

## Impacts of feral and domestic cats on birdlife

As summer is once again upon us, so are many of our species of migratory seabirds that treat Norfolk as their safe haven for nesting, fishing and breeding. I'm sure we're all enjoying the familiar calls of the White Terns, Goesbad (Ghostbirds) and Boesan Berd (Tropic Bird) that ring out day and night, so this is the perfect time to remind people of their responsibility to these birds, in the form of responsible cat ownership.

Ground nesting birds are in high numbers over the summer months, making them easy targets for roaming cats, both feral and domestic. Already in various reserves we are seeing the results of cat predation, in the form of headless Petrel bodies and pairs of beautiful white wings left discarded on the ground.



With more than 500 domestic cats currently residing on Norfolk, many of which are allowed to roam freely in the National Park, Reserves and on private property, the pressure on the native ecosystem is high.

The average cat consumes 300g of food a day. It is also estimated that a cat only eats one third of what it kills.

To put this into context, a fantail weighs 9g. If a cat was to get its daily intake from fantails only, it would have to consume 33 per day (assuming that the whole bird was consumed, which is most often not the case). This would then suggest that the cat could have easily killed 99 fantails in just one day.

Even if you feed your cat regularly, if it is allowed outside, day or night, it will hunt. Cats are natural born hunters and it would be naïve of anyone to believe that their cat exists outside of that predatory nature.

Studies conducted on the diets of feral cats on Norfolk Island show that they are eating a combination of forest birds, seabirds, rodents, and insects. Green Parrot feathers have even been found in these examinations.

Results from the 2017 Community Cat Survey showed that approximately 70% of the community requested that Norfolk implements various 'controlled conditions' in its approach



to future cat management and ownership on NI. These could include, but are not limited to: compulsory de-sexing, micro-chipping, curfews, containment, and registration.

NIRC recognises that cats play a major role in some family's lives, and that for others they may



be their only companion. One way to keep your pet safe, as well as keep Norfolk's birdlife safe, is to have a cat enclosure. There are a handful of people on Norfolk Island who have cat runs or enclosures set up in their backyard so that their cat can enjoy being outdoors whilst also being safe. Feral cats, secondary poisoning, cat AIDS and other diseases are just some of the risks associated with allowing your cat to roam freely. Cat enclosures are relatively simple to construct yourself, or you can order them online. Two great sites to check out are: [catnets.com.au](http://catnets.com.au) and [catispaces.com](http://catispaces.com).

Or, perhaps a great future business venture for someone...?

One management practice that is used widely throughout the world is a cat pound. Essentially a holding facility, where stray cats or domestic cats found outside of their home area, can be kept safely until their owners collect them for a fee. The establishment of such a facility is mentioned as a suggested action in our current Pest Management Plan.

NIRC and NINP also hope to have the capacity to provide incentives and facilities for higher rates of neutering and micro-chipping as NINP have done in the past, as well as registration. In this way domestic cats will pose less of a threat to future ecosystems and can continue to bring happiness to the families that they're a part of.

The Flora & Fauna Society has cat traps that are available for loan, as does NIRC. Anyone requiring feral cat trapping on their property, or to report cat sightings, please don't hesitate to call Chriss Nobbs (F&F) on 53277.

Thank you to all of the responsible owners out there who do the right thing not only by our precious wildlife, but by their cats as well.

**Lilli-unna King**

Environmental Project Officer

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