



# Cats and Birds: Creating A Safe Backyard Bird Habitat

## HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS

Besides bringing joy to birdwatchers, birds pollinate plants, spread seeds, and control insects. As we welcome them into our yards and living spaces with bird feeders, bird houses, and bird baths we must proceed with caution to protect our feathered guests from outdoor free-roaming cats in the neighborhood.

## OUTDOOR CATS & BIRDS: A BAD COMBO

Recognized as a threat to global biodiversity, outdoor domestic cats contribute to the extinction of many wild species of birds, mammals, and reptiles. In the U.S. alone, outdoor cats kill 2.4 billion birds every year which may seem unbelievable but it represents the combined impact of tens of millions of outdoor cats.  
– American Bird Conservancy

## TRAP, NEUTER, RELEASE PROGRAM

TNR is a program by which feral cats are trapped, spayed or neutered, and then released back into the environment where they were found. Rather than immediately reducing numbers through removal, TNR practitioners hope to slowly reduce populations over time. It's a hard life for these non-owned cats. Unfortunately, studies have shown that these feral cat populations can



Watercolor by Julie Zickefoose from her book, *The Bluebird Effect: Uncommon Bonds with Common Birds*.

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*“Any avian rehabilitator can tell you that when catching a bird, house cats almost always bite down hard on the right wing where it joins the birds body, crushing the shoulder joint so that their prey is instantly and permanently disabled. Birds die by the hundreds of millions and more than 1 billion small mammals die every year at the claws of some of our 90 million pet cats (in the U.S.), tasty supplements to their bowls of dry cat chow, an anodyne for the boredom of house pets left to roam outdoors.”* – Julie Zickefoose, *The Bluebird Effect: Uncommon Bonds with Common Birds*

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persist or increase instead of slowly declining, continuing to risk wildlife and healthy ecosystems. – American Bird Conservancy

## INDOOR CATS LIVE LONGER

A good way to help wild animals and nature is to keep cats indoors. Studies show that indoor cats live much

longer than free-range cats. There are many dangers in the outside cat world: running away and getting lost, being hit by a car, fighting with other animals. Coyotes have been known to prey on cats even in the suburbs of the Bay Area. If they survive these traumas, the vet bills and medications can be expensive.

## CATIOS

Cats naturally want to be outside where they can experience the sights, sounds and stimulation of the natural world. A catio, an outdoor cat enclosure or “cat patio,” is the purrfect solution for the indoor/outdoor dilemma and keeps cats happier. Catio spaces provide a safe outdoor space for everyone. For catio design plans and suggestions visit [CatioSpaces.com](http://CatioSpaces.com)



The OASIS DIY Catio Plan & Cat Tunnel by Catio Spaces; 8x8, 8x10.

## HAPPY INDOOR CATS

Some people believe that bird people do not like cats but that is not true. Many people who enjoy birds also own cats, however they do not appreciate someone else’s cat entering their property and killing wildlife. It can be preventable if everyone did their part. A comfortable viewing area near a window with a direct view to the feeders is fun for the cat and safe for the birds.



## WE ASKED OUR CUSTOMERS

Many backyard birders express powerlessness when they look into their own yard and witness a free-roaming cat snatching birds off their bird bath, plucking hummingbirds out of the flower bed, or snatching birds from a seed feeder. People ask us for help, so we surveyed our customers and here are some effective ways they deter cats:

“The best way to get rid of cats in my yard is to trap them and take them to the Santa Clara Humane Society. They check for a chip and call the owners. There’s a charge to retrieve their pets which helps to encourage cat owners to keep a closer watch on their cats.”

“I placed a *Cat Scat Mat* on the ground under my feeders. It’s a roll of flexible plastic spikes in mat form that is uncomfortable under paws.”

“I just let our dogs outside and they chase the cat away.”

“We wrapped our bird bath with chicken wire so there’s a wall of wire around the bath. The birds can still fly in, safely drink and bathe without the fear of a cat pouncing.”



Bird bath wrapped in chicken wire can protect birds from predatory cats.

### HAVE YOU HEARD THE SUPERSOAKER FULL OF WHITE VINEGAR TRICK?

Super-soakers have a very long range. Fill it with white vinegar then spray toward stray cats in your yard. The vinegar is harmless as the cat licks its fur clean but it will remember getting sprayed, thinking twice before returning to your yard.

— *Tip from Carrol Henderson, retired director/supervisor for the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources*

“To prevent a cat from jumping up and snagging a feeding bird, I cut up orange (or green) plastic temporary fencing, attach it to the base of the feeder so that it protrudes several inches on all sides from the feeder base.”

“The neighbor’s cats hid in the shrubs that line our walk-way so we edged our walk-way with low garden fencing. This obstacle slows down a cat giving birds time to escape.”

## MORE CAT DETERRENTS

- To deter cats from crouching under bird feeders or baths, place thorny rose bush clippings or a wire “pigeon poker” deterrent or apply a product called “Nature’s Wisdom Orange Oil Concentrate” to the ground area.

- If cats are hiding under your shrubbery, trim it up at the base so cats have no place to hide and birds can see them easier.

- Find a cat harness to use for walking your cat outside.

## LOS GATOS BIRDWATCHER

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