

Submission to Economic and Community Development Committee

Re: Item EC31.5, Updates to Chapter 349, Animals,

Date: July 6, 2022

Submitted by:

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Points of clarification

- Free-roaming pet cats versus feral (street) cats pose separate challenges with different solutions.
- Pet cats roam outside because of choices made by their owners; feral cats live outside permanently and are often subsidized by people.
- The proposed update to the animal control by-law would primarily impact pet cats that would no longer be taken off the street / potentially returned to owners, and may increase the likelihood of pet owners allowing their cats to roam. Feral cats will continue to require management to limit population growth.

**Instead of freely allowing pet cats to roam,
Toronto can reduce stress on animal shelters by:**

- **Characterizing the problem.** Why are shelters overwhelmed? Where are resources lacking? What data are available, and what does the data show?
- **Following evidence, advice from experts and current science.** How do other municipalities solve this problem? What does the literature recommend?

London, Ontario restricts cats from roaming. Why can't Toronto?



London
CANADA

Animal Control By-law - PH-3

4.11 Animal - running at large

No person shall permit any animal to run at large.

How does this by-law help free-roaming pet cats in London?

*Trapped in my backyard
(near bird feeders)*



Cat surrendered to
London Animal
Care Centre



Owner is contacted,
pays fine and
receives education

<2 weeks later, one street over



Instead of freely allowing pet cats to roam, Toronto can reduce stress on animal shelters by:

- **Characterizing the problem.** Why are shelters overwhelmed? Where are resources lacking? What data are available, and what does the data show?
- **Following evidence, advice from experts and current science.** How do other municipalities solve this problem? What does the literature recommend?
- **Promoting public education.** Reducing numbers of roaming of pet cats and associated complaints requires changing pet owners' behaviour. Low-cost solutions can help complainants to achieve desired outcomes without requiring by-law enforcement.

Anonymous template letter addressed to owner of roaming pet cat

Hello Neighbour,

If you are reading this letter, it's because I have reason to believe you have been allowing your pet cat to roam outside. I'm reaching out to you to share my **deep concern for your cat's safety** and wellbeing, and to offer some suggestions to help you keep your cat happy, healthy and safe. As a fellow cat lover, I hope you consider lending me 2 minutes of your time to hear me out!

Have you ever thought about how you might feel if your cat didn't return home one day?

Unfortunately, this is extremely common. The average life expectancy for pet cats that are kept indoors is 10-15 years, while cats allowed to roam outside live on average for only 2-5 years ([source](#)). Only 10% of cats that become lost outside and are admitted to a shelter will ever be reunited with their owner ([source](#)).

Cats are viewed as very independent animals that are supported by strong instincts they evolved as predators. However, pet cats are no match for the wide variety of severe, unpredictable hazards they can encounter while roaming in urban and suburban areas.

In London, pet cats that wander unsupervised outside are susceptible to the following threats:

- Collisions with vehicles;
- Attacks by dogs, other roaming cats, racoons, skunks;
- Eaten by wild coyotes, hawks, other raptors;
- Contracting pests such as fleas, ticks, lice or internal parasites such as worms;
- Intact cats may become impregnated;
- Contracting infectious diseases such as feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV);
- Contracting toxoplasmosis, a disease that develops from a parasite found in cat feces that can be transmitted to humans;
- Environmental irritants (e.g. poison ivy);
- Extreme weather- freezing, heat waves;
- Drowning in bodies of water or floods;
- Stepping on broken glass or other sharps;
- Poisoning, such as by eating mice or rats contaminated with rat poison;
- Starvation or dehydration, especially if accidentally trapped in confined spaces such as dumpsters;
- Theft, injury or death by people with cruel intentions.

In addition to the threats above, your cat may be captured and impounded at the London Animal Care Center. [City of London Animal Control By-Law PH-3](#) prohibits allowing pets (including cats) to run at large. To retrieve your cat, you will need to pay a significant fine.

Do you identify as a person who loves animals? Allowing your pet cat to roam outside unsupervised is extremely harmful to wildlife and biodiversity. Did you know:

- Although domestic cats are animals, they *cannot* be considered "part of nature" in North America according to scientists. Unlike wild felines like bobcats, domestic cats (like your pet) were introduced here by humans less than two centuries ago. Wildlife that evolved in ecosystems here over millions of years have no defenses against domestic cats.
- Free-roaming domestic cats have already caused the extinctions of at least 36 species of birds, mammals and lizards ([source](#))
- It is estimated that 100 million to 350 million wild birds per year in Canada are killed by domestic cats. Hunting by cats is the biggest human-caused source of bird deaths. ([source](#))

- 1/4 bird species in Canada are vulnerable to predation by cats including 23 species listed as being at risk of extinction ([source](#))
- A recent analysis from Australia found that on average, each roaming pet cat killed 186 reptiles, birds and mammals per year ([source](#))
- Most cat owners are not aware of how many wild animals their pet kills, because only a fraction of kills are brought home. Your cat may behave docile while around its human companions, but when exposed to wildlife that it recognizes as prey, your pet's predatory instincts will take over.

