



## Be a Good Neighbour

Currently in New Zealand there are no legal restrictions on a cats being able to wander freely, and no legal requirements for carers of cats to keep them on their property. However, not everyone likes cats, nor wants them on their property. Conflicts can and do arise.

So what can you do to be a good neighbour, whether or not you like cats?

### 1. Being a 'good neighbour' for cat lovers.

#### Recommendations

Being a good neighbour as a cat owner involves being considerate, proactive, and respectful of both your cat's freedom and your neighbours' comfort. Here are key tips to help you strike that balance:

#### *Keep your cat safe and happy at home (if possible)*

- Consider cat-proofing your yard or building a "catio" (an outdoor enclosure).
- If your cat roams, try to limit access to neighbours' gardens, especially if they're avid gardeners or have bird feeders.
- Roaming cats can dig, spray, or hunt – behaviours that understandably frustrate neighbours.

#### *Litter responsibility*

- Even if your cat goes outside, provide a clean litter tray at home. This discourages them from using neighbours' flower beds or veggie patches.
- Scoop regularly and dispose of waste properly to reduce odours and flies.

#### *Communicate openly*

- Let your immediate neighbours know you have a cat, especially if it roams. A friendly heads-up can prevent future tension.
- Be open to hearing concerns, and don't get defensive - acknowledging the impact is part of being a responsible pet owner.

#### *Microchip and register your cat*

- Make sure your cat is microchipped and registered.
- Also add a collar with an ID tag that includes your phone number. This way, neighbours can reach you directly if there's a problem.

### *Respect quiet hours*

- If your cat is noisy at night (e.g. yowling, mating calls, fighting), consider keeping them indoors during nighttime hours, or if there are specific time of the day your neighbours are concerned about

### *Protect local wildlife*

- Add bells to your cat's collar to reduce bird kills.
- Feeding your cat well and enriching their environment with toys they can divert their hunting energy to may also reduce their hunting instinct.

### *Clean up after your cat*

- If your cat frequently soils a neighbour's garden or car, make an effort to clean up - even if it wasn't intentional.
- You might also try cat deterrents (safe sprays, citrus peels, or motion-activated sprinklers) in problem areas as a goodwill gesture.

### *Train and enrich your cat's life*

- A bored cat is more likely to roam far or engage in unwanted behaviour.
- Offer toys, climbing spaces, and interaction to keep them stimulated at home.

### *Be Considerate and Friendly*

- Kindness goes a long way—maybe even drop off a small gift or card if your cat caused an issue.
- A positive relationship with neighbours makes any pet-related issues easier to address and resolve.

**Know your  
responsibilities.**

**Be a good  
neighbour.**

Taken from <https://www.nzncmg.com/cat-guardians>

## 2. Being a "good neighbour" for those not-so-cat-friendly

### *Recommendations*

Being a good neighbour, even if you don't like cats, means handling the situation with respect, calm communication, and reasonable boundaries—without escalating tension or harming the animal.

Here are practical and respectful ways to be a good neighbour while keeping unwanted feline visitors at bay:

### *Communicate politely and Early*

- Start with a friendly chat, not a complaint. Let the cat owner know you've noticed their cat in your garden or on your property.
- Use "I" statements to avoid blame:

*"I've noticed your cat has been digging & pooing in my flower beds and it's been a bit of a challenge for me."*

- A calm, respectful tone increases the chance they'll be willing to help.

### *Use humane deterrents*

There are effective, pet-safe ways to discourage cats from entering your space:

- Motion-activated sprinklers
- Ultrasonic cat deterrents (emits a high-pitched sound cats dislike)
- Scent-based repellents (citrus, lavender, or commercial products)
- Chicken wire or garden mesh on flower beds
- Plant cat-repellent plants like rosemary, rue, or lavender

These methods help you protect your space without harming the animal.

### *Protect key areas*

- Cover garden soil with stones or netting to prevent digging.
- Place fencing or spikes (humane, dull versions) along fences or ledges if cats are climbing or perching where they're not welcome.
- Keep windows closed if you don't want a cat entering your home.

### *Set boundaries without being hostile*

- If the cat continues to be a problem and polite conversations haven't worked, it's okay to be more direct - but not aggressive. Be aware it can take some time for your neighbour to make effective changes e.g. building a catio, so be reasonable on the timeframe for change.

You can say something like:

*"I'd really appreciate if you could try to keep your cat from entering my garden. I've put up some deterrents, but I'm hoping we can find a solution that works for both of us."*

- Avoid threatening the animal or making ultimatums. That can turn a manageable issue into a neighbour war.

