

Summary Points from Peter Marra and Chris Santella

The authors in no way condone or support the inhumane treatment of any animal. Pete Marra has devoted his life to the study and protection of all animals, including cats.

Core issues and arguments

- Currently, in the United States, there are an estimated to be 90 million owned cats and between 60 to 100 million free-ranging, unowned cats. The numbers of outdoor cats in the US has never been higher.
- It is clearly inhumane to let cats roam freely. Outdoor cats get hit by cars, preyed upon other animals, and can contract – and spread - a variety of diseases. Data on unowned outdoor cats suggest that 50 to 75 percent of kittens born outdoors do not survive to adulthood. If kittens do reach adulthood, their life expectancy is just two years without caregivers providing regular food and water. Even with this intervention, life expectancy is around 6 years, less than half that of indoor cats.
- The impacts of cat predation on bird and other wildlife populations, on both islands and mainland, are well documented. Cats have caused **a minimum of 33 global extinctions**, and significant number of declines of at least another 142 species of reptiles, birds, and mammals. A study published in 2013, in the peer-reviewed journal *Nature Communications* (with Marra as senior author), confirmed that cats kill an estimated 1.3-4.0 (with a median of 2.4) billion birds per year, with the majority of the mortality (69%) caused by unowned cats. Mammal mortality is equally alarming with 6.3 to 22.3 (with a median of 12.3) billion mammals killed every year by outdoor cats. Mortality for amphibians and reptiles is in the hundreds of millions – at 95 to 299 million amphibians, and 258 to 822 million reptiles per year, respectively.
- Cats can also pose a threat to public health from potential transmission of diseases, most significantly Toxoplasmosis. *Toxoplasma* is a protozoan parasite that reproduces sexually exclusively in felids. Dispersal into the environment occurs in the form of many millions of microscopic oocysts in cat feces. The oocysts can persist for years and are able to withstand harsh environmental conditions. Unintended hosts, such as gardeners and children, can ingest *Toxoplasma* oocysts and become infected (11%-22% of all Americans are estimated to be infected). Oocysts divide and spread, eventually lodging in various parts of the brain, with the potential to alter brain chemistry. A growing body of literature now strongly suggests that toxoplasmosis infection is responsible for a range of mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and increased risk of suicide. *Toxoplasma* oocysts also infect wildlife and have caused significant mortality in species such as the endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal and threatened Sea Otters.
- Most importantly, the book outlines a clear agenda for tackling these problems moving forward (and the consequences of inaction). This includes addressing the persistent issue of pet abandonment, stopping the failed practice of trap-neuter-return, and removing cats from particularly sensitive conservation areas with highly vulnerable wildlife populations.