

TRUE OR FALSE?

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, our 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 our suburban back gardens.

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.

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 it with an enclosed outdoor area where it can lie in the sun, have a play, and watch the world go by while remaining safely at home. 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

The neighbours love my cat.

FALSE. Complaints and disputes about roaming pets are one of the most frequent complaints local governments receive. 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 try to be a good neighbour.

TRUE. Just as dogs 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 neighbourhood 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

Contact your local government to find out about local laws in addition to state legislation and the registration process for cats and by-laws that encourage responsible cat ownership in your area. Local governments may also be able to provide advice on what to do if you are having problems with roaming cats on your property.

Western Australia's Cat Act 2011 promotes the welfare and responsible ownership of pet cats. The Act also outlines the requirements for cat owners to microchip, register and control their cats and seeks to reduce the negative impacts of all cats on the environment. For more information about responsible cat ownership in Western Australia, your legal responsibilities and available assistance, contact your local government or visit: www.dlgs.wa.gov.au/AdviceSupport/Pages/Cats-and-dogs.aspx

Many local governments also have specific local laws regarding cats.

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Cat with Phascogale.
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birdlife.org.au

BirdLife Western Australia

167 Perry Lakes Drive, Floreat WA 6014

T 08 9383 7749 | wa@birdlife.org.au

[facebook.com/BirdLifeAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/BirdLifeAustralia) | [@BirdlifeOz](https://twitter.com/BirdlifeOz)

ABN 75 149 124 774

Cats and Wildlife

How you can protect both



Photo by Billy West

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?

This infosheet will help you better care for the health and welfare of both your pet cat and Western Australia's native wildlife.

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Cats and Wildlife

How you can protect both

CATS CAN BE BOTH PETS AND PREDATORS

As pets, cats are wonderful companion animals with a range of health benefits for their owners. As predators, cats are very efficient hunters of native wildlife, altering the natural balance in an environment that did not include cats. Cats living 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. Even well-fed pet cats will still instinctively hunt. Prey that is not killed will often die later from shock, infection or disease.

In Western Australia, the Woylie and the Western Ground Parrot are all endangered as a result of cat activity. In parts of Perth, the local decline in population of blue wrens has been attributed to domestic cats.

RESEARCH TELLS US CATS THREATEN WILDLIFE

Cats 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 have shown cats catching and killing wildlife weighing up to four kilograms. 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. Four of these 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

Cats are known carriers of several diseases which are dangerous to both humans and stock.

Cats play a vital link in the life cycle of Toxoplasmosis. It is often fatal for infected wildlife, such as bandicoots; 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. In Australia, about 38% of cats carry the *Toxoplasma gondii* infection.

Cats are known to be a host for the Sarcosystis parasite, which affects the condition of stock and results 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.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP?

Here are five ways you can better care for the health and welfare of both your pet cat and Western Australia's native wildlife:

1. DESEX YOUR CAT

A desexed cat typically lives longer and is less likely to wander, fight, and spray-mark its territory. In general, a desexed cat makes a better pet.

Desexing cats is a requirement by law in Western Australia, unless you hold a permit to breed cats.

Desexing prevents unwanted litters of kittens contributing 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

2. IDENTIFY YOUR CAT AS A PET

A microchipped cat helps local councils and animal shelters identify pets and return them to their owners.

Microchipping your cat is a requirement by law in Western Australia. Putting a collar on your cat also helps

people identify your cat is a pet and not a feral cat. In Western Australia, by law, any cat which finds its way into a public place (that is, out side your property) must wear a current registration tag.



3. NEVER DUMP YOUR UNWANTED CATS OR KITTENS (IT IS AGAINST THE LAW)

Abandoned cats are likely to become feral and prey on wildlife as a food source. If you have unwanted cats and kittens contact your local government, local vet for assistance with unwanted cats. Serious penalties apply for dumping or abandoning cats and kittens.

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 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 will feed a stray cat. 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 local vet or contact your local council for assistance.

