

[From Spring 2003]

Protect Wildlife from Cats

While surfing the Fish and Wildlife Service Home Page on the internet, I found an interesting article on domestic cats and why they should be house pets. My two cute little kitties spend part of their time outdoors and occasionally bring the remains of a bird or rabbit into the house. But are those wildlife meals a serious problem around the country?

Domestic cats, introduced and unnatural predators in North America, can have a devastating impact on the survival of native wildlife, even in urban areas. Contrary to popular belief, well-fed cats are no less prone to hunting than cats that depend on hunting for food. In fact, many fat cats are avid hunters who can afford to patiently hunt more difficult prey, like birds. Some experts have estimated that over 4 million songbirds are killed each day by domestic cats in the United States. This high death toll may be contributing to declines in some rare species. The most effective way to prevent cats from harming birds and other wildlife is keeping cats indoors at all times. Initially, many cat owners may be reluctant to adopt this approach because they believe that confining cats would be cruel. Yet, according to the Humane Society of the United States, indoor cats lead longer, healthier lives than cats that roam freely. Cats can easily transition to the indoors by following these four basic steps:

1. Establish a routine before moving your cat inside.
2. Confine your cat to one room (a bath or utility room) with a litter box containing a mixture of soil and litter.
3. After a few days, allow your cat to have access to the rest of the house. Provide a second litter box in its permanent location; frequently put your cat in this box.
4. Once your cat regularly uses this second litter box, you can remove the first one.

Let's introduce our cats to a fun activity that is safe and exciting, bird watching.

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