

Cats and Birds Don't Mix  
By Gulf Coast Bird Observatory Staff



Domestic cats kill 2,400,000,000 birds every year in the U.S.  
Photo by Vishnevskiy Vasily/Shutterstock.

Recently, a humane organization located in Lake Jackson, TX made a push to implement a “Trap, Neuter, Release” (TNR) program that allows cats to roam free and in colonies. Normally, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory does not engage in public issues as we mainly work on bird conservation, research and land conservation. However, outdoor domestic cats are a huge threat to native wildlife, especially birds, so we wanted to share our viewpoint.

The house cat, *Felis catus*, is not native to our continent, but they have adapted well here. Several

of our staff members have indoor cats and love them dearly but we have to be realistic about the downsides of outside cats.

Domestic cats have contributed to the extinction of at least 63 species and the near-extinction of many more. They can eat the eggs, chicks and adults, or cause the adults to abandon their nests. Cats are natural hunters even when they are well fed and content. We can see this when they chase a laser pointer light or stalk a toy mouse. They don't just hunt because they're hungry, they hunt because that's what they do. So even if you feed your kitty, it will still hunt when it goes outside, whether for food or “fun”.

As for the docile cats that wouldn't hurt a fly, even a sleeping cat in your yard has an impact. Birds, unaware that Mr. Whiskers is harmless, see your cat as a dangerous predator. Many birds will abandon their nests, eggs and chicks out of fear of nearby predators.

In the United States, outdoor cats kill about 2.4 *billion* birds per year. That's more than any other human-caused source of bird death, including pesticides or window collisions. This seems like a ridiculously high number, but when you take into account the tens of millions of outdoor cats in the U.S., it makes sense. The average outdoor cat kills about two animals per week. That's about 100 animals per year per cat.

The solution is easy. Keep them indoors. You will be saving hundreds or even thousands of lives. These lives are crucial and losing them will create huge issues in our environment. Obviously, we need a healthy environment to survive, so this affects humans also.

The Texas Gulf Coast is a bird migration hot spot, with billions of birds travelling through here each year. This is a high-priority area, where your actions truly do matter! Just imagine how many of those birds you can save by simply bringing your cat indoors.

The solution for strays is much more difficult. Ideally, we could take the cats and place them in indoor homes, but that's not always easy. It takes commitments and resources from shelters and animal control departments. And "Trap, Neuter, Release" (TNR) only works if the number of sterilized cats in the outdoor population is continually kept at minimum 75%, a nearly impossible goal. This solution usually doesn't work, especially long term, and even if it does, a lot of native wildlife will still die unnecessarily.

As animal lovers, we are also concerned about the cats themselves. Outdoor cats are at a high risk of suffering or dying. They are prone to car collisions, diseases, predation, and poisoning from pesticides. Domestic cats just don't belong outside!

If you want to help solve this problem, there are plenty of things you can do. Volunteer at or donate to your local animal shelter (the ones that don't do TNR). Adopt your animals from shelters, rather than breeders to keep more cats off the streets. Spay and neuter your pets and don't add to the already high population. If you can't keep your pet, bring it to the shelter and don't simply let it go into the wild. And above all, keep your cats indoors!