

Cats - feral and stray

Felidae - Felis catus



What does it look like?

Feral cats are described as any cat that's not being actively cared for that lives in the wild. They're solitary and predominantly nocturnal and survive by hunting for their food. They're usually short haired, slightly built, with a large head and have very sharp features. Once caught in a cage they'll be aggressive, hiss, growl and spray.

Stray cats are unwanted or pest cats are domestic cats that have been abandoned or strayed from their owners. They generally rely on people for some of their food and shelter and are timid but they're usually wary of people and may be aggressive when cornered or captured. These cats can be found in most terrestrial habitats, including urban areas, production landscapes such as farms and orchards, and natural areas such as forests, dunes and wetlands.

Why is it a problem?

Cats are generalist predators and can have large home ranges. It's estimated that feral, stray and pet cats kill up to 100 million birds in New Zealand/Aotearoa each year. They're a major predator of kiwi chicks and also eat eggs, lizards, invertebrates and frogs. Feral cats also spread diseases such as toxoplasmosis that can cause significant losses in sheep production. Cats are prolific breeders. Females usually take 6-9 months to reach sexual maturity but kittens as young as 4 months can become pregnant and produce litters of 3-6 kittens. A female can have more than one litter each year. Stray cats have higher survival rates than feral cats and faster reproduction rates.

Control methods

Trapping: Live capture trapping is the best method to catch stray or pest cats. This way if a domestic pet cat is caught it can be released unharmed. See our website for the cat trap request form and information.

Residential properties in urban areas

We can lend a trap for stray cats causing problems on a residential property in some urban areas. Staff can also help with the removal and destruction of the cat if you can't do it. The urban areas include Gisborne city and the settlement or township areas of Wainui, Makorori, Manutuke, Patutahi and Ormond.

Other urban and non-residential areas

Other urban areas can only borrow traps. Help with trapping and removal of cats would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Commercial and industrial properties, schools, hospitals and other businesses need to pay a pest contractor.

Shooting: A method of control for landowner/occupiers following appropriate firearms regulations and safety procedures. It is advisable to inform or co-ordinate control efforts with your neighbours particular next to a shared boundary. Use appropriate calibre for shooting target species.

Controlling feral cats in rural areas

Night shooting with a spotlight is an effective way to control feral cats in rural areas. Talk to your neighbours before you do any night shooting.

Pet cats in the area must be kept indoors on nights when shooting is to take place. Extreme care is needed especially around lifestyle block areas. All provisions of the gun laws must be complied with.

Do not attempt to touch or pick up a wildcat or even a kitten. They bite and scratch and can spread disease. See your doctor if you're bitten by a cat.

More information

Council supports responsible cat ownership including microchipping, de-sexing and keeping cats contained at night. These actions all have a positive impact on cat health, cats as a disease vector and biodiversity protection. We encourage the use of live capture traps in urban areas so microchipped domestic cats can be distinguished from feral or stray cats by veterinary clinics.

Management programme

- Site-Led

Rules

- Council will work with landowner/occupier, including developing agreements for the effective management of this pest to protect the values of specific sites.

For more information about this Rule, refer to our Regional Pest Management Plan page 44, under Related Links.

Similar Species: There are no native species that resemble a domestic, feral or stray cat.