

PET CATS AND WILDLIFE

HELPING THEM BOTH TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE

If we want to enjoy native wildlife in our neighbourhood and backyard, we need to prevent our cats from hunting birds, frogs, possums and lizards. We can easily do this in a way that also improves the welfare of our beloved pets.

Why the concern with cats?

Cats are efficient hunters and when allowed outdoors, they love to hunt anything that moves, including native wildlife. Typical yards can't prevent a cat from roaming. Cats can roam many kilometres and, in doing so, hunt over a large area, including places important for wildlife.

Bells on cat collars don't prevent cats from harming wildlife because cats can learn to stalk without making them ring. Also, birds and other wildlife don't necessarily equate the tinkling of a bell with danger.

The great outdoors can also be unsafe for cats. Cats that are prevented from roaming will live, on average, up to four times longer than those that are allowed to roam. Cats are often struck by cars or injured by dogs, foxes, other cats and other causes.

When allowed to roam, our pets can also significantly affect the lives of our neighbours by making loud noises and by urinating or defecating on their property. Cat excrement can cause a serious infection called Toxoplasmosis (*T. gondii*) in wildlife and humans. Cats kept indoors that do not hunt prey are not likely to be infected with *T. gondii* and are much less likely to come into contact with other diseases.

A roaming cat can also be a hassle. If your cat is found on another person's property more than once, it may be seized and impounded. A fine may be payable to retrieve the cat from the pound. Councils may also issue orders to an owner to stop a cat trespassing and issue a fine for non-compliance. In addition, the City of Bayside regulations require the confinement of cats between 8pm and 6am (or between 9pm and 6am during daylight savings).

What can we do?

Confine our cat both day and night. Cats can live happily indoors, or in a suitable outdoor enclosure, or both. What is more important than total freedom to roam, is providing a stimulating environment that meets a cat's physical, mental and social needs.

Cat enclosures

The RSPCA highly recommends outdoor cat enclosures. Outdoor enclosures provide stimulation for a cat through fresh air, sunshine, scents and sounds and a different exercise area. Cat owners are now recognising that such enclosures can also provide more opportunities for them to spend more time with their pets while enjoying the outdoors.

An enclosure can provide the owner and the cat increased freedom and control, particularly if it is attached to a cat flap to the house which can either be left open or shut at particular times.

Cat enclosures can range in size and complexity from a small window box which allows a cat to easily move outside to sit in the fresh air, to an extensive pen containing a jungle gym or a cubby house,

and anything in between. Enclosures can contain plants and seating for owners. The possibilities are endless and designs can complement your house and garden.

Outdoor enclosures can be home-made, custom made or can be bought off the shelf. Plans can be found on the internet to enable DIY construction (e.g. refer to Victorian State Government Department of Agriculture) .

Enclosures don't need to be a permanent structure, although this would be preferable. You can buy a range of portable enclosures which allow your cat to play outside, whilst under your supervision.

A Testimonial from Karen and Iccy

"When I bought my new home, I wanted the best of both worlds – lots of native wildlife in the garden and a healthy, stimulating and safe environment for Iccy. Iccy is a "rescue cat" and, as a result of a traumatic kittenhood, can be very reclusive.

I found a brilliant, specialist cat enclosure builder, who worked with me to design an enclosure attached to a cat flap which I can leave open during the day and close at night. The enclosure adjoins my outdoor deck so my friends, Iccy and I can enjoy the outdoors together. The enclosure also incorporates an existing tree trunk and shrubs which provide opportunities for Iccy to climb and fossick around. A "tightrope" encourages Iccy to practice balance. He loves the platforms and hammock for exercising and relaxing".

Karen loves to watch Iccy play and relax outdoors. She has since installed a barrier at ground level to stop small lizards from entering. She also rescued another cat, Lucy, who quickly discovered the joys of the enclosure.



Iccy and his outdoor playground connected to the house with a cat flap(which he wants his owner to open please)

Further information at: <https://www.bayfonw.org.au/g4ws/cats>