

## Free Roaming Cats

### Position:

The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) does not support the practice of allowing owned cats to roam outdoors unsupervised. EHS recommends that domestic owned felines be kept indoors and only allowed outdoors in an enclosed area, or while supervised by their guardians on a secure harness and leash/tie-out.

### Summary

- Unsupervised and unrestricted outdoor access poses risks to cats and other animals, including wildlife such as birds.
- Cats as indoor pets are more likely to have a longer lifespan.
- It is possible to provide outlets for cats to express normal behaviours to maintain their welfare while living indoors.
- Risks to the cat, other animals, and humans must be controlled by guardians if cats are to spend time outdoors.

### Rationale

- EHS recognizes disparities in viewpoints of feline owners who may exercise personal choice in allowing their cats to roam outdoors. However, the Society does not support the practice of allowing cats to roam outdoors without supervision.
- Research shows that indoor cats live longer and tend to be healthier than outdoor cats.
- Cats can be dangerous to wildlife. It is estimated that between 100 and 350 million cats are killed by cats per year.
- Free roaming cats face a variety of dangers outdoors, many of which can lead to painful injuries or even death. Cats who are declawed are especially vulnerable since they are unable to climb or defend themselves.
  - DISEASE: Unvaccinated cats are at high risk of contracting diseases.
  - PARASITES: Cats can act as hosts for parasites such as fleas, ticks, worms, and/or ear mites.
  - POISONING: Cats may encounter antifreeze, yard chemicals, contaminated garbage, or poisoned animals. People intentionally leaving out poisoned food for cats has also been reported.

- HARM FROM THE ELEMENTS: Cats may be affected by extremes in temperature or weather conditions, especially if they are unable to take shelter or find their way home.
- OTHER ANIMALS: Some animals prey on cats, and cats may engage in conflict with other cats which can result in injury and infection.
  - When conflict with other cats occurs on another person's property, it can also cause undesirable behaviours in the other cat which may negatively impact their relationship with their owner. The owner may also have to restrict the cat from areas of the cat's own home to prevent future conflict with free-roaming cats.
- HUMAN DANGERS: Some people view free-roaming cats as a nuisance and may deal with them inhumanely or relocate the cat, making it less likely the cat will be able to find their way back home.
- TRAFFIC: Cats are not always adept at avoiding moving vehicles and vice versa.
- DISORIENTATION: Cats can become disoriented when outside, leaving them unable to find their way home.

- Free roaming cats may be collected by animal control or kept by homes they visit. The likelihood of a cat being returned to their owner following admission to an animal shelter when found as a stray is low: reclaim rates of cats in Canada are consistently less than 10%. Pet identification increases chances of return but relies on finders being able to detect it, ID information being accurate, and owners responding to being contacted in time.

- Allowing intact cats to roam can lead to reproduction, and an exponential increase in the cat population.

- Undesirable behaviours are not guaranteed to be remedied or fully addressed by letting cats outdoors. Providing outlets for natural behaviours or veterinary attention are recommended to address undesirable behaviours.

- Letting cats outdoors is not guarantee of exercise or a replacement for appropriate diet and exercise which can be provided indoors.

- Cats can live enriched lives indoors: an appropriate environment, enrichment, play, leash walks, and outdoor enclosures such as enclosed balconies and catios can be used to provide mental and physical stimulation.

- Free-roaming cats can be nuisance to people in community and other cats. Keeping cats indoors prevents conflict with neighbors and repeated fines. Municipal bylaws may penalize owners for allowing cats to stray via fines, reclaim fees, and by permitting citizen complaints to be filed.

- Fewer roaming animals reduces the strain on local animal control, animal shelters, and adoption agencies.

- Direct supervision and control over cats ensures owners can protect the welfare of their cat when outdoors. If cats are to be let outdoors in a supervised manner, owners should take all possible precautions to protect welfare of cats and other animals such as ensuring updated vaccines and microchip information, maintaining control of their cat, and spaying or neutering their cat.

## References

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