

2.6 Where was your cat last night?



There is currently a serious threat to our wildlife. This animal may purr and play with balls of string, but it can still be a formidable and dangerous hunter. It is *Felis domesticus*, the common domestic cat.

Domestic cats are known to kill wildlife, anything up to their own size, including over 100 species of native Birds, 50 mammal species, 50 reptile species, and numerous frog and insect species.

Did you know that one-in-three households have at least one cat?



The average domestic cat kills about 25 native animals a year. When these figures are scaled up to the number of domestic cats in Australia, the numbers indicate that cats kill about 75 million native animals each year. Such animals include;

- Mammals such as Brushtail possums, Pygmy Possums, Sugar and feathertail gliders, bats, marsupial mice and native rats.
- Birds, such as parrots, honeyeaters, pigeons, robins, kingfishers, quails, finches, willy-wag-tails, and wrens.
- Frogs and several reptiles such as legless lizards, blue tongued lizards, bearded dragons, geckoes and skinks.

Cats have a great potential for rapid increase in population numbers. They can have three litters each year, with an average of five kittens per litter. Births can occur in all months but mostly from spring to late summer. Kittens are weaned at eight weeks, and can reproduce from when they are about 1 year old.

Rapid reproduction of cats in urban areas contributes to the large numbers of stray cats that are put down each year by animal welfare agencies. For example a female cat, having 4 female kittens a year could in ten years be responsible for nearly 2 million female descendants.

Recent evidence also suggests that being well fed does not stop domestic cats from hunting.

The best way to stop cats from hunting is to stop them from roaming. Keeping cats in at night reduces the number of native animals killed.

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Responsible cat ownership is one way that you can help reduce the cat problem in Australia. It involves taking the following actions:

- 1. Desexing your cats**
- 2. Limiting the number of cats you keep**
- 3. Keeping your cats at home, either inside the house or shed or in an outside run, and**
- 4. Identifying your cats by microchip collar and tag.**



Wearing a bell does not stop cats from hunting, as they stalk their prey without the bell ringing until the moment they pounce – and then it is too late for the victim. Baby birds and mammals nesting cannot escape from cats whether or not they have bells.

Responsible cat ownership benefits cats, cat owners and neighbours as well as wildlife.

1. Desexed cats are better and more docile pets
2. Cats kept in at night are less likely to be hurt in fights, pick up diseases, be hit by cars or annoy neighbours
3. Dumped and stray cats are often sick and in bad condition. Animal welfare agencies have to put 1000's of unwanted cats down each year

Randwick City Council along with cat welfare agencies such as the RSPCA and Cat Protection Societies, encourage responsible cat ownership.

For further information on desexing or how to microchip your cat please contact you're nearest veterinarian.

Reference: The Endangered Species Unit Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service – Cats in Australia Fact Sheet 1993.

Images taken from: Texas Parks and Wildlife Home Page – Nature and the Environment:
<http://cats.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lads.com%2FBasicallyBats%2FhouseCat.html>