### *Know the law (and use it wisely)*

In most places, cats are allowed to roam by law. Unless they're causing damage, your options may be limited. If the cat is:

- causing property damage; and/or
- spraying, defecating regularly; and/or
- killing wildlife in large numbers;

you might be able to file a complaint with animal control or local council - **it's better as a last resort after trying polite conversation and deterrents.**

### *Be the neighbour you'd want*

Even if you don't like cats, you can still build trust and cooperation. Respectful communication and a little creativity usually go further than confrontation.

### 3. Being a 'good neighbour' to wildlife

Our native wildlife are also our neighbours and unfortunately many are in serious decline due to habitat loss and predation. Controlling or keeping cats safe and happy at home, whether by keeping them indoors, using a catio, or cat fencing to restrict their access to our own property has significant benefits for the country's native wildlife.

Neutering cats prevents unwanted kittens ending up as stray or feral cats predating in these environments. While cats can be effective hunters of unwanted predators like rats & mice, they are also indiscriminate hunters. They are not an effective means of controlling other predators like rats and mice to any useful level without affecting the native birds, lizards & insects we're trying to protect.

Here are the main advantages of managing cats around wildlife:

#### *Reduced predation on native species*

New Zealand has a high number of endemic and endangered species, including bats, birds and lizards. Cats are natural predators and can severely impact these species by preying on adults, and young, including eggs.

#### *Birds*

While birds like the kiwi, kākāpō, and takahē are less likely to be around residential areas, the hope is that this won't always be the case. Other species like tauhou (silvereye), tūī, korimako (bellbird), pīwakawaka (fantail), riroriro (grey warbler), ruru (morepork), kereru (pigeon) are more common around the areas we live & work.

Many of New Zealand's native birds, such as the godwit, kāki (black stilt), fairy tern, kākā, kea, karearea (NZ falcon) are ground-nesting and vulnerable to cats while sitting on their nests. By keeping cats out of areas where these birds nest (eg beaches, riverbeds and forests) the survival rates of these birds and their offspring are significantly improved.

#### *Reptiles*

New Zealand is home to unique reptile species, like skinks, gecko, frogs and the tuatara. Cats are highly effective hunters and can decimate reptile populations. Keeping cats contained reduces the risk to these species, some of which are found nowhere else in the world.

#### *Insects*

Cats can also hunt and kill insects, some of which are vital to local ecosystems, and others, like wētā, are unique to NZ. By limiting cats' access to the outdoors, the balance of insect populations, including pollinators and decomposers, is maintained.

#### *Bats*

Cats are known to kill and eat bats. Research indicates that in New Zealand, cats are a significant predator of native bat species, including the long-tailed bat and the lesser short-

tailed bat, according to the Department of Conservation.<sup>1</sup> Even companion cats can be responsible for multiple bat deaths.

Many native species in New Zealand have evolved without the presence of mammalian predators like cats. Their survival and reproduction are directly impacted by the presence of such predators. Keeping cats safe and happy at home (and removing them and other predators) helps restore ecological equilibrium, allowing native species to thrive without the constant threat of predation.

### *Lowering the spread of disease among wildlife, people & within agriculture*

Cats can carry and spread diseases such as toxoplasmosis which also affect wildlife. By keeping cats safe and happy at home and managing their waste by the use of litter trays, the chances of these diseases being passed onto vulnerable native species, particularly marine life, are reduced.

Toxoplasmosis can affect many other mammals too, including sheep where it can cause abortion storms resulting in large losses for affected farms, not to mention it being a terrible time for the ewes.

People are also susceptible to toxoplasmosis. Cats are known to use vegetable gardens for toileting which is a risk to both gardeners and those eating the produce of being affected by toxoplasmosis, as well as other parasites they may be carrying.

Find out more on the National Cat Management Group's website.<sup>2</sup>



### *Supporting conservation efforts*

Many conservation efforts in New Zealand focus on restoring habitats and protecting native species. Some places are also investing in predator-free zones. Neutering cats prevents unwanted kittens ending up as stray or feral cats in these environments. Keeping cats safe and happy at home reduces the burden on these conservation programs, and reducing the number of free-roaming cats that could undermine these sanctuary zones.

