



Keeping Cats & Wildlife Safe

Balancing cats and bats (and other native species!)

Cats bring joy and companionship to many households, yet ensuring their safety can be as challenging as it is important. In New Zealand, where our unique wildlife is both a treasure and a responsibility - it's crucial to find a balance that keeps our cats safe, happy and healthy while also protecting local species.

Balancing cat safety with wildlife preservation can be challenging because both concerns are important but require different approaches. For instance, while keeping cats indoors or in secure outdoor enclosures can prevent them from hunting wildlife, it may also limit their access to natural behaviours and exercise if not done well. Conversely, allowing cats to roam freely can endanger wildlife & themselves, but gives cats more freedom to engage in natural activities like hunting. This conflict requires cat owners and wildlife advocates to find innovative solutions that ensure the safety and well-being of both cats and native species.

For example, native birdlife is starting to make a comeback as various community groups and locals have undertaken reforestation projects, and the efforts of the Wanaka Backyard Trapping volunteers in trapping unwanted pests creates impact. Wānaka also has some really special lizard species which are desperately clinging on to survival. We have a responsibility to do all we practically can to help these species not only survive, but thrive.

Which cat is that?

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.¹



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.

Unfortunately, there is a significant increase in the number of stray cats in some districts, including Wānaka. Cats can breed at a rapid rate, putting extra pressure on cat rescue groups, as well as providing an increased risk of negative interactions with much loved companion (owned) cats in the neighbourhood.

We also have a responsibility to keep owned cats safe from any pest control efforts, so are working on some practical ideas and solutions for our district.

Risks of Outdoor Adventures for Cats

While many cats love the freedom of exploring the great outdoors, it comes with some significant risks:

1. **Traffic Hazards:** Cars, bikes, and other vehicles pose a danger to wandering cats. Road accidents can cause severe (expensive!) injuries or be fatal and are disturbingly common in Aotearoa compared to other countries.
2. **Predators and Aggressors:** Cats can be threatened by larger animals, such as dogs, or even other aggressive cats. Fight wounds and abscesses are also a lot more common in New Zealand than elsewhere in the world because our cats are free to roam.
3. **Disease Exposure:** Outdoor cats are more likely to contract diseases like FIV (feline HIV), and parasites, such as fleas, and ticks.
4. **Getting Lost:** Cats have been known to stray far from home, including climbing into warm engine bays for a trip up-country. They can end up trapped in shed, garages, or even a completely different region of the country as a result, making it difficult for them to find their way back.

Safe Solutions for Keeping Cats at Home

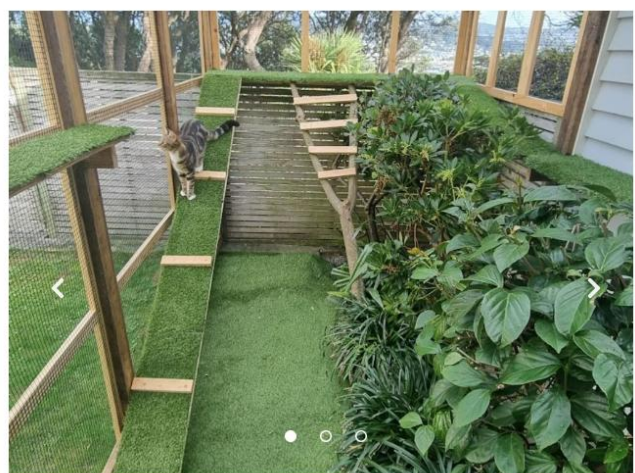
Safeguarding your cat's welfare and contributing to wildlife protection through effective strategies that keep you cat safe and happy at home requires getting up to speed with cats' needs, and a bit of planning – it can be done!

By keeping your cat safe and happy at home, you can mitigate risks to their safety and provide a secure environment where your companion can thrive.

1. Outdoor Catios

If you want your cat to experience the outdoors safely, consider building or purchasing a catio (cat + patio = catio.) Catios are enclosed spaces that allow your cat to enjoy fresh air and sunshine without the risks associated with free roaming. These don't need to be expensive or palatial.

