

Professor Rob Simmons of UCT supervised MA student Sharon George's thesis. He presented a short course at UCT Summer School in 2010 and the local media reported the findings of this study. We at TUFCAT, along with other cat lovers were very disturbed by the overall tone of this research and the subsequent reports in local newspapers. We hope that in the foreseeable future we can conduct our own study, which will hopefully help to balance these extreme views and in so doing emphasise the supportive role that cats play in human society.

In our view, the attitudes expressed by these individuals serve to malign cats even further. Their proposals for managing the cat over population and feral problem are ridiculous and amongst other things, include legislating against feeding stray cats. In other words they believe that by punishing the carers, you can solve the stray cat problem.

George's research extrapolates the kill rates from a few cats into huge estimates of prey killed by cats in general. The study is based on the activities of around 70 cats, 40% of which (by her own admission) never hunt. The cat, a species known to be indiscriminate killers, predators, destroyers of wildlife and a threat to biodiversity, yet a whopping 40% of them don't hunt at all! ***Now that is a significant statistic!!!***

We at TUFCAT, like other cat lovers and carers know that cats are scavengers more than predators. But, we are also aware of the ambiguity of people's attitudes towards cats and responses to them are often a mixture of "*affection, fear and distaste.*"

Cats (and their wild nature) threaten to disturb the urban order. Feral cats in particular often live on the fringes of civilization, occupy 'marginal spaces' and cannot easily be managed, which some find unsettling. In a study titled, "*Feral cats in the city,*" Griffiths *et al* (2000) argue that "*representations of feral cats in their relationship with the built environment and urban wilderness provide a commentary on attitudes to nature and civilization.*" In other words, human responses to cats (including ferals) are affected by their views on the environment and the ways in which they see cats (wild or domesticated). The interplay between understandings of nature and the nature of cats determines opinions as to whether cats belong or not. It is at this level that social science is helpful and the insights of disciplines like psychology, sociology and anthropology can help us move away from the limitations of biological knowledge alone when trying to deal with environmental challenges such as those posed by cats. If we can come to a better understanding of humans and their social interactions with their environment and everything in it, including other animal species, then we will be better equipped to solve 'conservation' problems. The moral reasoning and moral functioning, which lie in the heart of human-nature relationships

need to be taken into account.

As the Rev. Professor Andrew Linzey of University of Oxford, England puts it, *“In the name of biodiversity, these ‘managers’ regularly kill one form of life in order to ‘allow’ another to survive...perhaps populations rise and crash as a matter of course...we seem to have forgotten...that it is a self-regulating system. [And] in the end, everything depends upon our own moral vision of ourselves in the world of nature. I believe that we should be not the master species, but the servant species. That means as little interference as possible, and only then with genuinely benign intentions. Biodiversity is a classic tale of how an idealized view of the world can result in individual harm.”*

Conservationists want to ‘manage nature’ and preserve ‘bio-diversity’ at all costs. They tend to see nature as something that has to be ‘conserved,’ ordered and controlled. Nature is something that belongs in a reserve and is separate from civilization or society. Cats exist in both but to them belong in neither as they straddle the boundaries of wildness and domestication. They transgress the borders between nature and culture and because they don’t stay in their ‘proper’ place, they are seen to constitute a threat to both nature and society. They are neither pets nor wildlife and they are the scapegoat of choice when it comes to ecosystem damage.

We concur with Animal People, *“The humane cause is about preventing suffering. A species does not suffer; individual animals suffer. Organizations which favor causing individual animals to suffer in the name of conservation should accordingly receive no support from any humane donor.”*

Source: www.animalpeoplenews.org

While we acknowledge that outdoor cats do occasionally kill birds and other wildlife, the main cause of species decline is habitat loss, which is caused by humans, not cats. For example in 2002, National Geographic News reported that *“the declining bird populations reflect growing threats to many bird species resulting from habitat loss and fragmentation caused by development and other human activities.”*

Source: www.nationalgeographic.com

Moreover, conservation groups and government biologists estimate that communications towers (cell phone, television etc.) kill millions of birds a year and at least 50 species are threatened or endangered as a direct result thereof. The construction of new towers also creates a potentially significant impact on migratory birds.

Furthermore, two French researchers Drs. Anders Moller and Johannes Erritzoe of the Universite et Marie Cure in Paris conducted a study which compared birds killed by cats to those that met accidental deaths by crashing into windows. They examined the birds for various factors, the most significant of which was the health of the bird. They found that while windows were non-discriminating and killed healthy and sickly birds equally, the birds cats killed were significantly sicker than those who crashed into windows.

Source: www.economist.com

Subsequent studies have predicted that reducing cat populations would actually cause more harm to birds due to a resulting increase in rat populations. A Columbia University study (2001) found that *“reducing cats’ effect on the ecosystem may actually have a negative impact upon some native species due to the possibility of ‘mesopredator release effect’*. The study also recommended that we confront the cat population problem with a combination of methods: *“enlist the “trap-neuter-return style of feral management and combine it with incentives for owners to sterilise their pet cats.*

Those who blame cats for killing birds and other wildlife also believe that eradication programs work and are necessary in controlling cat populations. But, history has shown us that complete eradication does not work because it causes a “vacuum effect,” meaning, with a few short months, other stray cats quickly move in and fill the vacated territories and start the breeding process over again. Roger Tabor discusses this phenomenon saying, “*Although a total ‘wipe-out’ often appeals to authorities due to its apparent simplicity, it normally fails, as it does not allow for biological reality, and worse, is often counter-productive.*”

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