There are solutions for letting cats be outdoors!

Being allowed outside is something that many cats seem to really enjoy. You can absolutely continue to allow your cat to enjoy fresh air and sunshine, while making simple changes to keep them safe, healthy, and out of trouble:

- Many cats can be **trained to wear a harness and walk on a leash**, just like a dog! It is easier to train cats while they are young, but adult cats can be trained as well. [Click here for instructions on how to train your cat to wear a harness and walk on a leash.](#)
- You can purchase or build an **outdoor enclosure for your cat**. Sometimes called a "catio", a variety of design options are available to help you create a safe outdoor space for your cat to hang out. [See here for more information about cat enclosures.](#)
- Cats can be comfortably transported outside while traveling in a backpack or other carrier. Some people enjoy walking their cat inside a stroller or wagon. [Learn more by clicking here.](#)

The following authorities on animal welfare recommend against allowing cats to roam outside:

[American Association of Feline Practitioners](#) [Canadian Veterinary Medical Association](#)
[Nature Canada \(Cats and Birds\)](#) [Canadian Federation of Humane Societies](#)
[Ontario SPCA and Humane Society](#)

I hope that the information in this letter can be of use to you, and that you will consider changing the way in which you allow your pet cat to be outside. As biodiversity and wildlife are experiencing significant declines, especially in urban areas, it's up to *everyone* – including owners of pet cats – to take responsibility for protecting nature in our community.

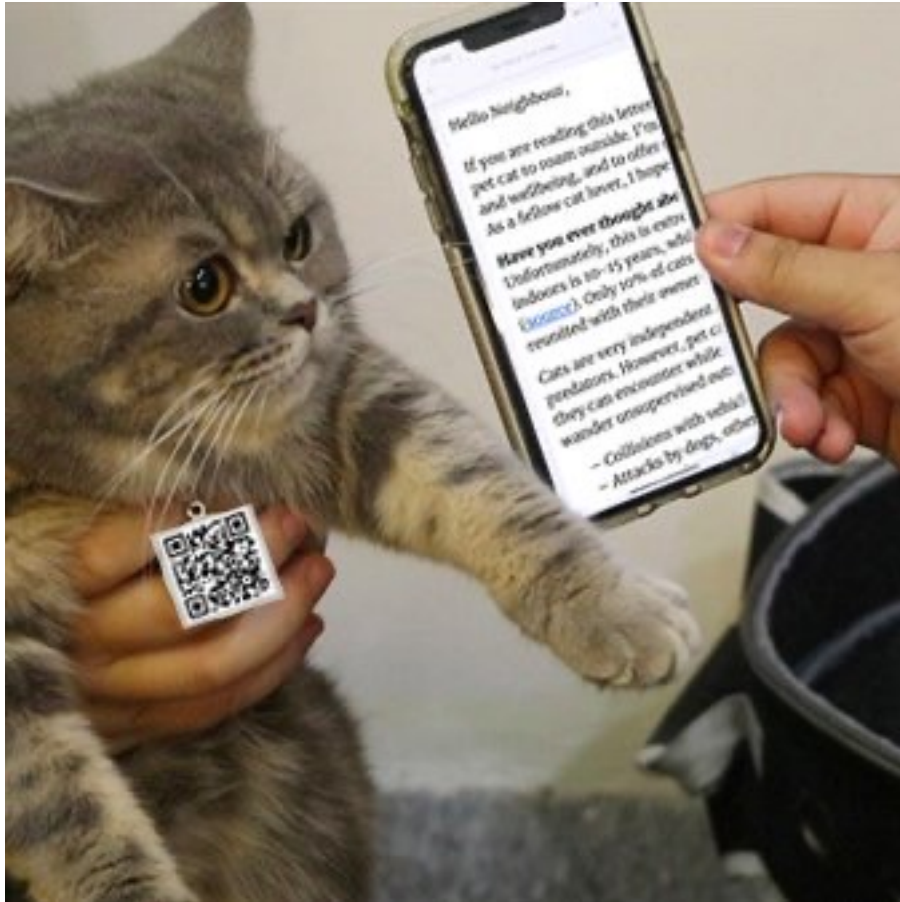
With kind regards and best wishes to both you and your cat,

- An Anonymous Neighbour

More information about keeping cats and wildlife safe can be found at the links below:

- www.birdfriendlylondon.ca/cats-and-birds provides information about where to buy supplies for taking cats outside in London.
- www.abcbirds.org/cats-indoors has great information about solutions for taking cats outside.
- www.catsandbirds.ca/about offers lots of helpful information and resources.

