

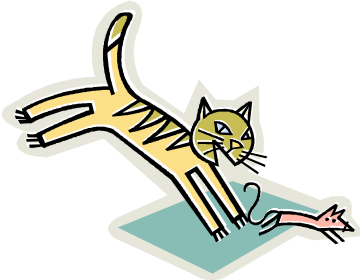
Hunting

Why do Cats Hunt?

Cats have evolved over thousands of years to be one of the most effective and efficient hunters on land. This must be kept in mind when you are considering your pet's impact on our native fauna. Your cat is not being evil or cruel by hunting, he or she is simply doing what a cat was designed to do.

Once this concept is taken on board, it becomes clear that if a cat is having a negative impact on our wonderful native animals, the responsibility lies not with the cat, but with the owner. This must be considered when making the decision to add a cat to your family – you must be prepared to take steps to keep our fauna and your cat safe. If the idea of cats hunting upsets you, and you are reluctant to have animals inside the house, you may wish to reconsider the idea of acquiring or keeping a cat as a pet.

Not every cat will hunt. Some co-inhabit quite peacefully with native animals and small domestic pets alike. Some theories suggest this is because they learn to hone their innate skills by watching other cats, particularly their mother. If they never see other cats hunting around them when they are young, they are less likely to develop the skill themselves. Unless you have detailed knowledge of a kitten's lineage and experiences from birth to 12 weeks old, it will be extremely difficult to predict if a cat will be a hunter or not. You should assume that every cat may hunt.



Contrary to popular belief, a cat's urge to hunt is not triggered by hunger, but by movement. This is why cats will often "toy" with their victims. The cat is not being sadistic; it is simply that movement prompts the behaviour. Even the best fed cats may still hunt.

Recognising prey as food is a learned behaviour. If cats have not learned that fact by the time they have reached maturity, they probably will never figure it out. This won't necessarily stop them hunting, it just makes them unlikely to consume their prey.

How to Protect Wildlife and Keep Your Cat Happy

If your cat has already demonstrated the capacity to be an effective hunter then there are steps you can take to protect wildlife. Most options will involve a change in the cat's lifestyle, so be prepared for a period of adjustment.

The RSPCA recommends at the very least a cat should be fitted with identification and bells on their collar. Please note that bells will not prevent your cat from hunting. A clever hunter can work out how to move so the bells don't give them away. The bells merely act as a deterrent or an early warning for fauna that a cat is about. They should be confined

indoors before dusk and until after dawn. Many Australian native mammals are more active between these hours, so keeping your cat indoors will minimise their exposure to these creatures, and also significantly reduce the likelihood of your cat being hit by a car, or injured in a cat fight.

The easiest method of preventing your cat from hunting is to confine it indoors. Given the correct stimulation and environment, a cat can live a happy and fulfilled life without ever setting foot outside. A cat that has lived an outdoor life previously will take longer to adjust to an indoor lifestyle than one that has always been indoors.

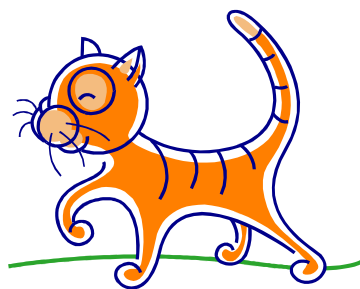


To make the transition easier on both you and the cat, you must provide them with an environment that allows it to display all their natural behaviours: running, climbing, scratching, batting, stalking, ambushing, chasing, carrying small objects and hiding. This will not only help them adjust to an indoor life, but will mean their new life is just as exciting and fulfilling as their outdoor one was. See “Entertaining your Feline Friend” help sheet for more information.

For a more “natural” approach that is still safe for your cat and for the native fauna, you can try investing in a cat enclosure such as a Cat Max™. Such enclosures allow your cat access to the great outdoors, while keeping them – and wildlife - safe. They can be made as large or small as required to fit your living situation.

You may also be able to train your cat to walk on a harness and lead. This will allow your cat the ability to explore the outdoors under complete supervision.

It is possible to enjoy the company of a feline friend and our amazing wildlife at the same time. You just might find that by following the suggestions above you and your cat will develop a very special relationship that you may not have expected.



If you like further information about keeping a happy indoor cat or understanding your cat’s behaviour please contact RSPCA Animal Training Centre staff on (07) 3426 9928 during office hours.