

Roaming Cats: common questions and misbeliefs

Did you know?

The average outdoor domestic cat roams an area of **2 hectares** from its home. Some cats may roam more than **4 km!**



I keep my cat inside at night. Why should I keep my cat from roaming day and night?

Contrary to popular belief, domestic cats don't need to roam.

Pet cats that are prevented from roaming are likely to live longer. They are protected from being hit by a car, injured in fights, attacked by dogs, bitten by snakes, getting lost/stolen and catching diseases from other cats.

Keeping cats confined only at night will reduce their impact on nocturnal wildlife, but not on wildlife such as lizards and birds that are active during the day. Keeping your cat confined both day and night is especially important if you live near bushland and nature reserves.

Your cat's day time activities may also be impacting on neighbours, their animals and neighbourly relations without your knowledge. Councils get many complaints from the community about the nuisance that roaming cats cause, including fights, spraying, digging and defecating in yards/vegetable gardens, spreading disease, disturbing pets, entering houses and preying on wildlife.

But my cat doesn't roam...

Given the opportunity, most cats will roam and may do so when their owners are out. How far they roam varies - cats living in rural areas roam further than city cats. One domestic cat that was tracked over 24 hours travelled almost four kilometres, visited 16 different backyards, crossed three roads and explored a nearby bushland reserve at night.

It's natural for cats to roam and cruel for them to be inside all of the time.

There are no wild cats native to Australia. Cats were introduced to Australia about 200 years ago as domestic animals.

Cats are adaptable and they don't need to be outside to be content. Indoor cats can get the required pleasure and stimulation if you plan for their needs.

They will need separate places to sleep, eat and toilet; something for them to sharpen their claws on and lots of play to keep them fit. If you want your cat to experience the outdoors you can train your cat to go outside on a harness and leash or build a cat enclosure.

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My cat has enjoyed being outside for years. How can I bring him/her in now?

You can help your cat make the adjustment gradually by keeping them inside for longer and longer periods of time. The benefits of introducing your cat to containment will outweigh the time taken to train your pet. Visit the TassieCat website for more information or ask your veterinarian, a cat management facility or local shelter for tips.

I put a bell on my cat so she/he doesn't kill birds or wildlife. Why should I keep my cat inside?

Cats with bells on their collars still kill wildlife as they can learn to silently stalk their prey. Birds or small mammals also don't necessarily associate the sound of a bell with danger.

My cat is well-fed so doesn't hunt when she/he goes out.

Scientific studies have shown that even well-fed cats do kill wildlife because of their hunting instinct. Prey that is not killed immediately is very likely to die later from shock or infection.

My cat doesn't bring home dead animals.

The impact of an individual cat on wildlife is hard to estimate. One study found that free roaming domestic cats only bring approximately 15% of their prey home.

Don't cats just kill diseased or old animals?

No. Cats kill animals smaller than a kangaroo, including pademelons, potoroos, bandicoots, birds, bats, snakes, lizards, frogs, centipedes and scorpions. It is estimated that a single roaming domestic cat kills 186 animals per year, this includes 115 native animals. This does not account for impact to native animals due to competition, disturbance and disease.

But isn't Australian wildlife used to cats?

Our unique wildlife evolved in an environment that didn't include cats. Cats are very efficient, intelligent and skilled hunters. Cats are considered to be a major cause of the extinction of 27 native Australian animals. Wildlife that feeds or nests on or near the ground are easy prey for cats e.g. shearwaters, little penguins, hooded and red-capped plovers, blue wren and robins. Small native mammals e.g. Tasmanian

bettongs, little pygmy possums, antechinus and eastern barred bandicoots are also at high risk of predation.

Cats, especially those that roam, are the host for a disease called toxoplasmosis (transmitted in their faeces). Many native birds and mammals are very susceptible to toxoplasmosis (for example the eastern barred bandicoot) and it can be very harmful to humans and livestock. A recent study found that 84% of feral and stray cats tested in Tasmania were infected with toxoplasmosis.

There are so many stray and feral cats - what can I do?

While it may not be possible to eradicate feral and stray cats, you can (a) reduce the source of stray and feral cats by desexing and microchipping your cat/s and (b) reduce the spread of toxoplasmosis and protect native animals by preventing your cats from roaming (especially if you live near bushland and reserves).

Should I feed a cat that is not mine?

No. The large number of stray cats in Tasmania is causing serious harm to our native wildlife and costing livestock farmers over a million dollars each year due to cat-borne diseases.

Although your intention is to help, feeding unowned stray cats will only worsen the problem. Most stray cats are not desexed and will be able to reproduce prolifically if they are being fed.

Here's what you can do instead:

- 1) Contact a cat management facility or veterinary clinic to find out if they can scan the cat for a microchip. If the cat is microchipped they may be able to contact the owner.
- 2) If the cat is not microchipped, the cat should be taken to a cat management facility. If you contact your nearest facility, they can assist you with the process. If the cat is healthy and sociable, you may be able to adopt the cat once they have been desexed, microchipped and vaccinated, if interested.

For more information visit: www.tassiecat.com

Thanks to Kingborough Council for their great information on roaming cats.



Kingborough