By addressing the issue of free-roaming cats and their impact on native wildlife, New Zealand sets an example for other countries facing similar challenges with introduced species. Keeping cats safe and happy at home aligns with the country's reputation as a leader in conservation and biodiversity protection.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2022-media-releases/new-research-confirms-cat-risk-for-pekapeka/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nzncmg.com/toxoplasmosis>

## 4. Trapping cats

### Companion, stray or feral?

If you catch a cat in a live-capture trap, or find one captured in a trap someone else has set, it's important to handle the situation calmly and responsibly, as the cat could be someone's companion cat or it might be a stray cat that someone cares for.

In built up areas, you won't catch truly feral cats because they live completely independently of humans – for this reason, in this section companion and stray cats are the focus.

Plenty of stray cats and some companion cats will do a good job of looking fairly cross and very wild – so take care, and make sure you identify from which cat category the trapped animal comes. Legally, this matters – you can't destroy someone else's property (which is how companion cats (and some stray cats) may be seen).

Do you know the difference between an anti-social stray cat, and a feral cat?

Curious? For loads more information, check out the NCMG website.<sup>3</sup>



**Companion cats**

These are cats that are considered to be owned by a person. They are usually very sociable, and directly dependent on people and live with them.



**Stray cats**

Stray cats can be social or not, and managed or not. They might be lost, abandoned, or stray-born companion cats with varying levels of dependence on people.



**Feral cat**

These cats are unowned and unsocialised. They often have no relationship with or dependence on people, and live in the wild.

The Ministry for Primary Industries has information on their website,<sup>3</sup> as does the National Cat Management Group in the section called 'Caring for Colony Cats.'<sup>4</sup>

### What to do

Here's a step-by-step guide on what to do:

#### *Stay calm and assess the situation*

**Ensure Your Safety.** If the cat appears frightened or aggressive, give it space. Even a domestic cat can be startled and may try to scratch or bite.

**Observe the cat's behaviour.** Domestic cats may appear more relaxed and approachable, while stray cats are likely to be more frightened, aggressive, or wary of humans. However, domestic cats can act extremely aggressively out of fear too, so behaviour in a cage alone is not a good indicator of whether the cat is stray or not.

**Identify the trap's owner (if not yours).** If the trap is not yours, is there any identification on the trap or nearby that could help you identify who has set it and how to contact them. If the

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-and-pest-management/traps-and-devices-used-to-manage-pests/#CatTrap>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nzncmg.com/cat-guardians>

cage has an antenna on it, it is likely a satellite activated trap which will notify the trapper that the cage has been triggered, and they are likely on their way already.

If the cat has been killed by the trap, it is still important to check if it was potentially an owned cat by getting it scanned for a microchip. Contact your local animal rescue, veterinary clinic, or pest control group.

### *Check for identification*

**If the cat is wearing a collar**, it might have an identification tag with the owner's contact details. In this case, contact the owner directly to inform them that their cat has been trapped.

**If there's no collar**, and you can't find any contact details for who set the trap, you can contact your local cat rescue group or predator control group to see if they are able to come & scan the cat for a microchip.

If you are able to transport the cage with the cat in it, you could also take the cat to a local veterinarian, animal shelter, or contact your council animal control officer to have it scanned for a microchip.

This is a quick and non-invasive process that can help identify the cat's owner, if there is one.

### *Provide water and comfort*

If the cat is trapped in a humane trap, cover the trap with a towel or blanket to reduce stress and help the cat feel more secure until a plan can be made.

If the cat is not injured and seems calm enough, offer some water through the bars of the trap. Avoid giving food immediately, as it could lead to digestive issues if the cat is stressed or hasn't been eating regularly.

### *Do not attempt to handle the cat*

Unless you are experienced with handling frightened or aggressive animals, do not attempt to handle the cat directly, as it could scratch or bite. If the cat is stray with wild behaviour (anti-social) or extremely scared, it may also try to escape and could injure itself, you, or both, in the process.

### *Contact local animal services or a shelter*

**If the cat is unidentifiable (no collar, no microchip)** or you are unsure what to do next, contact your local animal rescue, animal control, veterinarian, or a community organisation that deals with animal welfare. They will have the expertise and resources to safely deal with the situation.

**If the cat is injured or sick and cannot be treated**, local shelters or veterinarians may provide humane euthanasia. They can help assess the cat's health and make the best decision.



### *Avoid further trapping of cats*

If you are using a live-capture trap for pest control (e.g., targeting stray cats), make sure to use it responsibly (see below). Ensure it is checked every day it is set to avoid accidental captures of non-target animals, such as domestic cats. Use lures that will attract the target pests ideally.

