

# THE GREAT CAT DILEMMA

By: Derek Matthews



As part of a focused conservation campaign for 2022, VARC wants to encourage responsible cat ownership. And being a good guardian isn't just about keeping your cat fed and healthy. It's also about keeping your cat safe and being responsible for your pet's behaviour.

## Why is this important for birds?

A study by the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that free-roaming cats (feral and household cats allowed outside all or part of the time) kill 1.4 to 3.7 billion birds each year in the U.S. In fact, these agile and skillful predators are the most significant human-related





source of bird death in Canada. And according to The American Bird Conservancy, they are the greatest human-caused mortality threat to wild bird populations!

Ground-dwelling birds are most at risk to free-roaming cats. Robins, towhees, sparrows, thrushes and wrens spend much of their time on the ground or low in shrubs searching for insects and seeds. Nestlings are especially vulnerable when they leave the nest and are incapable of sustained flight. Outdoor cats not only threaten birds, but they also seriously threaten small animals such as bats, chipmunks, snakes, lizards, and rodents.

Cats are very effective predators, and hunting is instinctive even if they are well-fed. Cats are not part of the natural wildlife of North America and, if allowed to behave so, do enormous damage. The best way to reduce the impact on wildlife from cats is to spay and neuter our pets and keep them indoors.



### **Why is this important for cats?**

Outdoor free-roaming cats face many risks, including road mortality, unwanted pregnancy, predators, toxins, diseases and parasites passed on from the environment or other animals. They also suffer trauma and injuries from wildlife encounters and catfights. Therefore, an indoor lifestyle and outdoor supervision are vital in addressing these issues and other cat welfare concerns such as cat overpopulation and feral cat colonies.

The [Stewardship Centre for BC](#) has conducted extensive research on the impact of free-roaming cats using standardized methodology and computer models to produce population estimates and inform management plans for keeping cats and birds safe in British Columbia.

You can take a [quick survey](#) to tell the Stewardship Centre about cat-friendly and bird-friendly practices that you use to protect your pets and local birds. You can receive a free window decal and have your story featured on SCBC's Happy Cat Gallery!

Please join the growing community of responsible cat owners and help make British Columbia a safer place for cats, birds and other wildlife!

