

## Why Cats Belong Indoors

**Stella Miller**

It's 10am. Do you know where Fluffy is? If you are like many people, and allow your cat to roam outdoors, there is a distinct possibility that at this moment, Fluffy is stalking an unaware bird, ready to pounce with deadly accuracy. "But wait, Fluffy is well fed", you say. That doesn't matter. Cats do not always hunt because they are hungry. They hunt because of an innate instinct for hunting. They hunt because it is, dare I say it, fun. "Well, Fluffy wears a bell and that will serve as a warning", you say. No again. A bell is useless. Wild animals do not recognize the sound of a bell as a danger signal and even if they did, most cats learn to stalk and seize their prey silently, despite the presence of a bell on their collar.

### **Cats as our companions**

Cats are companion animals, just as dogs are. They were domesticated thousands of years ago in Egypt and were brought to the United States a couple of hundred years ago. Cats evolved from wild species but are now considered their own separate species, *Felis catus*. Although they retain many of their wild characteristics such as appearance and the urge to hunt, they are now as domesticated as dogs are. Would you allow your dog to roam freely in the neighborhood?

### **Cats impact on birds and other wildlife:**

As an Audubon member, you have no doubt read about the decline of our native birds. Many bird populations are in a serious and steep decline due to three major causes: habitat destruction, window bird collisions (a topic we discussed in the last issue of Killdeer) and cat predation. When you add up these losses, the math is chilling. Hundreds of millions of birds are killed by cats each year, and between 100 million and a billion die from window collisions. Factor in habitat loss and you are now looking at an unsustainable loss of these species.

Cats also kill prey animals such as mice, chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits and other small mammals, competing with native species such as hawks, owls, foxes and other larger wild predators that depend on these animals for their survival. Statistics show that the combined numbers of birds and small mammals killed each year by cats is close to one billion. Allowing a well fed house cat to compete for wild food sources places native predators at a disadvantage. Bottom line, cats are an invasive and alien species and do not belong in our ecosystem.

### **The Dangers Cats Themselves Face**

You may be wondering if it is cruel to deprive your cat of an outdoor life. Absolutely not. **Cats that are allowed outside are more likely to lead shorter lives.** Exposure to transmittable and deadly diseases (such as rabies, feline leukemia, distemper and FIV), the constant threat of being hit by a car, as well as being attacked by a dog or a larger predator such as a fox are very real and likely possibilities. In addition, there have been many publicized cases of cats found stabbed, burned and shot by humans. Letting your cat outside can also be a risk for you: cats can contract diseases such as rabies and toxoplasmosis, both of which can be transmitted to humans. Furthermore, an outdoor cat may carry parasites, such as ticks, fleas and worms into the home. Why expose your cat and yourself to these risks? Keep Fluffy inside and allow her to live a spoiled, pampered life!

When you really think about it, the greatest gift you can give your cat is to allow it to live a pampered, spoiled life inside your home. For more information and to download the brochure, please visit: <http://www.hobaudubon.org/Cats-Indoors.asp>.

One final note: if you are no longer able to care for your cat for any reason, please do not release it outdoors, thinking it will fend for itself, or that someone will find and take care of it. **Chances are your cat will end up dead.** Please take your unwanted cat to a local shelter or rescue organization. Think of your cat's quality of life as well as the lives of our native species. Birds and other wildlife are already struggling to survive in a world filled with human caused obstacles. As caretakers of our natural world, why make it more difficult for them by allowing your cat to roam outside?

For the health and happiness of your cat, for the benefit of wild animals, and for your peace of mind, please, keep your cat indoors.