



# REDUCING THE IMPACT OF CATS ON BIRDS AND WILDLIFE

AN INTRODUCTION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



STEWARDSHIP CENTRE  
FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

# INTRODUCTION

British Columbia has a critical conservation and stewardship responsibility for birds, more than any other province in Canada—with over 300 species that breed in BC each year. BC is host to many migratory birds that arrive in our neighbourhoods over the course of the year. These birds all depend on the availability of food and suitable habitat to maintain their population numbers.

At the same time, every year in Canada, many cats end up homeless with an estimated 1.4 to 4.2 million unowned cats. Outdoor cats, either owned or unowned, are exposed to the risks of predation, parasites, diseases, trauma and toxins. Due to these risks, cat welfare groups recommend keeping cats indoors with only supervised

outdoor access (e.g. screened porch, leash and harness).

To address these issues, animal welfare groups, conservation organizations and municipalities are increasingly recognizing the importance of keeping all cats from roaming for the benefit of cats, wildlife and their communities. Changes in attitudes toward domestic cats, new animal control legislation and cat management policies are all needed to bring about the necessary change.

This document will provide local government decision-makers with an introduction to the issues related to cat predation of vulnerable bird and wildlife species and recommended actions for consideration.

FIGURE 1

## ONE-THIRD OF ALL NORTH AMERICAN BIRD SPECIES NEED URGENT CONSERVATION ACTION

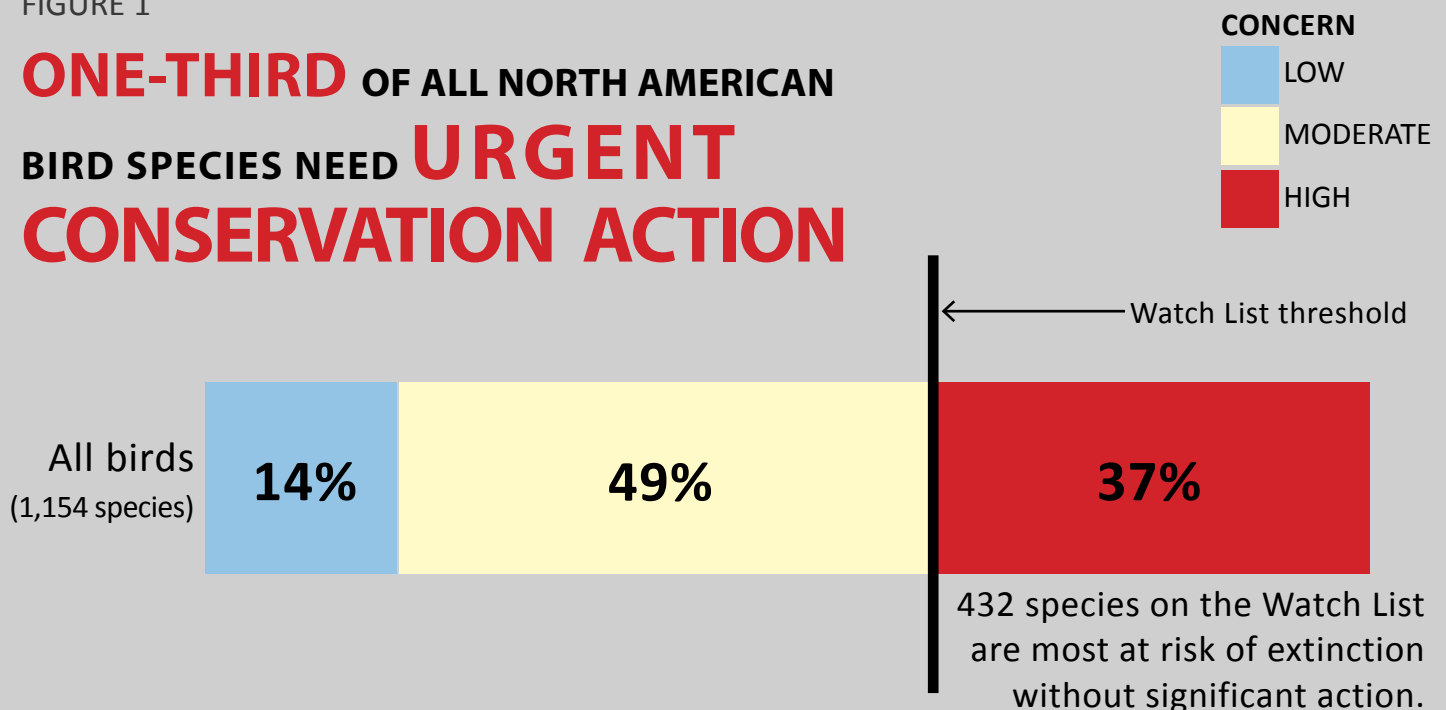


Figure 1. “The State of North America’s Birds”(2016) a trilateral report from Canada, Mexico and the US on behalf of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), demonstrated that a full third of North American bird species are of “high conservation concern.”

# BIRDS AND WILDLIFE ARE IN TROUBLE

## SONGBIRDS

Songbirds are a common prey. Cat predation of birds is highest in spring and summer when nestlings and fledgelings are abundant. The number of birds killed by cats annually in urban areas is often greater than the number of young hatched and often up to 40% of the total population in the area. With such high death rates, these areas reduce rather than contribute to regional bird populations. Urban cats tend to catch a higher proportion of birds than rural cats do.

## SMALL MAMMALS

In Canada, hundreds of millions of small mammals, most of them native species, are killed annually by cats. Cats used on farms for pest control are in a different category than owned or unowned cats.

Shrews, voles and mice are most likely to be impacted because of their small size and likelihood of being found around farms and urbanizing areas.

## REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Reptiles and amphibians are reported as prey in almost all studies of outdoor cats, whether owned or unowned. They are rarely brought home by outdoor cats and are likely killed more often owners realize.



*Song Sparrow*

