

Peaceable Backyard Kingdom

Keep cats inside for their own safety—and to protect your wild neighbors

by KAREN E. LANGE

Ask Dr. David Zanders why people shouldn't let their cats roam outdoors, and the veterinarian quickly recites a litany of the daily emergencies he sees at the Academy Animal Hospital in Solana Beach, Calif.

First, there are the puncture wounds and infections from other cats—inflicted during fights over territory or by aggressive toms. “A non-neutered cat will try to mate with a spayed female or even a neutered male ... [and will] grab ahold with claws and teeth.” The victim ends up with abscesses, especially on the back, Zanders says.

Then there are the broken bones from encounters with motor vehicles. And the injuries from individuals who just plain don't like cats—teenagers with BB guns, or people who yank them hard by the tail.

Adding to the list of potential dangers are fleas and parasites that can be passed on to people, plus diseases like feline immunodeficiency virus and leukemia—even kidney failure from drinking spilled antifreeze. Smaller felines may also incur talon wounds from owls and hawks who attempt to prey on them.

Finally, there are the cats who never come home: Warming themselves on car engines, they are torn to pieces when the key turns in the ignition. Or they're eaten by predators such as coyotes when left out overnight—or deliberately trapped or poisoned.

So even though Zanders knows he's up against some hard-to-change attitudes among cat owners, he does his best to persuade them to stop allowing their cats to roam.

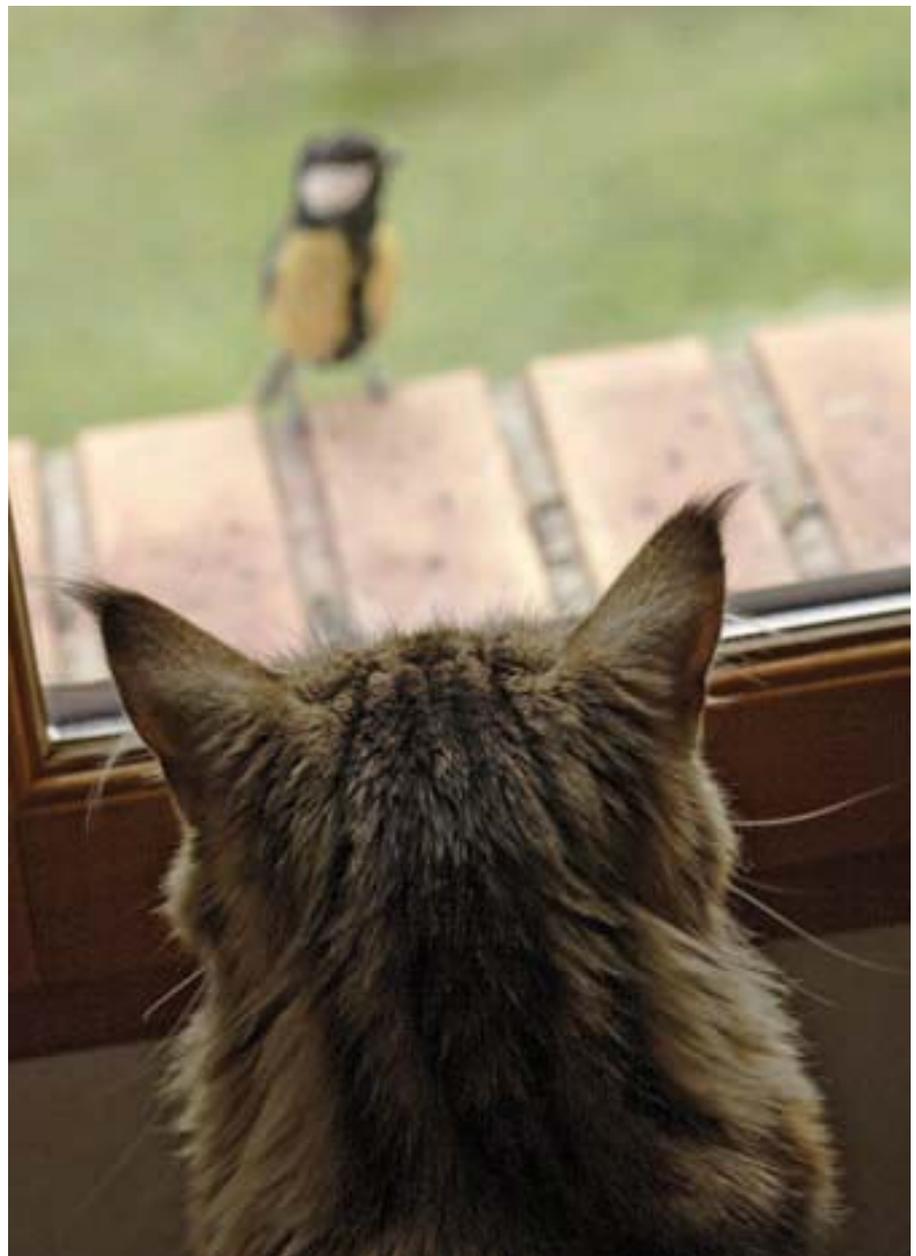
“People say, ‘I feel guilty. I love my cat; therefore, he gets to go outdoors.’ ... It's like letting your child go downtown [alone].”