If cats are your target, then make sure you have informed any nearby households (up to a 3km radius) that the traps are being set & when so cat owners can take appropriate action (keep safe and happy at home; get microchipped) to avoid their cats being targeted.

### *Notify neighbours or the local community*

If the cat appears to be a lost companion cat and you cannot find the owner immediately, inform your neighbours, local rescue organisations and veterinary clinics. You could also post on community social media pages to increase the chances of reuniting the cat with its owner.

There are various online resources and websites where you can post information about the lost cat, including a photo and location, to help find the owner.

### *Prevent future accidental trapping*

If you are using traps to catch stray (or proper ferals) cats, avoid setting them in areas where domestic cats are known to roam, such as neighbourhoods or around homes. Consider placing traps in more remote or controlled environments to minimize the chance of trapping pets.

MPI and the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) are jointly responsible for enforcing the Animal Welfare Act 1999. If you have any particular concerns about the trapping of cats in your neighbourhood, contact your local SPCA or MPI.

## *Setting up traps to avoid accidental cat entrapment*

There are a number of different types of traps, including live-capture and kill traps. Live capture traps would typically be used when targeting cats as they are wily adversaries. However, there are some kill-traps approved for use in catching cats, and it is possible to accidentally trap and possibly not kill a cat in traps that are not licensed for use against them.

Until AI traps are readily available and can identify which animals should enter the trap, it's up to the cat (and other predators) as whether they or not they do.

There are some things you can do to help prevent accidental entrapment of cats:

### *Communicate with neighbours or your community*

- Inform your neighbours about your trapping activities and encourage them to keep their cats contained if possible (there's plenty of resources here to share!)
- Explain the types of traps you will be setting and the steps you will take to prevent cats being accidental caught where possible. This cooperation can help prevent domestic cats from being unintentionally caught and potential backlash from the community

### *Avoid setting traps where owned cats may roam*

- If you are using traps to catch feral or stray animals, avoid setting them in areas where domestic cats are known to roam, such as neighbourhoods or around homes.



- Consider placing traps in more remote or controlled environments to minimize the chance of trapping pets.
- Let neighbours know if you're trapping so they can keep their pets indoors overnight or contained (see catio & fencing options)
- Trap during times when cats are less active (e.g., midday), though this depends on your target species.
- If you do want or need to trap in urban areas or areas where owned cats are likely to be present, you have a responsibility to contact the owner of that cat and return it (alive!) to them

### *Use trail cameras first*

- If you're unsure what animals are around, a cheap trail camera can help you ID visitors before you trap. This helps avoid surprises and lets you adjust the trap setup accordingly.

### *Use species-specific trap boxes*

- Enclosed trap boxes with restricted entry holes (e.g., 60 mm diameter or smaller) can exclude most adult cats while still catching target species like rats or mustelids. Owned kittens would not reasonably be expected to be free roaming when they are still small enough to fit through these entranceways.
- Designs like the DOC 150, 200 or 250, and rat traps in wooden boxes are often used because you can customize the entrance size to suit the target species.
- Avoid open, uncovered traps which can accidentally harm non-target animals and small children!
- If there is a high chance of capturing owned cats, then opt for live capture traps, which are designed to safely contain animals without harm. These traps are particularly suitable for residential areas, as they allow for the identification and safe release of non-target animals, such as domestic cats. The disadvantage is that target species caught will then need to be humanely killed after capture. Best practice guidance for live capture traps can be found on<sup>5</sup> MPI's website.
- Some cats like to explore traps or are attracted to the lures used. Even if they can't fit inside the trap itself, they may try to hook the lure out with a paw. Extending the length of the trap in the entrance area, or placing a low barrier just inside the entranceway to prevent a cats paw being able to reach the trap mechanism at full stretch is critical if there are cats around to prevent injury.

### *Fence off traps*

- Installing barriers like cat-proof fencing or cat rollers can effectively prevent cats from accessing areas where traps are set. These measures are humane and can be particularly effective in urban settings, however, are not often practical

### *Careful trap placement*

- Avoid placing traps near:
  - Urban areas or known owned cat territories.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/27894-Remote-monitoring-of-live-capture-traps-for-vertebrates>

- Warm sleeping spots or food sources that might attract curious cats.
- Bush lines or along fences away from homes are better for predator control and less tempting for pet cats.
- While you can set live-capture traps on your property, there is no law against cats 'trespassing' on your property. If you live in an urban area, or there is a possibility owned cats could be wandering on your property, your starting point if you capture a cat should be to assume it is owned, find out who the owner is and contact them directly.