Species that nest on or near the ground and birds that are found near residential neighbourhoods, farms and at bird feeders are the most vulnerable.



*Little Brown Myotis*

Bats can eat their body weight in insects every night and are vital to control insect pests. Cats may hunt bats as they swoop out of their roosts to forage or prey on sick or injured bats that may be on the ground.

The *Northern Red-legged Frog* is found in and around shallow ponds, lake margins, slow-flowing streams and wetlands and is vulnerable to habitat loss due to urbanization, including increased populations of roaming cats.

# CAT MANAGEMENT ISSUES

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF ALLOWING CATS TO ROAM

### CONFLICT & HEALTH RISKS

- Conflicts between neighbours, complaints by residents about cats running at large.
- Public health risks to humans from zoonotic disease and parasites.

### UNWANTED CATS

- High pregnancy rates lead to many unwanted kittens.
- Unwanted cats and kittens surrendered to shelters.
- High rates of euthanized animals.

### FERAL CAT PROBLEM

- Unwanted cats and kittens abandoned in the wild.
- Growth of feral cats colonies.

### COST OF ANIMAL CONTROL

- Municipal animal control budgets.
- Humane shelter budgets.
- Feral cat societies' trap/neuter/vaccinate costs.

### ENVIRONMENTAL COST

- 2 to 7% of bird population killed by cats annually.
- Small mammals, amphibians and reptiles killed by cats.
- Cats roam in sensitive habitats and impact species at risk.

**Each year in Canada hundreds of thousands of animals enter shelters, the majority of these are cats. Some are pets surrendered by their owners who can no longer care for them, while others are found roaming as strays. Some are never adopted.**

**According to the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, it is projected that more than 260,000 homeless cats in Canadian shelters did not find homes in 2016.**

# RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

## SUGGESTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Most municipalities and regional districts in British Columbia have had dog control bylaws for years. Bylaws restrict dogs from roaming to protect domestic pets, wildlife, farm animals and humans from injury.

Historically, cats have been allowed to roam unsupervised because of a popular belief that cats are independent and need to roam. However, with the increasing owned and unowned cat populations, it is time to consider a different approach.

A multi-pronged strategy to help address the cat overpopulation crisis and its impact on birds and wildlife includes:

**public education** about responsible pet ownership;

**the enactment of local government bylaws** to protect birds and other wildlife and reinforce responsible pet practices;

and **increased municipal support** to humane shelters and societies.



