



*Bringing back the birds*

6/27/2022

The Honorable Michael Thompson  
Economic and Community Development Committee  
Toronto City Council  
100 Queen Street West, Suite B31  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Chair Thompson and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of American Bird Conservancy and our members, I am writing to express our **opposition to proposed amendments to Toronto Municipal Code Ch. 349 regarding domestic cats (*Felis catus*)**. The proposed language would not only be a death sentence for Toronto's wildlife but also put cats and people in danger.

As currently written, the proposed amendments to Ch. 349 regarding cats would do the following:

1. Authorize cats to run at large within the city (§ 349-6D), and
2. Eliminate the City of Toronto's ability to protect its residents from nuisances and damages caused by at-large cats (§ 349-20A).

Cats can make wonderful pets, but they are also instinctive predators that can have devastating impacts on wildlife. Cats are among the world's most harmful invasive species and have contributed to the extinction of 63 species of birds, mammals, and reptiles.<sup>i</sup> In Canada, cats kill an estimated 200 million birds every year and are the top source of direct, human-caused bird mortality.<sup>ii</sup> Even well-fed cats will hunt and kill wildlife, and the impacts are 4-10x greater than impacts from native predators.<sup>iii</sup> Cats not only directly kill a wide variety of wildlife but also contribute to indirect impacts, such as behavioral disruptions and competition. Authorizing cats to run at large in Toronto will enable tremendous harm to vulnerable wildlife.

Cats that run at large are also more likely to cause nuisances and damages, whether that be to property, pets, or people. For example, cats can transmit a variety of infectious parasites and diseases to other animals and people, and cats that roam outdoors are nearly three times more likely to be infected with parasites.<sup>iv</sup> In western Canada, at-large cats were more likely to host infectious endoparasites, and research in the United States has shown that at-large cats may not only host a large number of parasites but also pose a serious risk for human infections, especially to at-risk populations such as children.<sup>v,vi,vii</sup>

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by infection with the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. Cats play a critical role in the parasite's life cycle by transmitting the parasite's eggs into the environment via their feces. A single cat can excrete up to hundreds of millions of these eggs, which can then infect any bird or mammal. In people, toxoplasmosis can cause miscarriages, fetal deformities,

blindness, organ failure, and death. This parasite is the reason that women are advised to avoid changing cat litter boxes while pregnant, but policies that facilitate cats roaming the outdoors turn the entire environment into one, giant litter box, and subsequent outbreaks of the disease have occurred in Canada and other countries.<sup>viii</sup>

The proposed amendments to Ch. 349 regarding cats do not reflect veterinary, animal welfare, or conservation best practices. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, for example, “recommends that veterinarians discourage the unsupervised roaming of owned cats due to the health and welfare risks to individual cats, their potential contribution to the stray and feral populations, impacts on wildlife populations, and increased zoonotic public health risk.”<sup>ix</sup>

For the reasons listed above, **I strongly urge you to oppose authorizing cats to run at large and eliminating the City’s ability to protect residents from damages and nuisances.**

Thank you for your consideration,



Grant Sizemore, M.S., CWB®  
Director of Invasive Species Programs

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- <sup>i</sup> [Doherty T.S., A.S. Glen, D.G. Nimmo, E.G. Ritchie, and C.R. Dickman. 2016. Invasive predators and global biodiversity loss. PNAS 113\(40\): 11261-11265.](#)
- <sup>ii</sup> [Blancher P. 2013. Estimated number of birds killed by house cats \(\*Felis catus\*\) in Canada. Avian Conservation and Ecology 8\(2\): 3.](#)
- <sup>iii</sup> [Kays R., R.R. Dunn, A.W. Parsons, B. McDonald, T. Perkins, S.A. Powers, L. Shell, J.L. McDonald, H. Cole, H. Kikillus, L. Woods, H. Tindle, and P. Roetman. 2020. The small home ranges and large local ecological impacts of pet cats. Animal Conservation 23\(5\): 516-523.](#)
- <sup>iv</sup> [Chalkowski K.E., A.E. Wilson, C.A. Lepczyk, and S. Zohdy. 2019. Who let the cats out? A global meta-analysis on risk of parasitic infection in indoors versus outdoor domestic cats \(\*Felis catus\*\). Biology Letters 15: 20180840.](#)
- <sup>v</sup> [Hoopes J., J.E. Hill, L. Polley, C. Fernando, B. Wagner, J. Schurer, and E. Jenkins. 2015. Enteric parasites of free-roaming, owned, and rural cats in prairie regions of Canada. Canadian Veterinary Journal 56: 495-501.](#)
- <sup>vi</sup> [Taetzsch S.J., K.R. Gruszynski, A.S. Bertke, J.P. Dubey, K.A. Monti, A.M. Zajac, and D.S. Lindsay. 2018. Prevalence of zoonotic parasites in feral cats of Central Virginia, USA. Zoonoses and Public Health 65: 728-735.](#)
- <sup>vii</sup> [Taetzsch S.J., A.S. Bertke, and K.R. Gruszynski. 2018. Zoonotic disease transmission associated with feral cats in a metropolitan area: a geospatial analysis. Zoonoses and Public Health 65: 412-419.](#)
- <sup>viii</sup> [Boyer K., D. Hill, E. Mui, K. Wroblewski, T. Karrison, J.P. Dubey, M. Sautter, A.G. Noble, S. Withers, C. Swisher, P. Heydemann, T. Hosten, J. Babiarz, D. Lee, P. Meier, and R. McLeod. 2011. Unrecognized ingestion of \*Toxoplasma gondii\* oocysts leads to congenital toxoplasmosis and causes epidemics in North America. Clinical Infectious Diseases 53\(11\): 1081-1089.](#)
- <sup>ix</sup> [Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. 2020. Free-roaming Owned, Abandoned, and Feral Cats. Position Statement \(accessed 6/24/2022\).](#)