

Submission
No 12

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: The Glebe Society Incorporated

Date Received: 24 November 2024

Society's submission to the NSW Legislative Council's inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations in NSW

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23 November 2024

MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NSW

This submission has, in particular, drawn upon the published research work of Professor Chris Dickman, Professor in Ecology at the University of Sydney; he was the Society's 2017 Biodiversity Lecturer.

The Glebe Society Inc

The Glebe Society has been caring for Glebe and Forest Lodge for over 50 years and has nearly 400 members. It rests upon three pillars – heritage, community and the environment. This submission reflects our concerns particularly in relation 'environment'. Our suburb has multiple parks which play an essential role in urban biodiversity by providing habitat for our native flora and fauna as well as wildlife corridors.

Hunting domestic cats

Domestic cats have had a devastating effect on Australia's smallest birds, mammals and reptiles as many species quickly became extinct soon after European settlers arrived with their pets; these native animals provided a food source that was easily caught by cats. Studies have shown that domestic and stray cats are very efficient hunters of small native fauna and rats, and tend to specialise in a particular species e.g. some will hunt and kill small birds while others are very successful at hunting lizards or rodents. Many native animals don't have high reproductive rates so they cannot survive this level of feline predation.

Just over one-quarter of Australian households (27%) have pet cats, and about half of cat-owning households have two or more cats.

Roaming domestic cats kill 390 million animals per year in Australia. The results are staggering. On average, each roaming pet cat kills 186 reptiles, birds and mammals per year, most of them native to Australia. Collectively, that's 4,440 to 8,100 animals per square kilometre per year for the area inhabited by pet cats. On average, pet cats bring home only 15% of their prey.

Pet cats are in cities and towns, where you'll find 40 to 70 roaming cats per square kilometre. Wildlife cameras set-up on Glebe's Hill have recorded hunting domestic cats (see photos). The Hill is a fenced site of contaminated crown land between the Forest Lodge Tramsheds and the light rail line. Similar results were found where the wildlife cameras were set up in a bush restoration section of the Orphan School Creek Reserve, which is being managed specifically for wildlife habitat, albeit surrounded by residential housing. Volunteers also reported finding dead Ringtail Possums in the Reserve, likely due to cat predation.



Photos - domestic cats hunting at night on Glebe's Hill (photos © Genevieve Heggarty, University of Sydney)

The Glebe Society wants to see wildlife retained in, and returned to, our suburb. Through its Blue Wren Subcommittee, the Society is working to:

- increase the diversity, abundance and distribution of indigenous fauna and flora.
- promote a network of wildlife corridors linking key habitat areas.
- involve the local community in habitat creation, enhancement activities and public education on the importance of biodiversity.

Such a vision is compromised by the extraordinary level of domestic cat predation. Our local council, the City of Sydney, supports our nature-positive aims and those of the local volunteers who carry out bush restoration work in Glebe's habitat reserves. The City, however, does not currently have the legislative authority to ensure domestic cats are not allowed to roam freely in the designated wildlife corridors and habitat reserves, as well as park and gardens, where they disturb the vegetation and threaten small birds, insects, reptiles and small nocturnal mammals.

The Society's recommendation for managing the cat populations in NSW

Legislative changes, specifically to the NSW Companion Animal Act, to enable local Councils to:

- enforce mandatory microchipping of cats
- enforce mandatory desexing of cats
- enforce 24 hour cat containment

In Australia, 1.1 million pet cats are contained 24 hours a day by responsible pet owners. The remaining 2.7 million pet cats – 71% of all pet cats – are able to roam and hunt.

Please note the following myths promoted about ways to curb cat hunting:

- a good diet or feeding a cat more meat will prevent hunting - even cats that aren't hungry will hunt.
- devices such as bells on collars are sold with the promise of preventing hunting. While they may reduce the rate of successful kills, they don't prevent hunting altogether. And they don't prevent cats from disturbing wildlife. When cats prowl and hunt in an area, wildlife must spend more time hiding or escaping. This reduces the time spent feeding themselves or their young or resting.

Other reasons for always keeping cats indoors:

- it protects them from injury (especially through fighting with other cats), avoids nuisance behaviour and prevents unwanted breeding.
- roaming cats are also very prone to getting hit by a vehicle. USA studies have shown that indoor cats live up to four times longer than those allowed to roam freely.
- They have lower rates of cat-borne diseases, some of which can infect humans. For example, in humans the cat-borne disease toxoplasmosis can cause illness, miscarriages and birth defects.

Yours sincerely

Duncan Leys

President