

Beware of cats and backyard wildlife

Early summer is a time of relative abundance for wildlife. Young birds are leaving nests and learning to fly, and young mammals, such as rabbits, are beginning to look for food on their own. If you are interested and/or concerned with wildlife around your house, you should be aware of the detrimental impacts of house cats.

House cats are extremely proficient predators and can severely reduce the number of birds and small mammals around your house. Research has shown house cats (both feral and pets) kill millions of birds and untold numbers of native small mammals each year. (Note this does not include or consider non-native rats and mice.) In many cases, the prey is not consumed, but only killed because of the cat's innate sense to hunt. If you own a cat and allow it to stay outside, certainly you have seen this many times over as you go out to get the morning paper and find dead birds and rabbits or squirrels the cat has "collected."

It is irresponsible to take the time and effort to develop attractive wildlife habitat and also allow house cats to roam around the area. If you have a cat, the only way to preclude it from having a detrimental impact on wildlife is to keep it indoors. Putting a bell around its neck will **not** keep it from killing birds and small mammals. If you see feral cats in your area, report them to your local animal shelter for immediate capture and removal. Otherwise, you are doing a disservice to native wildlife populations. While predation is necessary for healthy wildlife communities, you should realize house cats (whether pets or feral) are not natural predators because they are not native to North America.

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