

## OUR PLACE ON EARTH

# WHAT DO 100,000,000 PET CATS HAVE TO DO WITH NATIVE WILDLIFE?

BY JUDY ISACOFF

Pet cats are "second nature" to us. That is, most of us see them as friendly animals that are part of our homes and free to come and go (inside and outside) like we do. We know that they are not wild animals, nor a part of the native Berkshire-Taconic landscape like bobcats, foxes, red-tailed hawks, and chickadees. Let's think about what affect pet cats have on those animals and how we can help solve a problem many people don't know exists.

Many pet owners don't think about the fact that millions of other people have added a cat to their neighborhoods, too. When our soft, cuddly, purring friends go outside, they hunt. They are hunters. So, even if they have just eaten their favorite cat food, they will chase, catch, and kill wild birds, mammals, and reptiles. What happens to the natural food chain when a cat goes outside? Not only do we



lose the many kinds of prey animals they catch that make our world a healthy and exciting place to live in, such as woodpeckers, cottontail rabbits, and chipmunks, we can lose the predator animals, too. Pet cats take food that they do not

need, and often do not eat, while local predators depend on that food for their existence. Owls and weasels end up going hungry, and our forests and meadows have fewer wild predators.

It may be a hard adjustment for cat lovers to make, because cats like to be outside. We think of them as animals who should be free to roam, but the solution is to keep cats indoors! To protect our native landscape, pet cats should be house cats that we help keep happy indoors. If they go out, it should be on a leash or in a secure pen, like dogs. Declawing and wearing a bell does not help. If you don't have a cat, you can help by leaving a lot of open space around feeders to give birds a better chance to see approaching cats. And you might just give this article to someone who does have one!

For more information on the "Cats Indoors" program, contact Linda

Winter at the *Cats Indoors! Campaign*, American Bird Conservancy, 1834 Jefferson Place NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. You can also call 202-452-1535 or e-mail her at [lwinter@abcbirds.org](mailto:lwinter@abcbirds.org).

*Judy Isacoff, MA, is a writer, environmental educator, and arts-education consultant. She can be contacted at Nature's Turn, 413-528-1335.*

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