There's a fairly simple solution to the problem of cats getting themselves into trouble, as well as killing and injuring wildlife: Keep them indoors. In recent

decades, the U.S. has experienced a welcome shift in this direction. The proportion of owned cats kept entirely in the house rose from 56 percent in 1998 to 64 percent in 2008, according to a survey by the American Pet Products Association. Still, a significant number continue to wander.

Pet cats allowed to roam freely outside

join the more than 70 million feral and homeless stray cats on the streets—the same number as are owned and spend all or part of their time indoors, according to the American Association of Feline Practitioners. The stray and feral cats survive mainly off human handouts, dumpster diving, and other scavenging activities; as cats are domesticated animals, they have a difficult time feeding themselves from hunting, says Karen Kraus, executive director of the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon. Yet, whatever their situation, cats do sometimes follow their instinctual drive to hunt.



Veterinarians who work at wildlife rehabilitation centers see the subsequent damage to small mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles: puncture and bite wounds, skin torn open or ripped away, feathers pulled off. Sometimes the wound may be nearly invisible or appear minor, but the animal will soon die from infection, says Dr. Roberto Aguilar, wildlife veterinarian at The HSUS's Cape Wildlife Center in Barn-

stable, Mass. And sometimes the victim is a member of a vulnerable species like the New England cottontail, he adds.

Experts advise that if you believe you must let your cat outside, you should keep him in an enclosure or on a leash under supervision. At the very least, let him out only during the day, not in the early morning, the early evening, or at night, which are the most dangerous times for

both cats and wildlife.

“What we’re asking for is accountability,” says John Hadidian, HSUS director of urban wildlife. “For people to understand the issues, to know their cats, and to take responsibility—especially when they know their cat is already being fed.”

Many feline friends and foes alike still see cats as free agents who move outside human control through backyards and



Smile and Say “Daiya”

Andre Kroecher and Greg Blake hoped to make a splash at the 2009 Natural Products Expo West in Anaheim, Calif. The cofounders of Daiya Foods in Vancouver, British Columbia, shipped an oven, 900 pizza crusts, and 31 gallons of sauce to the trade event to showcase their new nondairy shredded cheese.

Three days and more than 8,000 pizza slices later, the pair had generated a tidal wave of excitement. Tasters were wild for Daiya’s flavor

and texture, and *VegNews* magazine awarded Daiya (pronounced *day-uh*) a coveted Best of Show Award—all before the product had hit the market.

For Kroecher, the journey began two decades ago when he learned about the suffering of cows and calves in the dairy industry. He experimented in his kitchen for years to create a nondairy cheese that would appeal to vegans, people allergic to dairy, and those looking to reduce their consumption of animal products. A fortuitous cooking disaster resulted in the product he named Daiya, a play on *dairy* and *daya*, a Sanskrit word for compassion.

Tapioca and arrowroot flours give Kroecher’s creation the melt and stretch qualities of dairy cheeses—minus the hormones and antibiotics. Daiya is also free of soy, nuts, and other common allergens, prompting *Allergic Living* magazine to deem it a “dairy-free dream come true.”

“We hear . . . daily from mothers whose children are lactose-intolerant or have an allergy that we’ve changed their lives because they can now enjoy pizza with the other kids at school and birthday parties,” says Ryan Bennett, the company’s vice president of sales and marketing.

Available in a growing number of health food stores and restaurants, Daiya has become so popular that when the company sponsored a recipe contest, more than 7,000 entries were submitted. Dawn Grey of Lawrence, Kansas, whipped up this version of an iconic comfort dish.

