



Preventing pet cats from roaming: addressing urban myths & fallacies

Purpose

Constraining pet cats from roaming has many benefits. It brings health benefits to pet cats, stops pet cats from killing and maiming wildlife in local parks or your neighbours' gardens, and brings benefits to human health and the wider community. Keeping pet cats safe and happy at home is part of being a responsible pet-owner.

Definitions

Let's be clear about what we mean by "preventing cats from roaming", often known as "permanent containment" or "keeping your cat under effective control at all times". The goal of permanent containment is to simply *prevent your cat from roaming beyond your property at all times*. Solutions to achieve this include, and you can certainly implement more than one:

- Keeping your cat inside your home, including modifying a window with an exit box or window box to permit outdoor time.
- Keeping your cat confined to your back yard via modifying your fences (fence-topper netting or rollers) and closing off escape routes.
- Keeping your cat in an outdoor 'catio' (much like a bird aviary), that can be stand-alone or linked to your home to allow your cat to come in and out as it pleases.
- Transporting your cat (e.g., to the vet or a groomer) in a cat box, backpack or stroller.
- Taking your cat for a walk on a harness and leash.

The realities of roaming

1. "It's not fair to contain a pet cat"

- Owners of all other sorts of pets (e.g., dogs) aren't allowed to let their pets wander.
- It is not fair for your neighbours if your pet cat is a nuisance to them.
- It is not fair to your local community if local wildlife is killed, injured or living in fear due to your roaming pet cat.
- It is not fair for urban wildlife to face a predator that could otherwise be readily controlled.

2. "My cat doesn't roam far"

- Pet cats have been recorded moving more than 5 km or over 2 ha in a single night.
- studies using radio-collars show that pet cats (try to) cross busy roads, enter crawl spaces under houses, explore drains and eat or drink away from home – even when moving only a few hundred metres.
- The distances that pet cats roam vary with age, sex, temperament and breed of cat.
- You only see your cat when you see your cat (absence of evidence is not evidence of absence); when out of sight, it may well be out on the town.
- Your cat doesn't have to roam far to be a nuisance to neighbours or to be deadly for native animals.



3. *"My cat would never bother anyone else while roaming"*

- Roaming pet cats use children's sandpits as toilets.
- Roaming pet cats go to the toilet in vegetable patches where faeces and cat parasites can enter our food chain, contaminating produce that would otherwise be healthy for us.
- Toileting pet cats dig up garden beds, both ornamentals and vegetables.
- Cats fight each other, causing disrupting noise.
- Pet cats harass birds in outdoor aviaries and frogs and fish in ponds.
- Roaming pet cats eat birds and other animals that people want in their gardens.
- Roaming pet cats may fight with other people's animals.
- Urine spraying on houses and outdoor furniture is a major nuisance caused by roaming pet cats.
- Roaming pet cats can intimidate and bully other pet cats that are contained on their owner's property.
- People can be very cruel to roaming cats.

4. *"Roaming isn't that dangerous"*

- More than two-thirds of cat owners have lost a cat to a roaming-related death.
- Many owners who 'lose' a pet cat never discover their pet's fate.
- Hazards for pet cats include car accidents, fighting with other animals, poisoning and falls.
- The feed of the 'Pets of Perth – Lost & Found' Facebook group is a grim reminder of just how often pet cats are killed on our roads.
- Quality of life studies confirm that owners of contained pet cats experience less anxiety because of reduced risk to their pet's health and welfare.
- Cats can catch H5N1 bird flu, which has a very high mortality rate in cats. Pet cats can catch bird flu while roaming from coming into contact with an infected sick or dead animal. Keeping your pet cat away from infected animals indoors or in a covered catio will help to avoid it catching bird flu.