## *Remove attractants and use species-specific lures*

- If you are trapping on your own property and don't want to accidentally trap a cat, ensure that food sources, such as pet food or bird seed, are not left outside, as these can attract cats. Additionally, secure rubbish bins and remove any other potential food sources to discourage cats from entering your property.
- Use lures known to be effective for your specific target species eg cinnamon, apple, vanilla, onion etc for possums; peanut butter, chocolate, cinnamon etc for rats; hens eggs & mayonnaise for stoats.
- Where you need to use lures for species that are carnivores like cats (eg mustelids) consider using specific scent lures instead or you may need to take other the precautions listed here instead

## *Abide by the law*

### *Animal Welfare Act 1999*

- You are legally responsible for checking live-capture traps within 12 hours of sunrise, and for humane dispatch of pest species (section 36 Obligations relating to traps<sup>6</sup>)
- For kill traps, only use MPI-approved or NAWAC-tested traps to ensure they're effective and humane; using these traps will also ensure you compliant with respect to which traps are legal to use (section 34 Restrictions on use of traps and devices to kill, manage, entrap, capture, entangle, restrain, or immobilise animals<sup>7</sup>)
- For a summary of the requirements relating to stray cats<sup>8</sup> and cat colonies, and a list of recommendations for people who manage feral or anti-social stray cats in colonies, you can read part 12 of the Animal Welfare (Companion Cats) Code of Welfare: Companion Cats. [Code of Welfare: Companion Cats](#)



### *Other legislation*

- There may be by-laws in place in your area that restrict the use of traps. Your local council can provide you with information about these by-laws.

<sup>6</sup> <https://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1999/0142/latest/DLM50444.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1999/0142/latest/DLM50442.html>

<sup>8</sup> Photo by [Melody Lin](#) on [Unsplash](#)

- Killing an animal (humanely) is not illegal under animal welfare legislation, but destroying someone's property is (Crimes Act 1961) and companion cats are technically considered property. The deliberate act of killing someone's pet cat should be reported to police, but the humane killing of feral cats is not an offence. [Crimes Act 1961 – NZ Legislation](#)

#### Other Advice

- The **National Cat Management Group's Report**<sup>9</sup> contains recommendations for managing stray cats. It aims to help people humanely manage cats in a way that protects their welfare and our unique environment and biodiversity. It encourages live trapping (not using leg-hold traps), checking for microchips and desexing/rehoming wherever possible.
- Talk to your local trapping group(s) coordinator; get in contact with DOC; Predator Free NZ or other trapping organisations to discuss what is best for your location.
- Make sure you engage your local community, cat rescue groups, or anyone who is likely to be affected by your trapping efforts, so they understand what you are aiming to achieve and how, as well as how they can minimise the impact on them and any owned cats that may be present.

## What traps look like

At these links, you can see what various trap look like and read about how to use them.

1. **Predator Free NZ:** <https://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/trapping-baiting-toolkit/where-to-buy-traps-and-equipment/>
2. **Steve Allan:** <https://steveallantraps.co.nz/sa2-feral-cat-trap/>
3. **Traps.co.nz** <https://traps.co.nz/products/cage-trap-large-ptr1009>
4. **Maintrac Group:** <https://www.maintracgroup.com/collections/cat-traps>
5. **Connovation:** <https://www.connovation.co.nz/products/trap-tunnel>

## Useful links

1. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-and-pest-management/traps-and-devices-used-to-manage-pests/#:~:text=Live%20capture%20traps,Live%20capture%20traps&text=The%20Act%20requires%20that%20any,an%20animal%20in%20the%20trap.>
2. <https://www.bionet.nz/assets/Trap-summary-table-DOC-3174743-21-Nov-2023-update.pdf>
3. <https://www.nawac.org.nz/assets/NAWAC-documents/guidelines/NAWAC-Guideline-on-humaneness-testing-of-traps-FINAL.pdf>
4. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/27894-Remote-monitoring-of-live-capture-traps-for-vertebrates>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nzncmg.com/research> - at this link is the Executive Summary and the Full Report

5. <https://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1999/0142/latest/DLM50444.html>
6. <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/predator-free-2050/community-trapping/trapping-and-toxins/animal-welfare-and-trapping/>
7. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-and-pest-management/traps-and-devices-used-to-manage-pests/restricted-traps-and-devices/>