

Cats Indoors!

By Tanya Mackey Boehner, Provincial Wildlife Park

Domestic cats are not a natural part of the North American ecosystems. They were introduced by European settlers. Some people think it is great that cats hunt and kill certain creatures like the field mouse but small, native mammals are important in maintaining biologically diverse ecosystems. Mice and shrews are an important food source for birds like the great horned owl, red-tailed hawk and American kestrel.

Test your knowledge

Fill in the blanks from the list. (Answers are at the bottom.)

1. Indoor cats live for about _____ years while outside cats live two to five years.
2. "Belled" cats do kill wildlife—they learn to stalk their _____ and avoid their predators silently.
3. Outdoor cats suffer from attacks by animals such as other cats, dogs, and _____ animals like coyotes, foxes and raccoons.
4. Even well-fed cats kill wildlife. The urge to _____ and the urge to eat are controlled by different parts of the brain.
5. Birds that are caught by cats usually do not survive even though they may appear to have _____ uninjured. They often get infection from the teeth and claws of the cat.
6. Cats who roam are more likely to be run over by a car or be _____ in a car engine than an indoor cat.
7. Cats allowed outdoors are more likely to be attacked by _____ such as ticks, mites, fleas and worms.
8. Indoor cats are less likely to contract fatal diseases like rabies, _____ leukemia, and distemper.
9. Outdoor cats will have less _____ to pesticides.
10. Unsupervised outdoor cats have a greater chance of being captured and _____.
11. Domestic cats kill hundreds of millions of birds each year. These include a common species like the song _____ and an _____ like the piping plover.

Tips for Happy Birds

- Place bird feeders away from windows
- Keep feeders clean and filled with dry seed
- Provide water for drinking and bathing
- Avoid using pesticides
- Establish brush piles for wildlife away from bird feeders
- Enhance your yard with native plants that will attract birds and other wildlife

Tips for Happy Indoor Cats

- Provide a safe outside enclosure such as a screened-in porch
- Gradually replace outdoor activities with new indoor routines
- Window shelves allow cats to monitor the outdoors from the safety of indoors
- Play with your cat daily. A ping-pong ball or a wadded up tin foil roll make interesting toys. Make sure toys are not too small as they may be swallowed or get stuck in the throat.
- An empty paper bag or cardboard box makes a popular playhouse
- Plant alfalfa, grass or catnip for your cat to graze on without harming houseplants.
- Clean litter boxes regularly!

A colouring page may be downloaded from www.abcbirds.org/cats/coloringpage.pdf

Colour it or draw your own showing what can happen to cats if released into the wild. Mail to Cats Indoors!, Provincial Wildlife Park, PO Box 299 Shubenacadie, NS B0N 2H0. Deadline for submissions is Friday October 24, 2003. We will randomly select three entrants for a family day pass to the Wildlife Park in Shubenacadie.

In the last issue the secret message was: "We care about this environment."

The winners from the last two contests are Ben & Danielle Cable, Jillian Doucet, Kenny MacPhee, Thomas Sitser, and N. Wood.

(Answers: 1-f, 2-h, 3-l, 4-c, 5-b, 6-e, 7-k, 8-g, 9-a, 10-j, 11-i, d)