoned are likely to become feral and prey on wildlife as a food source. Unwanted cats and kittens should be taken to the RSPCA or Hobart Cat Centre. Serious penalties apply in Tasmania for dumping or abandoning cats and kittens.

Contact your local vet, the RSPCA or the Hobart Cat Centre for assistance with unwanted cats.

### **4. Prevent your cat from roaming**

Cats kept indoors or in an enclosed outdoor area won't prey on wildlife. You will get to enjoy their company more too! Cats that are prevented from roaming are also protected from being hit by cars and from being injured or catching diseases from interactions with other animals. Cats prevented from roaming will live, on average, up to four times longer than those that are allowed to roam.

### **5. Don't feed stray cats or kittens**

About one in five households feed a stray cat that does not belong to them. Many stray cats are not desexed and feeding them supports breeding, resulting in greater impacts on native wildlife, disease spread, public nuisance and more cats for the feral population. Do not feed a cat that is not yours.

Stray cats should be taken to the RSPCA or the Hobart Cat Centre.

## True or false?

*It is cruel to confine my cat.* FALSE

Cats can happily live indoors or in a suitable enclosed area. What is most important is to keep your cat entertained by providing a stimulating environment that meets its physical, mental and social needs.

If you feel that your cat needs to have time outside, provide them with an enclosed outdoor area where they can lie in the sun, have a play, and watch the world go by while remaining safely at home.

*Cats and wildlife can live together.* FALSE

Cats are skilled hunters and are a threat to the survival of many native mammals and birds. When combined with threats like habitat loss, Tasmania's native wildlife is facing a battle to survive.



*Cats in the suburbs, away from bushland, are not a risk to wildlife.* FALSE

Cats, especially males, can roam many kilometres and in doing so may hunt wildlife. Remember that our native wildlife isn't just restricted to parks and reserves. Many species of native mammals, birds and lizards are found in suburban areas of Tasmania.

*A cat with a bell on its collar cannot catch wildlife. FALSE*

Cats with bells soon learn how to silently stalk their prey and will still catch wildlife. Even if they do make noise, the sound of a bell does not necessarily mean ‘danger’ to native animals and birds.

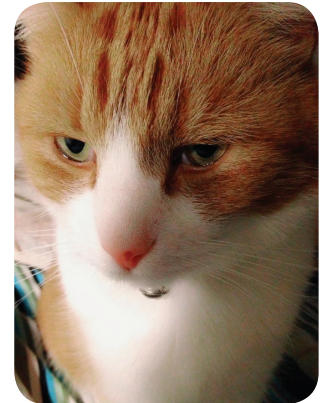
*The neighbours love my cat. FALSE*

Complaints and disputes about roaming pet cats are common in Tasmania. Complaints include roaming cats entering homes, defecating in vegetable gardens and sandpits, fighting with and disturbing other pets, killing wildlife and potentially affecting people’s health.

*I should be a good neighbour. TRUE*

Just as dogs in Tasmania must be confined to their owner’s property, there is increasing demand within our community that cat owners should confine cats to their property. In addition to causing community disputes and killing wildlife, roaming cats are also at risk of being injured in fights, catching disease and being killed on the roads.

Keeping your cat confined to your property will avoid all these problems.



## Further information

### *Your local council may require you to manage your cat*

Contact your local council to find out if they have any policies or by-laws that encourage responsible cat ownership in your area. Local councils may also be able to provide advice on what to do if you are having problems with roaming cats on your property.

### *Cat health and welfare*

Your cat should have regular health checks and must be vaccinated to protect it from harmful, or even fatal, diseases. Contact your local vet, the RSPCA or the Hobart Cat Centre for advice on how to keep your cat happy and healthy.

### *Cat enclosures*

Contact details for commercial suppliers of cat enclosures can be found on the internet. For guidance on building your own cat-proof fencing or cat enclosure go to:

 [www.goodcatsa.com](http://www.goodcatsa.com)



## Tasmania's Cat Management Act 2009

The *Cat Management Act 2009* promotes the welfare and responsible ownership of pet cats. The Act also outlines the requirements for the humane handling and control of stray and feral cats, and seeks to reduce the negative impacts of all cats on the environment.

For more information about responsible cat ownership in Tasmania, visit:



[www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/invasivespecies](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/invasivespecies)



*Cats and Wildlife: How You Can Protect Both* has been prepared by Biosecurity Tasmania based on a fact sheet of the same name produced by the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment (2002).

For copies of this booklet, please contact ✉ [invasive.species@dpiwwe.tas.gov.au](mailto:invasive.species@dpiwwe.tas.gov.au)

*This community information booklet has been supported through funding from BirdLife Tasmania and was prepared in consultation with:*