Palaces are possible too! Check out this fancy set up from Predator Free 2050's website! To be fully inspired (or perhaps a bit jealous!) have a look at their website.¹



Artificial grass, shrubs and tree branches make it fun for hiding and climbing. Image credit: Ross

¹ <https://predatorfreenz.org/stories/5-cool-catios-that-will-make-your-cat-jealous/>

There are heaps of examples on Google of anything from enormous multi-level constructions to window-box extensions, or enclosed patio spaces. They have some key features:

1. **Secure Construction:** Ensure the catio is built with sturdy materials and has no gaps or weak points that could allow your cat to escape. Check out Cat Nets² for ready-made, portable catios, and secure cat fencing solutions.
2. **Enriching Features:** Cats love vertical space to climb & hangout, so include climbing structures, perches, hammocks, catnip and other cat safe plants, and shaded areas to mimic the outdoor environment and keep your cat entertained.
3. **Supervised Time:** If possible, spend time with your cat in the catio to provide companionship and further enhance their experience.
4. **Toilets:** You can provide a dedicated toileting area (sandpit or garden area) or ideally litter trays which you will need to clean out & refresh regularly. Just make sure if you're planning on an outdoor litter tray that it's place under cover for easy cleaning.

2. Fencing

Alternatively, if you have a fenced property, there are some clever fence toppers that can keep your cat contained in your backyard. They are not as expensive as you might think.

It pays for us to remember that keeping dogs safe and happy at home is normal now, when it wasn't a few decades ago. It's pretty common to spend money of a fence for that purpose – let's extend that normal to cats, who deserve the same safe living environment.



Taken from <https://catfence.nz/oscillot/>

3. Indoor Living

While keeping your cat indoors is the safest option for their physical health, we also need to ensure that their mental health is supported too. It's not just a matter of shutting the door, which in itself is not always that practical in a warm environment where windows & doors are left open. Indoor living ensures cats are protected from the hazards of the outside world, but they also must be carefully managed to ensure their needs are met without causing stress.

To keep your indoor cat safe and happy:

1. **Create a Stimulating Environment:** Invest in toys, scratching posts, and interactive playthings. This helps to fulfill their hunting instincts and keeps them mentally and physically active.
2. **Provide Vertical Space:** Cats are climbers and love to go up and observe their surroundings. Install cat trees, shelves, or window perches to give them a vantage point and vertical space to explore.

² www.catnets.co.nz

3. **Regular Playtime:** Dedicate time each day to play with your cat using wand toys or laser pointers. This simulates hunting and provides valuable exercise.
4. **Toilets:** Cats will need litter trays for toileting, and these will need regular emptying. Make sure each cat in the house has one and then have one spare

4. Leash Training

Leash training is another way for cats to safely explore the outdoors. Here's how to get started:

1. **Harness Training:** Use a well-fitted harness designed specifically for cats. Introduce it gradually and make sure the cat is comfortable wearing it.
2. **Leash Exploration:** Once cats are accustomed to being in a harness, leashes can be attached, and they can have short, supervised outings in a secure area. Gradually increase the duration and distance as confidence grows.

Keeping Cats Safe and Happy at Home Benefits Wildlife

While cat safety is the primary concern, it's worth noting that cats kept safe and happy at home also helps protect local wildlife:

1. **Reduced Predation:** By keeping cats indoors or in a catio, prevents them from preying on native birds, insects, and reptiles. This is especially important in New Zealand, where many species are vulnerable to predation at all hours of the day & night.
2. **Ecosystem Balance:** Preventing cats from roaming helps maintain the balance of local ecosystems, ensuring that native species continue to thrive.

Community and Environmental Responsibility

Supporting responsible cat ownership is not just about individual actions; it involves community efforts. Driving human behaviour change needs people to understand why cats are safer at home.

1. **Promote Awareness:** Educate other cat owners about the benefits of containment for their companion cats and the environment.



Taken from <https://www.nzncmg.com/about>

It's win-win

By adopting strategies for keeping cats safe and happy at home (e.g., indoor living; catios; fences; leash training), cat safety and welfare can be ensured, while also contributing to the protection of New Zealand's unique wildlife.

It's a win-win approach that allows enjoyment of feline friends without compromising their safety or the health of the natural environment. Embracing these practices to provide a secure, enriching life for your cat and a safe haven for the incredible wildlife around us.