

Kamloops Residents' Perceptions of Risk Regarding Outdoor Pet Cats

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that outdoor cats have a negative impact on our ecosystems and the cat's welfare is also at risk. Cat owners can reduce the risks outdoor pet cats impose and incur on the environment; however, that may require a change in behaviour or regulations. This research seeks to understand households' in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada, perceptions of the risks that outdoor pet cats impose and incur on the environment in order to implement risk-mitigation strategies that will be effective for the community. Data was gathered using an online survey in the Kamloops community with a sample size of 584 residents who voluntarily completing the survey, of which 376 were cat owners and 208 were non-cat owners. Of the cat owners, 155 allowed their cats outdoors and 221 kept their cats indoors. Descriptive statistics reveal that the three risks outdoor pet cats impose on the environment that were perceived as most likely included decreasing the population of mice or rats, decreasing bird populations, and damaging people's property. The three most likely risks outdoor pet cats incur while outdoors included cats being hit by cars, cats being lost or stolen and cats being killed or injured by coyotes. When it comes to prey most often brought to the cat owner's home, cat owners claimed their cats brought mice 30% of the time and birds 5%. Furthermore, the results demonstrate statistically significant differences in perception between cat owners and non-cat owners and cat owners who keep their cats indoors compared to those who allow their cats outdoors. It appears that despite the perception of the risks outdoor pet cats impose and incur, the cat owners who allow their cats outdoors continue to allow their cats outdoors.