

Literature Review on Effective Solutions for Feral Cats

Feral and free-roaming domestic cats have been accused of destroying wildlife, causing property damage and disturbance, endangering other domestic pets, and posing health risks for humans. These issues are a growing problem across New York State, where the burden of these impacts is most felt at the local government level. In response to this problem, the American Wildlife Conservation Foundation has commissioned a literature review of the impacts of free-roaming cats, the effectiveness of management and control techniques that are currently being employed, and the control measures that have been enacted at the local level in New York State

There is little question that free-roaming cats are causing unsustainable impacts on wildlife. This is true anywhere that there are large, established populations of feral cats, or where household pets are allowed to wander outside of the home. In the United States alone, it is estimated that free-roaming domestic cats annually kill more than 1 billion wild birds and 7 billion small mammals. The loss to bird life from predation by domestic cats is more severe than deaths from collisions with automobiles, buildings, power lines, towers, and wind turbines. Reported losses in Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and other countries are of similar magnitude.

The damage caused by feral and free-roaming cats is a direct consequence of their enormous numbers. There are at least 100 million free-roaming cats in the United States, or about one for every three human beings, with perhaps 6 million or more in New York State. “Free-roaming” includes household pets that are allowed regular outdoor access, abandoned and stray former pets, and truly feral, unapproachable cats. However, the numbers are just part of the story; it is just as important to understand the role of human behavior in the creation and perpetuation of the problem. Free-roaming cats are often described as “subsidized predators”, because they are fed and sheltered by people, and are maintained at densities which may be hundreds of times greater than any native predator in the wild. Surveys have revealed that more than half of cat owners allow their cats outside without monitoring or control, and in some places as many as one quarter of all households regularly feed stray cats. Therefore, any government body attempting to control feral cats must recognize that an effective solution will require widespread community participation.

So far, the legislative response at the local level continues to be isolated and sporadic. In New York State, just 82 local governments (county, city, town, or village) have laws that are specifically directed at the management of feral or stray cats, or include cats in their general animal control ordinances. Only 5% of the 932 towns have such laws, compared to 86% that have control or management laws for dogs. Recognizing that local conditions and policy preferences vary from municipality to municipality, we hope that a thorough exploration of the available management solutions and their success or failure will assist local government leaders in making informed decisions. To that end, the information being gathered in this literature review will be made available to local governments in New York State at the conclusion of the project.



www.sciencenews.org/article/cats-kill-more-one-billion-birds-each-year