Letter can be linked to QR code attached to cat collars



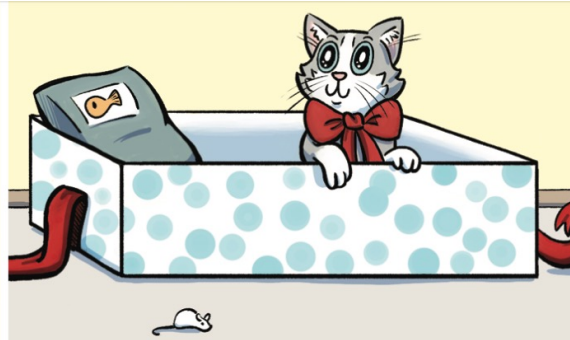
Education pamphlet for owners of new pet cats

Your Best 9 Lives: Information for New Cat Owners



Congratulations on your new feline companion!
Help your cat prepare for a long, healthy life by taking steps early in your relationship.

Information provided by
 **BIRD FRIENDLY CITY**
LONDON, ON
Scan using phone camera
birdfriendlylondon.ca
Artwork by Deven Hoover



Your first months with your new pet are some of the most special time you have together. This period is also an important opportunity to develop good habits while your cat is young and easier to train.



Just like children and dogs, many cats express interest in being outside.

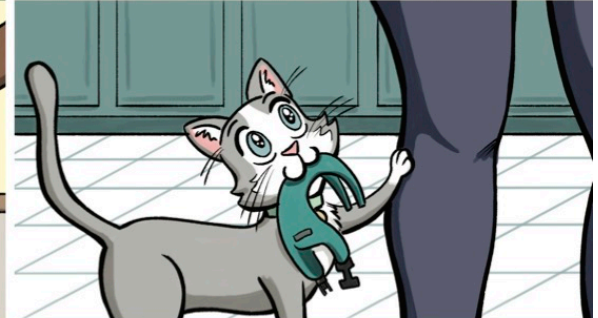
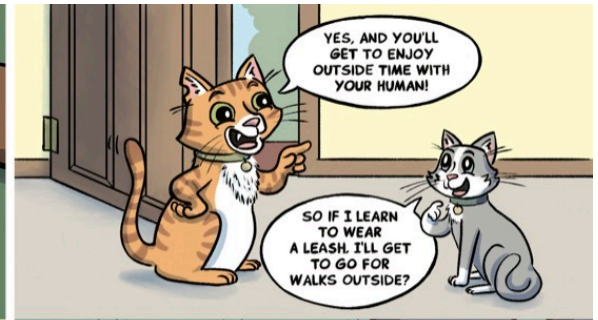


However, allowing your pet cat to roam outside without supervision is **extremely dangerous** for both your cat and for wildlife that your cat may hunt like birds and small mammals.



Education pamphlet for owners of new pet cats

Cats roaming outside may encounter many dangers that can cause them to be injured, poisoned, traumatized or killed. Sadly, many pet cats who wander away from home will never return.

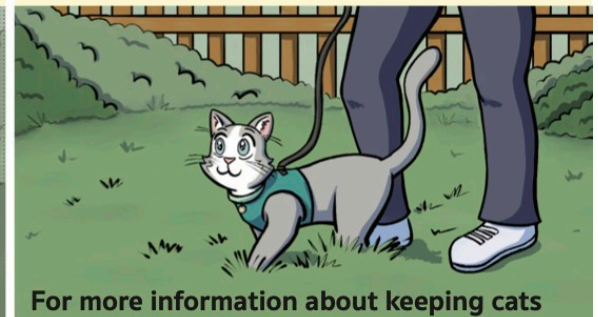


Adult cats can be more difficult, but not impossible, to train to wear a leash and harness. Cats of any age can still enjoy being outside, but they should be kept contained and/or supervised at all times.

Young cats will quickly learn to wear a leash and harness. Once trained, your cat may ask to be taken outside for regular walks. Being outside together is great exercise and promotes your cat's overall wellbeing.



For cats that won't wear a leash, you can create a "catio" space outside where they can be safely contained while still enjoying sunshine and nature.



For more information about keeping cats safe, including instructions for training cats to wear a leash and harness, please visit:

www.catsandbirds.ca
www.birdfriendlylondon.ca/cats-and-birds

Recommendations:

- Uphold the current animal control by law and continue to prohibit owners of pet cats from allowing their animals to roam outside. Treat cats the same as dogs.
- Convene an advisory group of community and subject experts to study the problem, then develop and implement solutions (e.g., Feral Cat Coalition).
- Where appropriate, recognize domestic cats as an introduced invasive species in the City of Toronto that endangers biodiversity, people and property.
- Facilitate public education and awareness by highlighting positive pet owner behaviour (e.g., wearing a leash) and dangers of roaming (e.g., coyotes).