

Maria: Urban wildlife biologist

Hi! My name is Maria and I am an urban wildlife biologist. In my job I am fortunate enough to study urban wildlife and the connections between wildlife and humans. Sometimes working in urban settings can be a challenge because of all the various threats to wildlife that exist such as pollution, poison, habitat loss, etc. But I am always impressed at how high the biodiversity in my region is. Cities often provide food, water, shelter, and space for a variety of animal species. In fact, just recently my city had a rare visitor. A snowy owl came to town to eat our large rats! I believe one of the main threats to urban wildlife are domestic, outdoor cats. I admire cats because they are such excellent hunters, but I also feel frustrated at people who think it's okay for their cats to bring home injured or dead birds, mammals, and reptiles. The diversity of wildlife in our city contributes greatly to the health of our ecosystem and I often worry that cats are killing too much. I have been working with different stakeholders in my city to try and inform people about the dangers of outdoor cats to various wildlife species. Together, we are trying to encourage our community members to treat cats like dogs when it comes to going outside. This means walking them on a leash or spending supervised time with them outdoors. We also try and highlight the rich and fulfilling life a cat can have if it lives only indoors. Sometimes the people I talk to think I hate cats. That couldn't be further from the truth! I grew up with cats and personally experienced the loss of three indoor-outdoor cats as a young girl. People with indoor-outdoor cats in my city experience the same threats: cats can be hit by vehicles, get poisoned, fight with other animals, pick up disease, and more. I believe that for both the cats' health and wildlife's health, the best choice for a cat is an indoor home. Just as feeding wildlife can cause problems, feeding stray and feral cats can also perpetuate disease spread and wildlife loss in our community. Please do your part and help keep cats indoors and safe for all.

Johann: Owner of three indoor-outdoor cats

My name is Johann, but more importantly, let me introduce you to her royal highnesses. Here we have Priscilla who is a fluffy, gray long-haired rescue. Priscilla is really the queen of the household and she approves or disapproves of the behaviors of the other two kitties. But they are all still royalty! Okay, the next one is Jasmine and she is a short-haired tortoiseshell. Jasmine has a lot of personality and her and Priscilla often spar for the "queen" position of our household. My third cat is also my newest arrival. His name is Ossie and he is the most handsome orange and white tabby cat. All three of my cats are indoor-outdoor cats. I've had many cats over the years and they have all been indoor-outdoor. I really can't imagine keeping a cat indoors -- they would drive me crazy! I have had people and my veterinarian tell me that my cats will be safer if I keep them indoors. I can understand how it might reduce the risk of them getting hurt, but let me tell you, my cats are S-M-A-R-T. Why, just the other day I found Ossie on the kitchen counter opening the cupboard where I keep his treats. They are just so clever I know they do their best to protect themselves outside. It is true that I have lost cats in the past, but I have come to accept that as a part of having kitties in my life. Priscilla is almost 10 now and she's not moving around as well as she used to. She hasn't brought me a bird or a rodent in a couple of years now. Occasionally, Ossie will bring me a lizard or a bird. But Jasmine, she's the real bird hunter. She's so quick! I do feel bad when she gets wildlife. I certainly don't want to harm other animals, but my babies need to go outside! It really is part of their culture and wellbeing.

Damian: Gardener and bird watcher

Hello there, I'm Damian and I am a single dad to three amazing kids. Part of keeping my kids engaged in our community means visiting parks and green spaces to learn and stay healthy. My girls love seeing the birds on our backyard feeder and this year we have enjoyed growing some of our own food from a small raised garden bed on the porch of our apartment. The garden and our bird feeders have acted like a haven for wildlife and I am wowed at how many different animals come and visit. It's been a great learning experience for us. However, my neighbor is causing me grief. She has three cats who she lets outdoors, and she feeds ALL of the feral cats around our apartment complex. The cats have been coming on to my porch and using our garden as a litter box AND sitting on our fresh vegetables. On top of that, they've been killing the birds who come to our feeder, which has caused my kids to be very upset on multiple occasions. I've tried talking to my neighbor about not feeding the feral cats, but she says it's my problem for having a bird feeder and a garden. I've tried working with her to address the issue, but she hasn't been willing to work with me at all. I recently called animal services about the feral cats. They came out to trap the cats so that they could neuter/spay them and then re-release them. While I understand the attempt at population control, this did nothing to ease my problem. I still have multiple cats in my yard, killing the wildlife I am trying to attract and peeing in my garden. I am really fed up with these feral cats and I am considering using poison to get rid of them.