

Cats - feral and stray

Felis catus

What does it look like?

Under our Regional Pest Management Plan, we refer to Pest cats rather than feral or stray cats (see definition).

Pest cats originate from domesticated cats. They are usually short-haired and slightly built, with a large head and sharp features. Coat colours vary from pure black to orange tabby and some resemble the striped dark and pale grey of the true European wild cat. They commonly revert to black, tabby or tortoiseshell, with various extents of white. Adult male cats are usually larger than the females and can weigh up to 5kg. Cats are prolific breeders. Females usually take 6 - 9 months to reach sexual maturity but kittens as young as 4 months can become pregnant. Pest cats can produce 2- 3 litters per year with an average of 4 young in each. Pest cats are often in poor physical condition.

Cats can be found in most terrestrial habitats, including urban areas, production landscapes (e.g. farms and orchards) and natural areas (e.g. forests, dunes and wetlands).

Why is it a problem?

Cats are generalist predators and can have large home ranges. It is estimated that between pest and pet cats, up to 100 million birds in New Zealand are killed each year. They are a major predator of kiwi chicks and also eat eggs, lizards, invertebrates and frogs.

Pest cats are also implicated in a small way in the spread of bovine Tb, with the potential to spread the infection to cattle. They carry parasites and toxoplasmosis. Aggression towards pet cats is also an issue.

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Control Methods

Control options include live capture or kill traps. When trapping for pest cats you need to be careful to avoid trapping domestic cats. **Live capture traps** include any secure box or trap that is safe to use around residential areas.

Kill traps can be used in a variety of situations **outside of residential areas**. Kill traps are SA2 or (Steve Allan traps). Bait the trap with meat based baits.

A person who, for the purpose of capturing alive a mammal, bird, reptile, or amphibian, sets a trap or causes a trap to be set must inspect the trap, or cause a competent person to inspect that trap, within 12 hours after sunrise on each day the trap remains set, beginning on the day immediately after the day on which the trap is set.

Pest cats can be very difficult to trap as they are naturally cautious and a previous bad experience will make them shy. Sometimes it is best to fix the door open for two or three nights until the cat is comfortable entering the trap, before actually setting it. Do not attempt to touch or pick up a pest cat, or even a kitten. They bite and scratch and can spread disease. See a doctor if you get bitten by a pest cat.

Contact GW for more information. Call us on our Freephone 0800 496 734.

Related Links

Invasive Species Compendium <http://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/82598>

Landcare Research - Vertebrate Pest Control <https://pestdss.landcareresearch.co.nz/Cats/Location>

GW Regional Pest Management Plan <https://www.gw.govt.nz/environment/pest-management/>

Rules

Under Section 52 and 53 of the Biosecurity Act 1993 no person can sell, propagate, breed, distribute or otherwise spread any pest in a Pest Management Plan, or any unwanted organism. Not complying with Section 52 or 53 is an offence under the Act, and may result in penalties noted in Section 157(1).

No person shall feed or provide shelter to pest cats* on private or public land within the Wellington Region, without the permission of the occupier.

*Pest cat means any cat within the Wellington Region that is:

1. Not microchipped in an area where microchipping is compulsory, and free-living, unowned and unsocialised, and has limited or no relationship with or dependence on humans, or
2. Not microchipped, or registered on the New Zealand Companion Animal Register, and is free-living, unowned and unsocialised, and has limited or no relationship with or dependence on humans.

Management Programme

Site-led