



Community Cats and Nuisance Behavior

Through no fault of their own, many cats roam. Whether they're owned (pets), lost and abandoned pets (strays) or unsocialized and fear people (ferals), some of their natural behaviors – especially if they're not spayed and neutered – aren't always pleasant.

The Humane Society of the United States believes that owned cats should be spayed and neutered before they can reproduce; kept indoors, safely confined to their property or walked on a harness and leash; and provided with a collar and visible identification. These actions will protect cats and wildlife, prevent nuisance behaviors, and stem the tide of cat overpopulation.

We also support Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and other sterilization programs to humanely reduce unowned community cat populations. With TNR, nuisance behaviors are reduced or eliminated because cats no longer reproduce or fight over mates and marking is diminished.

If you're frustrated with roaming cats, there are several things you can do to humanely deter them.

Complaint: Cats are getting into my trash

Cause: Cats are hungry.

Solution: Put garbage in a container with a lid that locks in place

Complaint: Cats are digging in my yard

Cause: Cats are covering up their feces and urine in soft loose materials such as mulch, sand or peat moss.

Solution: Bury objects that are uncomfortable for the cat to dig in, such as small-gauge chicken wire, a plastic carpet runner with the knobby side up, irregular shaped rock and pinecones. Spray or spread nontoxic cat repellent, available at pet and home supply stores, in targeted areas.

Complaint: Cats are sleeping under my house, deck, shed

Cause: Cats are looking for a warm and dry place where they are safe from predators.

Solution: Physically block or seal the location with chicken wire or lattice. Be certain no cats or kittens are inside.

Complaint: Cats are lounging in my yard or on my porch/deck/patio

Cause: Cats are territorial and remain close to their food source.

Solution: Apply cat repellent, such as Liquid Fence®, liberally around the edges of the yard, the tops of fences, and favorite digging areas. Install a motion-activated device, such as ScareCrow® to deliver a burst of water or CatStop® and Bird-X to deliver a burst of ultrasonic sound.

Complaint: Cats are leaving paw prints and/or scratches on my car

Cause: Cats like high places where they can safely observe their surroundings.

Solution: Park your car in the garage or buy a car cover.

Complaint: Cats are urinating and it smells

Cause: Male cats spray urine to mark their territory.

Solution: Spray the area thoroughly with white vinegar or a nontoxic product available at pet supply stores. The permanent solution is to neuter cats because that eliminates the strong smell of their urine.



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Complaint: Cats are yowling, fighting, spraying urine and having more kittens

Cause: These are mating behaviors and the results of mating.

Solution: Neutering male cats will eliminate the hormones that cause these behaviors and spaying female cats will stop the birth of kittens.

Complaint: Cats are attracting wildlife

Cause: Wildlife, such as raccoons, foxes, and skunks are attracted by cat food.

Solution: Find out who is feeding the cats and ask them to follow proper feeding guidelines (in addition to spaying and neutering the cats), which include only feeding cats what they can finish in one sitting, removing any remaining food and keeping the feeding area free of trash.

Complaint: Cats are killing birds I feed in my yard

Cause: Cats' natural instinct is to hunt prey.

Solutions:

- Position feeders at least 12 feet away from grass and shrubs, which can serve as good cat cover. If possible, place the feeders within 15 feet of trees, where birds can hide or flee from avian predators.
- If you can, hang feeders on a wire strung at least 8 feet above the ground, between two trees that are at least 8 feet apart.
- If your feeder is mounted on a pole, install a predator guard (a metal cone with the wide bottom facing down) to keep cats and other animals from climbing up.
- Place circular fences, about 2 feet high and 4 feet in diameter, on the ground directly below feeders to make it difficult for cats and predators to creep up on birds unseen.
- Use high-quality food that birds will be sure to devour, rather than let some of it fall to the ground, where it can attract other types of birds and make them vulnerable. Also install a spill tray to catch seeds.
- Put down sharp-edged gravel beneath feeders—or, under a shallow layer of dirt or mulch, bury small-gauge chicken wire, a plastic carpet runner with the knobby side up, or a deterrent mat such as a Cat Scat. Cats don't like walking on these types of irregular surfaces.
- Drive cats away from feeders with a motion-activated product that sends out a burst of water or high-pitched ultrasonic vibrations—in audible to humans but uncomfortable for cats.

Complaint: Cats are everywhere because my neighbor feeds them

Cause: Cats are searching for food in trash containers, litter and nature and caring people start to feed the cats.

Solution: Talk to your caring neighbor about [keeping pet cats indoors or confined to their property](#) and spaying and neutering community cats so that they don't reproduce. Spaying and neutering will mean fewer and healthier cats and [low-cost clinics](#) are available. Find a local TNR organization on our [map](#). Learn about community cats, successful Trap/Neuter/Return programs and much more by visiting [humanesociety.org/outdoorcats](https://www.humanesociety.org/outdoorcats).

Contact The Humane Society of the United States at cats@humanesociety.org for additional information and resources.