

## **Guidelines for cat and bird lovers**

As the Foundation Pro Biodiversity, we are committed to preserving and protecting our unique birdlife. At the same time, we know that cats are one of the most popular domestic pets and that many people value their cat as their best friend. It is noteworthy that the number of German domestic cats has increased from 6.8 million to 14.7 million (as of 2019) over the past 20 years.

Many cat owners let their animals leave the house whenever they wish. Although humans have domesticated cats for thousands of years, they have not lost their hunting instinct. It is undeniable that these so-called outdoor cats hunt and also catch and kill songbirds and small mammals in gardens.

Cats as individuals are very different; some are good hunters, while others do not catch prey. Statistics say that songbirds make up to 20% of cats' prey. Their main prey is small animals such as mice. Nevertheless, up to 200 million birds fall victim to cats in Germany every year. Furthermore, through their presence alone, cats increase the escape flight and survival stress of our songbirds.

As a result, there are often grave conflicts and animosity between cat and bird lovers

The total area of all private gardens in Germany is about equal to all nature reserves. As some 92% of agricultural land is intensively managed by industrial methods, gardens and parks are, therefore, of increasing importance as songbird habitats. By designing gardens naturally, using, for example, indigenous (fruit) trees and shrubs, thorny hedges of hawthorn and sea buckthorn, wild roses and piles of dead wood, garden owners can create safe havens, nest and feeding sites for birds. This can measurably reduce the adverse effects of domestic cats on songbirds.

## **10 Tips for cat and bird lovers**

1. Cats are most active at dusk and daybreak and prefer to hunt at those times. Therefore, they are most likely to catch weaker animals and, unfortunately, in spring, a not inconsiderable number of inexperienced young birds. Therefore it is beneficial to keep your cat indoors early in the morning and evenings from April to July. Young birds that have just fledged are then mobile and are easy to prey, especially since they often squat on the ground and are still being tended by the adult birds.

If you notice young birds in the garden, keep the cat indoors for some time. This allows the birds' parents to continue tending to the young birds.

2. Do not offer nesting opportunities (nest boxes) in ornamental gardens full of exotic plants and shrubs or non-natural gravelled gardens. Songbirds find here neither suitable sustenance nor livelihood.
3. In structurally varied gardens with indigenous trees and shrubs, hang out nest boxes out of the reach of cats. Do not underestimate the climbing or leaping ability of cats. The adult

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birds must be able to see the entrance hole in flight and feel safe when approaching so that they cannot be surprised by a lurking cat.

4. Protect trees that can be used for nesting with cat cuffs made of sheet metal or plastic, so-called cat defence belts. Natural indigenous thorny shrubs or blackberry tendrils and trees with a lack of climbing aids such as low branches are, of course, best.
5. Feed the birds only in places out of the reach of cats. Hang feeders at a height of at least 2 metres, or place them in open spaces where no cat can sneak up unseen.
6. Have your cat neutered. In many federal German states, it is now mandatory to have your house cat castrated or spayed. In addition, studies have proved that neutered cats have a smaller territory and thus a reduced hunting area. In this way, you also prevent the unwanted reproduction and the wilding of domestic cats.
7. A secure cat collar with a bell is also often recommended. However, some studies have shown that young birds are startled by the bell, bringing them to the cat's notice. Besides, the bell is very irritating for the cat, and many cats learn to move so that it does not ring.
8. Are you considering getting a new cat? It does not always have to be a kitten. The shelters are full of older cats. These are usually a little more comfortable to keep than a young kitten, can stay alone for a few hours and ignore your wallpaper, sofa, and hopefully some birds.
9. Even if your neighbour's cat bothers you, it is forbidden to harm it. Please keep in mind that an elderly person or a child may love this cat. We suggest that you talk to your neighbour about bird conservation and cats, or about these tips, and make them aware of nesting or young birds.
10. Cannot take care of your cat anymore? On no account should you abandon your cat or set it out. Animal shelters are happy to take them in. A donation to cover the additional costs is of great help to the animal shelter. Not only is it forbidden to abandon cats, but a stray cat is also a great danger to wild birds.

By the way: the increasing loss of natural countryside, the trend to modern easily cared for ornamental and gravel gardens, fully glazed house facades, and the ever denser traffic network endanger the numbers and diversity of birdlife to at least the same extent as the hunting pressure from domestic cats and their bird victims.