5. *"Roaming cats live happy lives"*

- Constantly defending territory from other cats is not a fun lifestyle for pet cats, causing considerable mental stress and trauma.
- Roaming pet cats have short lives. Trauma related to roaming claims mainly young cats, often less than 5 years old. Roaming stray cats live 2.5 years on average – they do not die of happiness.
- Dogs like to attack and harass cats when they roam into other people's properties.
- Roaming cats regularly consume plastic, which can lead to gastrointestinal blockages and remain for a long time internally disrupting diet.
- Cats that roam catch and spread fleas, worms and disease to other species including dogs and people.
- While roaming pet cats get exercise – but this can also be easily (and more safely) achieved for contained cats.
- Roaming cats often find other (more responsible) owners.



Containment logistics

6. *"It would cost a significant amount to contain my pet cat"*

- Pet cats can be kept inside your house all the time, without the need to build any external facilities, provided you give them items to play with and climb on and satisfy their mental and toileting needs.
- Catos to provide contained access to the outdoors can be built very cheaply from scrap and recycled material.
- Organisations such as Men's Sheds and Women's Sheds can help with the construction of facilities for those who are not able to do it themselves.
- Installing a catio is often cheaper than a single trip to the vet for accidents that occur outdoors.

7. *"I live in a rental property and it's impossible to contain my cat"*

- There are many options for containing pet cats in temporary enclosures that will not damage a rental property.
- These temporary enclosures come in many different shapes and sizes and do not need to be expensive. They can be easily dismantled and taken to a new property.
- An exit box (or window box) attached to a window provides a temporary and space efficient way for an indoor cat to access the outdoors safely.

8. *"I have multiple cats that will be too hard to contain and keep happy together."*

- This is why the law limits the number of pet cats you can own. If you really want more cats and have the facilities to do this responsibly with good welfare outcomes, you can apply for a permit to do so.
- It is possible to keep multiple pet cats contained and content depending on their personality and how much space you have.

9. *"I cannot handle my cat begging to go outside"*

- That is why outdoor catios or teaching your pet cat to walk on a harness and lead are so successfully used for preventing pet cats from roaming.
- Just like people, pet cats will manipulate you to get what they want – you are the weakest link when it comes to containment.
- Distraction is the best way to avoid begging.
- In responding to such begging, consider the risks to your pet cat and its potential harm to wildlife.

10. *"I will have to buy and clean a litter tray if my cat comes indoors."*

- Currently your neighbours, their dogs and your local government are cleaning up after your pet cat for you.
- Your cat could be toileting in children's sandpits.

11. *"I built a catio and my cat doesn't use it"*

- You have probably built a catio that suits you and/or the landlord but not the pet cat. Have another look at it and think whether you would use it if you were your cat. There are many good designs available to follow.



Mental and physical needs

12. *"My cat has an essential need to roam"*

- Cats roam to mark their territory and find mates – desexing cats removes much of this drive to roam.
- With human interaction and entertainment, even roaming pet cats can become content when contained.
- Pet cats can be content indoors if their mental, physical and toileting needs are taken care of.
- Quality of life studies confirm higher qualities of life for contained pet cats because of greater interactions with owners, and fewer risks of disease or injury.

Predation

13. *"My cat doesn't hunt"*

- Pet cats only bring home only about 15% of what they kill so you will never see the majority of the death toll.
- Each pet cat in Australia kills, on average, 186 mammals, birds and reptiles every year.
- These numbers do not include the animals that are injured and maimed by pet cats.
- The majority of these animals killed by pet cats are native animals.
- Pet cats will also hunt animals that most of us overlook (e.g., insects, small skinks, frogs).

14. *"I feed my cat, it won't be hungry"*

- Pet cats will hunt regardless of whether they have been fed.
- Cats do not eat every animal that they attack.
- Play that mimics prey attack is the best way to entertain cats – it satisfies their hunting drive.

15. *"Everything is OK, I lock up my cat at night"*

- Night curfews simply change what the pet cat kills, birds and reptiles during the day, mammals and frogs at night.
- Hazards to pet cat welfare, such as fighting and traffic accidents, still occur during the day.