—Arna Cohen

Creamy Macaroni and Cheese Casserole—Serves 6 to 8

8 ounces pasta, any shape
3 cups Daiya cheddar style shreds
3 tablespoons margarine
¼ teaspoon black pepper
1 tablespoon nutritional yeast
(a cheesy-flavored inactive yeast full of vitamins and minerals)

2 cups unsweetened soy or rice milk
½ cup bread crumbs
¼ teaspoon paprika
¼ cup vegan parmesan cheese (optional)

1. Cook pasta according to package instructions, and drain. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. While oven is warming, melt margarine in a small pot. Add pepper and nutritional yeast. Stir in milk. Add Daiya shreds, and cook over low to medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring frequently to prevent burning. Add the macaroni and mix well.
3. Transfer to an 8-by-8-inch casserole dish. Top with bread crumbs and paprika. Bake for 15 minutes uncovered, or until the cheese is bubbling and the top starts to brown. Remove from oven and top with the parmesan just before serving.

▶ **FOR MORE** recipes, visit humanesociety.org/recipes.

neighborhoods as they wish. But in reality, says Nancy Peterson, cat programs manager for The HSUS, cats can be perfectly content in the house, as long as they have a stimulating environment and plenty of affection. “They can lie in the sun. They can climb. They have things to scratch on. They can chase,” she says.

Kraus’ group works with the Audubon Society of Portland to persuade pet owners to spay and neuter their cats and keep them indoors. It only takes a moment of inattention for an unspayed pet to slip out the door, Kraus says, and if she’s in heat, she may soon become pregnant. If the mother doesn’t return home, the kittens will be feral, adding to the burden of cat overpopulation. “What we need to do is stop the flow” of cats into feral colonies, Kraus says.

For cat owners who think they owe it to their cat to let her wander—and who don’t mind making regular trips to the vet for abscesses or contributing to the deaths of mice and songbirds—Peterson has a sobering statistic: Only 2 to 5 percent of cats entering shelters are reunited with their families.

The average lifespan of an outdoor cat is significantly less than his indoor-only counterpart. Many free-roaming cats simply disappear. An indoor existence, or a carefully supervised indoor-outdoor combination, can keep a cat in the family for many more years.



To help protect birds from free-roaming cats, place feeders at least 12 feet away from grass and shrubs and within 15 feet of trees.



Foiling the Cat Burglars

Keeping cats inside is the best way to ensure their safety and protect wild animals in the area. But if you’re feeding a feral cat colony or your neighbors let their kitties roam—and you also enjoy putting out bird feeders—follow these tips to promote everyone’s safety.

- ▶ Position feeders at least 12 feet away from grass and shrubs, which can serve as good cat cover. If possible, place the feeders within 15 feet of trees, where birds can hide or flee from avian predators.
- ▶ If you can, hang feeders on a wire strung at least 8 feet above the ground, between two trees that are at least 8 feet apart.
- ▶ If your feeder is mounted on a pole, install a predator guard (a metal cone with the wide bottom facing down) to keep cats and other animals from climbing up.
- ▶ Place circular fences, about 2 feet high and 4 feet in diameter, on the ground directly below feeders to make it difficult for cats and predators to creep up on birds unseen.
- ▶ Use high-quality food that birds will be sure to devour, rather than let some of it fall to the ground, where it can attract other types of birds and make them vulnerable. Also install a spill tray to catch seeds.
- ▶ Put down sharp-edged gravel beneath feeders—or, under a shallow layer of dirt or mulch, bury small-gauge chicken wire, a plastic carpet runner with the knobby side up, or a deterrent mat such as the Cat Scat brand. Cats don’t like walking on these types of irregular surfaces.
- ▶ Drive cats away from feeders with CatStop, a motion-activated product that sends out a burst of high-pitched ultrasonic vibrations—in audible to humans but uncomfortable for cats. Or install a motion-activated sprinkler to soak cats stalking birds at feeders.
- ▶ To prevent attracting cats to your yard, store garbage in a container with a lid that locks in place.
- ▶ Do not leave food for your cat outdoors, as this can attract additional cats and other predators. If you feed feral cats, make sure they are spayed or neutered, and put food out at a designated time when you are present to monitor for predators. Take the food away when everyone is done eating.