

# The Outdoor Cat

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## **DIETARY OVERLAP OF AN ALIEN AND NATIVE CARNIVORE ON SAN CLEMENTE ISLAND, CALIFORNIA**

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Predation by feral cats (*Felis catus*) is recognized as a major threat to native fauna worldwide, but the competitive effects of cats on native species have not been extensively studied. Cats occur on San Clemente Island, California, in sympatry with endemic island foxes (*Urocyon littoralis clementae*). We examined diets of cats and island foxes between years, seasons, and habitats to assess the potential for resource competition between the 2 species. Analysis of 602 cat and 958 fox feces revealed a high level of dietary overlap ( $O = 0.93$ ) and relatively

# Aggie Cat Services

**What is ACS?** Aggie Cat Services (**ACS**) is a committee of volunteers including faculty, staff, students, and community members. We are a non-profit organization that relies entirely on donations and committee fundraising. Our primary goal is to reduce the feral cat population on campus through a sustained and humane Trap-Neuter-Return-Maintain (**TNRM**) program.

**What is a feral cat?** Feral cats are domestic cats or the descendants of domestic cats that have reverted to a wild state. Feral cats are scared of humans and are often only seen at night around dumpsters and other scavenging areas. Contrary to popular belief, feral cats are not aggressive or dangerous unless overtly threatened.

**How did the cats get here?** Most feral cats start as household pets that were abandoned by their human owners. These owners may have been well intentioned but were probably not prepared for the many responsibilities of pet ownership, including the cost of food and supplies, veterinary care, and the time commitment. The abandoned cats breed and spawn a generation of cats that have not lived as pets.

**Where are the feral cats at USU?** There are a number of colonies on the USU campus concentrated near our family housing and Central Campus. The cats congregate around the feeding stations in these areas and give the impression of large concentrated populations. The reality is that the majority of these cats have been neutered and the overall population is being reduced.





# *Burrowing Owl*

*Yolo Audubon Society*

# Bottom line...

- Cats are here to stay!
  - Outdoor cat issues will never go away
- Cat management is not simply a biological issue
- There is not “one answer” to cat-related issues
- Research on outdoor cats is bearing fruit
- Advances in outdoor cat management are positive

# What is working?

- More attention is being given to outdoor cat issues
  - Conservation impacts
  - Welfare issues
    - Both cats and communities
  - Shelter and NGO operations
  - Initiatives involving multiple stakeholders

# What is working?

- The outdoor cat issue has attracted talented researchers
  - *High quality research provides reliable information for managers, and improves the quality of decisions used by policy-makers*
  - *It has to be communicated to the right audience in a useful format*

# What is working?

- There are many case histories being developed in multiple locations
- Surveys are providing insight into motivations why people care for stray cats, and how they feel toward various management scenarios
- Problem definition: there's not *one* problem



# What needs to be addressed?

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  - Some locations should NOT include cats
  - There are some locations where conservation concerns are of overriding significance... but not everywhere.

# Observations

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- Except in limited situations (such as islands), trap and kill programs have proven their ineffectiveness over the past 100 years

# Ruminations...

- The failure of conservation biologists to have nothing positive to say about TNR is problematic
- “NZ envy” affects US conservationists

# Ruminations...

- Protecting birds *and* cats instead of birds *or* cats seems the appropriate emphasis
- Customized solutions for local programs
- Remind everyone that trap and kill programs have left us with millions of outdoor cats. Other approaches need to be encouraged, not discouraged.

# The result?

- Optimism
- More collaboration
- Protection of sensitive species
- A wicked problem worthy of additional investment



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## *Science and Policy from a Global Perspective*

