

The cat is a carnivorous mammal and is very well adapted to hunting small mammals and birds. Being largely nocturnal hunters, cats may travel for several kilometres at night in search of prey. Cats can also find their prey just by following the scent trail left by small animals as they move along the ground. They are also very able climbers. All of these features together with four sets of retractable claws, and teeth adapted for gripping, tearing and shearing, make the cat a formidable hunter



The Feral Cat - A ruthless predator

Feral cats prefer live prey but do occasionally scavenge human food scraps. They are opportunistic predators, meaning that their diet generally reflects the fauna present in the area where they live and hunt. Their diet usually consists of small mammals, birds, reptiles, frogs, fish, invertebrates and native birds.

Domestic cat – Companion animal

Domestic cats often continue to hunt, even when fed on a regular basis. This is because cats instinctively react to movement, particularly rapid jerky movements. The prey is often left uneaten and may be brought home. Surveys of domestic cats reveal that the list of prey matches that of feral cats. Therefore domestic cats also impact negatively on our native wildlife.

Where do feral cats come from?

Although there is a standing population of feral cats, recruitment is constantly occurring from the domestic population. Even the best kept cat can go wild, whether through wandering too far from its home area when hunting or via interactions with feral cats. Unfortunately unwanted domestic cats or kittens are often dumped by irresponsible owners. If they survive in the wild, these discarded pets join the feral population and may breed with other feral cats if they have not been desexed.

Feral cats are not just a problem in the bush. Indeed, a greater number of feral cats occur in and around cities. This is probably due to more stable and abundant food sources being available in these areas.

Prevent the domestic cat from becoming feral

How can you help?

Desexing - If your cat is desexed, it cannot breed with feral cats (whether it goes wild or not), and the inconvenience of unwanted kittens is also prevented. Desexing is a simple procedure that can be conducted at your local veterinary surgery.

Detaining your cat at night - A cat's home range (the area in which it lives and hunts) may be reduced by up to 75% by detaining it at night. This often results in a decrease in the number of native animals killed by cats overall. Cats that are kept in at night also live longer than those that are not. This is because they are not out fighting or mating with other cats or contracting diseases from them. Road accidents are also a major cause of death for domestic cats, so keeping them in at night greatly reduces this risk.

Warning bells - Fit your cat with a collar and two bells, one on either side of the name tag so that potential prey is warned of the cats approach. Many cats continue to hunt successfully with a single bell. A second bell can reduce its chances of success.

Existing Feral/Stray

A stray cat is basically someone's pet that has become lost or has been abandoned. Stray cats are usually tame and comfortable around people. Stray cats will often try to make a home near humans – in car garages, front porches or backyards. If you have a stray take it to the RSPCA animal shelter and they will scan it for identification and enable the cat to be reunited with its owner.

A feral cat is primarily a wild animal. It has been raised by other feral cats or has adapted to feral life since it was very young. Feral cats prefer to form colonies wherever they can find food and shelter, for example in parks, restaurant alleys, hospital grounds or industrial estates. The most important thing is not to feed a feral cat as it will continue to be destructive to wildlife, in any case, and encourages a sustainable life for breeding.

The Illawarra Branch of the Animal Welfare League NSW together with Wollongong Council is working to reduce the number of stray and feral cats in the community, through micro chipping, registration and desexing.

If you have a UN owned stray or feral cat in or around your area please call the Animal Welfare League and they may be able to assist in trapping the feral cat humanely.

Purchasing a Cat

If you decide to purchase a cat, visit a RSPCA Shelter. This facility admits thousands of cats per year. All of the shelters cats are desexed and given a clean bill of health by a qualified veterinary surgeon. "Remember" bringing a cat into your family should be a lifelong commitment, so give it serious thought otherwise it may end up stray and impact on our wildlife.

For further information/enquiries

Wollongong City Council: 02 42 27 7111

Animal Welfare League: 02 42 611 686

Disclaimers

This information was believed to be correct at the date of its publication.

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