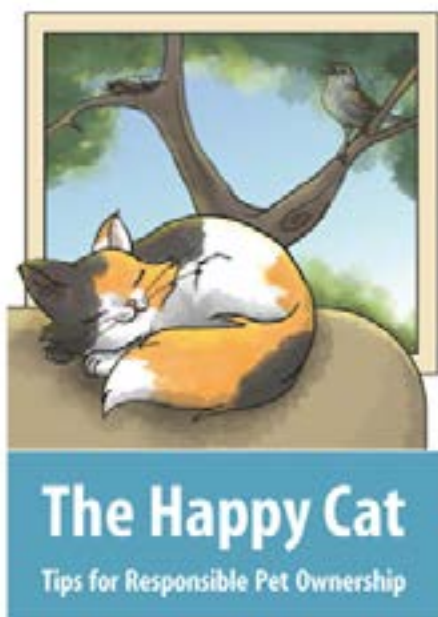
## ACTION #1 EDUCATE PET OWNERS

Local governments have jurisdiction to implement a number of mechanisms to control cats, but none are likely to be effective or politically possible in the absence of public education efforts.

Public attitudes towards control measures typically vary with pet ownership. Non-cat owners are more likely to recognize that cats may pose a threat to wildlife in urban and suburban areas and are more likely to favour control of cat movement.

Finding and working with cat owners who do support strict controls can be very effective in educating others and increasing public acceptance of these measures.

Other potential partners include animal shelters, local veterinarians, and nature clubs.



The Stewardship Centre for BC urges you to keep your feline family members indoors and adopt these tips. It's better for cats and better for birds and wildlife.

For further information go to:  
[www.stewardshipcentrebc.ca](http://www.stewardshipcentrebc.ca)  
[www.speciesatriskbc.ca/guides](http://www.speciesatriskbc.ca/guides)  
1-866-456-7222

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### Key messages to pet owners include:

- Keep cats indoors and supervise outdoor access
- Do not place bat houses or bird feeders in areas where cats can reach them
- Ensure pets are spayed or neutered by 4-5 months
- Identify cats with permanent identification so they can be returned if lost.
- Take cat to the vet for annual check-ups and vaccinations.

To view The Happy Cat brochure or for more information on responsible cat ownership visit [www.stewardshipcentrebc.ca](http://www.stewardshipcentrebc.ca)

## ACTION #2 ADOPT POLICIES AND BYLAWS

Bylaws and policies evolve to reflect the values and needs of communities. Usually, bylaws for animal control only stipulate regulations for dogs. Newer bylaws such as, “Responsible Pet” or “Companion Animal”, reflect a concern for general animal welfare as well as public safety. Recognizing the impact of human activities on birds and other wildlife, local governments have the opportunity modify or enact bylaws to protect birds and other small wildlife within their jurisdictions.



Municipalities in British Columbia can require that cats be licensed, neutered and/or vaccinated with permits, with exceptions such as licensed breeders or animals too old or medically unfit to be neutered safely. Microchips or tags can be used to positively identify animals, reducing the number of lost pets that are sent to shelters or euthanized. A licensing program can also be used to limit the number of cats per household and allow the return of lost pets to owners. Farmers can be required to learn how to minimize the impact of their cats on local wildlife and ensure all of their cats are sterilized.

*Canada’s songbird population has decreased 12% since 1970.*

*Let’s help keep our backyards and natural areas safe from cats.*



For more information on recommended policies and bylaws, see the resources tab for the [Policies and Bylaws](#) document at [www.stewardshipcentrebc.ca](http://www.stewardshipcentrebc.ca)

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This document does not necessarily represent the views of all individual members of the advisory committee, or the official positions of the organizations with which the individual committee members are associated.

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The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag above the letter "a".

## PHOTO ATTRIBUTIONS

Cover: Black-capped Chickadee; Spotted Towhee by Darren Kirby, Flickr Creative Commons; Cat on leash by Marion Grimes

Page 2: Song Sparrow by Becky Matsubara Flickr Creative Commons; Little Brown Myotis by Jarred Hobbs; Northern Red-legged Frog

Page 4: Indoor cat looking at bird by Puchan, Shutterstock

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