



AAV Resolution on Free-roaming Cats

Free-roaming cats (*Felis catus*) are a nonnative, introduced species that cause significant harm to native wildlife—including birds, reptiles, amphibians, and small mammals—across ecosystems. They also prey on neotropical migrant bird species that provide essential ecological services throughout North America; neotropical migrants represent roughly half of the bird species in the United States and Canada and contribute substantially to natural pest and vector control during the breeding season.

Unowned outdoor cat populations expand rapidly, leading to overpopulation, starvation, injury, and increased prevalence of infectious and noninfectious diseases. Free-roaming cats also pose zoonotic and public health risks through disease transmission to humans, domestic animals, and wildlife.

The Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) recognizes cats as valued companion animals deserving compassion, protection, and evidence-based welfare. This position is intended to promote feline health, safety, and long-term welfare while protecting wildlife and public health. Cats allowed outdoors face substantially higher risks of trauma, predation, starvation, environmental exposure, poisoning, infectious disease, parasitism, and premature death. Reducing outdoor cat populations protects native wildlife, safeguards public health, and prevents significant animal suffering.

Veterinarians should promote indoor living and secure containment as core elements of feline preventive care, animal welfare, public health, and environmental stewardship. Evidence shows that cats kept indoors or in secure outdoor enclosures live longer and experience fewer injuries and diseases than cats permitted to roam freely.

The AAV advocates that veterinarians lead in preventive care for all species and ecosystems and supports humane, effective community cat management strategies that balance animal welfare with environmental protection. Management must address individual cat welfare while reducing impacts on wildlife, ecosystems, and public health and should prevent ongoing cycles of outdoor reproduction, disease, injury, abandonment, and suffering.

AAV does not support Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs that return cats to a free-roaming capacity. Instead, we support trapping, neutering, and adopting that maintains secure containment to remove free-roaming cats from the environment.

Therefore, the AAV:

- Supports local ordinances that: a) Require spay/neuter of cats older than six months unless an annual intact or breeder permit is obtained; b) Require licensing and rabies vaccination for all cats; and c) Discourage allowing cats to roam freely outdoors.
- Supports reducing stray and free-roaming cat populations through humane capture, veterinary evaluation, sterilization, vaccination, adoption, and secure containment, including indoor placement, enclosed facilities, or managed indoor sanctuaries.

- Supports community cat management programs that prioritize adoption and containment over returning cats to outdoor free-roaming environments.
- Supports actions by wildlife and public health agencies, as well as public and private organizations, to humanely eliminate free roaming cat colonies on public lands and to discourage establishment of them on private lands.
- Supports policies and programs that improve feline health, welfare, and safety by reducing the number of unowned or unsupervised outdoor cats and expanding opportunities for adoption, responsible ownership, secure containment, and lifelong veterinary care.
- Will continue work within their organization and will collaborate with veterinary education programs, wildlife conservation organizations, public health agencies, and other professional organizations to promote awareness, education, and research to reduce owned and unowned free-roaming cat populations while protecting native wildlife, public health, and feline welfare.

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If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Executive Director, Dr. Elizabeth Mackey at emackey@aav.org.