16. *"I need my cat to roam to control the rodent numbers"*

- The scientific evidence shows that roaming cats have no meaningful impact on total rodent numbers.
- Rodents learn to avoid cats so a change in rodent visibility does not equate to rodent absence due to hunting pressure.
- Cats will mostly hunt whatever species is most abundant in the environment.
- A good predictor of high rat abundance is the presence of a 'feeding station' for stray cats –rodents consume food put out for stray cats.
- Cats that eat rodents carry multiple, often debilitating, parasites.



- Cats that eat rodents are more likely to experience secondary poisoning from rodenticides.

17. *"There is no native wildlife left in Perth so why should I contain my cat to protect species like ravens and rats?"*

- There are many native species still managing to exist in small populations in urban and peri-urban environments. These populations are likely to increase when pet cats are contained. Don't accept the situation that we have now as normal or acceptable.
- Native quenda (bandicoots) are holding on or being introduced in remnant bushland around Perth suburbs and are highly vulnerable to cat predation.
- There is a very short distance in space and time between a roaming pet cat and a feral cat [[read more here](#)].
- Almost 50% of Australia's threatened animal species are found living in our cities. Urban biodiversity is an incredibly important part of our priority conservation goals.
- Urban wildlife is a main part of most people's interaction with nature.

18. *"Habitat clearing is a bigger threat to wildlife than my cat."*

- This claim is a whataboutism – the practice of responding to an important issue by raising a different issue - please don't. These aren't either/or competing threats, they are all threats that are worth addressing. The important thing about containing pet cats is that the solution is very achievable with no down sides when done appropriately.
- While habitat clearing may impact wildlife, can you prevent this impact? The impact of your cat on your local wildlife is something you have direct control over. Containing your pet cat will make an immediate difference to the wildlife in your neighbourhood.
- If all owners contain their pet cats, then wildlife in our towns and cities will have the opportunity to recover.

19. *"I will have to feed my cat more if it cannot hunt"*

- The health of your pet cat is your responsibility 24 hours a day. If you cannot afford to feed your cat properly then consider rehoming it.

Socio-economic considerations

20. *"Containment will impact lower socio-economic cohorts more"*

- Your financial status does not influence whether you are subject to law.
- The number of cats owned is negatively associated with wealth.
- The number of cats owned is negatively associated with pet cat welfare and health.
- Poorer homes can be supported (financially and with education) in their reduction to the mandated number of desexed pet cats.

21. *"You are just picking on the mentally ill if you push for cat containment"*

- Animal hoarding is associated with financial status and poor physical and mental health of owners.



- Reducing pet cat numbers per owner will increase human health, reduce financial pressure, and improve welfare outcomes for pet cats.

22. *“Lower socio-economic cohorts don’t care about roaming cat issues”*

- Complaints to councils from residents are highest in poorer areas with larger populations of roaming pet and stray cats.

23. *“The best way to deal with roaming (‘stray’) cats with no real owner is via Trap-Neuter-Release” (TNR; or Trap-Neuter-Return) programs”*

- This issue is not directly related to roaming pet cats – although roaming pet cats may interact with (including being attacked by) stray (unowned) cats.
- This claim is completely wrong. There is a comprehensive evidence-based case that supports with absolute clarity the case as to why TNR programs have no place in the management of cats anywhere in Australia. We can share that information as appropriate.
- A core ingredient of TNR is the release of unowned cats back to the wild (generally where they were trapped) after sterilisation. In all but the ACT (who are looking to prevent TNR), this practice is illegal. Those released cats will continue to kill and maim wildlife and lead compromised lives full of disease and suffering.
- Stray cats (or so-called ‘Community cats’) are attended to with highly variable levels of care by a small group of people in Australian society. Provision of inconsistent food and sometimes health related services in no way avoids the considerable welfare implications for roaming stray cats that come from scavenging, diseases, and both physical and mental threats experienced while roaming.
- Stray cats live sad, short, and harsh lives with poor welfare outcomes. If you are going to go to the trouble of trapping and neutering a cat, do the right thing and take it to the responsible agency (e.g., the nearest cat shelter) so it can be given a proper home with containment and a loving owner to provide responsible care.

Information in this document is supported by scientific theory and research. If you would like a copy of the relevant research for a particular issue, please contact info@wafcwg.org.au