

The Effects of Outdoor Cats on Suburban Ecosystems

Secondary Sources

Dauphiné, N., Cooper, R. *"Pick One: Outdoor Cats or Conservation"* (2011) [Article 1]
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nico_Dauphine/publication/288947356_Pick_one_outdoor_cats_or_conservation/links/581a340e08aeffb294131773/Pick-one-outdoor-cats-or-conservation.pdf

Summary: This article briefly summarizes the contentious political issues surrounding the outdoor cat problem. Most importantly for my research, it covers certain fallacies regarding TNR (trap-release-neuter) as a method of reducing the outdoor cat population. In addition, it provides a summary of a very important problem beyond the simple issue of cat predation on local wildlife; cat welfare. I plan on introducing arguments related to cat welfare as part of my report.

Dauphiné, N., Cooper, R. *"IMPACTS OF FREE-RANGING DOMESTIC CATS (FELIS CATUS) ON BIRDS IN THE UNITED STATES: A REVIEW OF RECENT RESEARCH WITH CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS"* (2009)
http://www.birdsphotography.com/cats/by_dauphine_cooper.pdf

Summary: This research paper (written by the same authors as the article above) speaks on the highly specific issue of domestic bird population decline as compared against outdoor cat population. Beyond simply stating the issue, this paper goes into a many-bulleted list of methods to address the impact that outdoor cats have on native and migratory bird populations.

Readfearn, G. *"Keep pet cats indoors, say researchers who found they kill 230m native Australian animals each year"* (2020)
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/15/keep-pet-cats-indoors-say-researchers-who-found-they-kill-230m-native-australian-animals-each-year>

Summary: Currently, the majority of research and articles on this topic relate to Australia, as they tend to be on the "front lines" of the feral cat problem, likely due in part to their large amounts of native, exotic wildlife. For this reason, I've identified this article as a useful source. In it, the author summarizes several papers, while providing relevant quotes from leaders in the field.

Australian Government Dept. of Agriculture, Water, and the Environment on *"Feral Cats"*
<https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia/feral-cats>

Summary: As I mentioned in the previous summary, Australia tends to be a major area of study in regards to this topic. As such, this bulletin from the Australian government department of agriculture, water, and the environment provides information from the government's perspective on how they are attempting to resolve the problem.

Loss, S., Will, T. & Marra, P. *The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States*. *Nat Commun* 4, 1396 (2013).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms2380>

Summary: While focusing on Australia is useful from a research perspective, I do not live in Australia and neither does my intended local audience. In order to effectively gain traction when presenting the issue, it is important that I identify key research that takes place close to home. This study further reinforces the idea that we need to approach conservation and intervention as scientifically as possible, in order to reduce the damage domestic cats cause on local ecosystems and the environment as a whole.

Hadidian, J., Gibson, I., Hagood, S., Peterson, N., Unti, B., McFarland, B., ... & Fearing, J. (2012). *Outdoor cats: An animal welfare and protection perspective*. In *Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference* (Vol. 25, No. 25).

<https://doi.org/10.5070/V425110526>

Summary: This research paper approaches the topic at hand with a slightly different perspective than the ones previously mentioned. In it, the authors briefly summarize some of the historical research done on the issue (dating back to over 100 years ago). Additionally, they provide insight into the societal and ethical factors of reducing cat population; i.e. its impact on the human beings performing population reduction and how their methods of approach affect an ethical conscience.

Boone, J. D, Briggs, J. R, Hiby, E., Lawler, D. F, Levy, J. K, Miller, P. S, et al. (2014). *Improving and Evaluating Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) Management for Outdoor Cats on the Human Landscape*. *Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference*, 26.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/V426110434> Retrieved from

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6z98577x>

Summary: This paper focuses specifically on the TNR (trap-neuter-release) method of population reduction. In it, they discuss the ineffective ways in which TNR is typically performed, while providing guidance on how to make it effective. As I've read through various papers and articles, I've noticed that TNR seems to be the dominantly considered ethical approach. For this reason, this paper is critical in assisting various TNR efforts occurring both abroad and at home.

The Interview

1. *Identify your purpose*

In this interview, I hope to gain insight into how this problem can be handled at a suburban, community level. Most of the research I have found tends to focus on a more “macro” scale, whereas I need to tailor my project into a more local community reflection.

2. *Choose an interview participant or participants*

While I will make the best effort to identify individuals in my literally local (neighborhood) community, it is unlikely that many people here are familiar with this problem on a deep enough level to provide insight into this problem, beyond what I may find in articles and research papers. Assuming I have to expand my “net” (so to speak) to the greater cat owner community, I would ideally like to interview someone who wrote one of my secondary sources above. Finding the correct person to talk to is likely going to be more difficult than performing the interview itself.

3. *Determine the format of the interview*

I believe this interview can successfully be conducted via email, as the people I would like to reach out to are likely very busy. That said, I will approach each potential candidate with an offer of either phone call, video call, or email, in order to accommodate them with their preference. Given the current (justified) stigma against direct in-person social contact, I will not be pursuing an in-person interview.

4. *Develop questions*

As stated above, I hope to gain insight at a local level into how this problem can be addressed by small suburban communities. As such, I believe the following questions are applicable

- a. What can your average every-day person do to help?
- b. How can local cat shelters help to educate potential adopters on the issues caused by domestic outdoor cats?
- c. In a broad sense, how do we maintain the balance between environmental protection and the ethical responsibility we have to the cats themselves?

Reflection

I believe that I have successfully compiled sufficient amounts of information regarding the topic at hand, however I do indeed lack topical knowledge regarding the impact of domestic cats on my specific neighborhood. I recognize that my project will not only impact my literal local community, but also the “cat” community at large, however I believe it is important that I have sufficient locally-sourced data to support my conclusions when applied at a local level. In general, I want to avoid a situation where I appear to be crying wolf about a problem happening in (x) country, which functionally has no impact on my neighborhood. Should that occur, my bulletin will fall on entirely deaf ears (and somewhat rightfully so); it would be as if I’m telling everyone to “hunker down” for a tornado happening 600 miles away.

My original foray into this topic was due to my frustration with abandoned cats living poor and miserable lives outdoors. As an owner of three cats, animal welfare in general is a topic close to my heart. Through reading about that, I discovered the greater issue at play which evolved into the subject of my project. I believe that through my secondary sources, I am not only armed with information that will help the environment as a whole, but that will also hopefully help my local community to address the issue from a sufficiently ethical perspective - not just for the ecosystem, but for the cats themselves. Ultimately the homeless and feral cats are the result of human negligence, which I hope to (at least in some small part) alleviate with my project.