

Love pets? Love wildlife?

Win/win ways we can protect cats and wildlife in
Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

December 2021





There are two parts to this presentation:

Firstly, we'll examine what responsible cat ownership involves.

Then, we'll look at some social science to learn how to change the behaviour of cat owners.



Responsible cat ownership behaviours keep cats safe AND wildlife safe

- Desexing
- Microchipping
- Stay-at-home cats (kept inside or on home property)
- Enrichment and stimulation
- Real meat / high protein diet
- Bird safe collar covers

Let's take a look in more detail, including motivators and barriers to increasing these behaviours...



Desexing



- There are too many kittens without forever homes.
- 69% of owned cats are acquired as strays or from shelters/ friends / family / neighbours¹. Often, we didn't set out to own a cat, but took one in because it needed a home.
- Desexed animals experience a range of welfare benefits.

Take-home message: desexing is a critical component of humane cat management.



Desexing



Top motivators to desexing:

- Prevent unwanted litters (71%)
- Prevent unwanted behaviours (26%)
- Prevent medical problems (15%)
- Vet advised it (12%)

Top barriers to desexing:

- **Cost (28%)**
- Think cat is too young (23%) or too old (20%)
- Think it is unnecessary (20%)
- Believe animals should reproduce (8%)
- Concerned about the process (8%)



Desexing

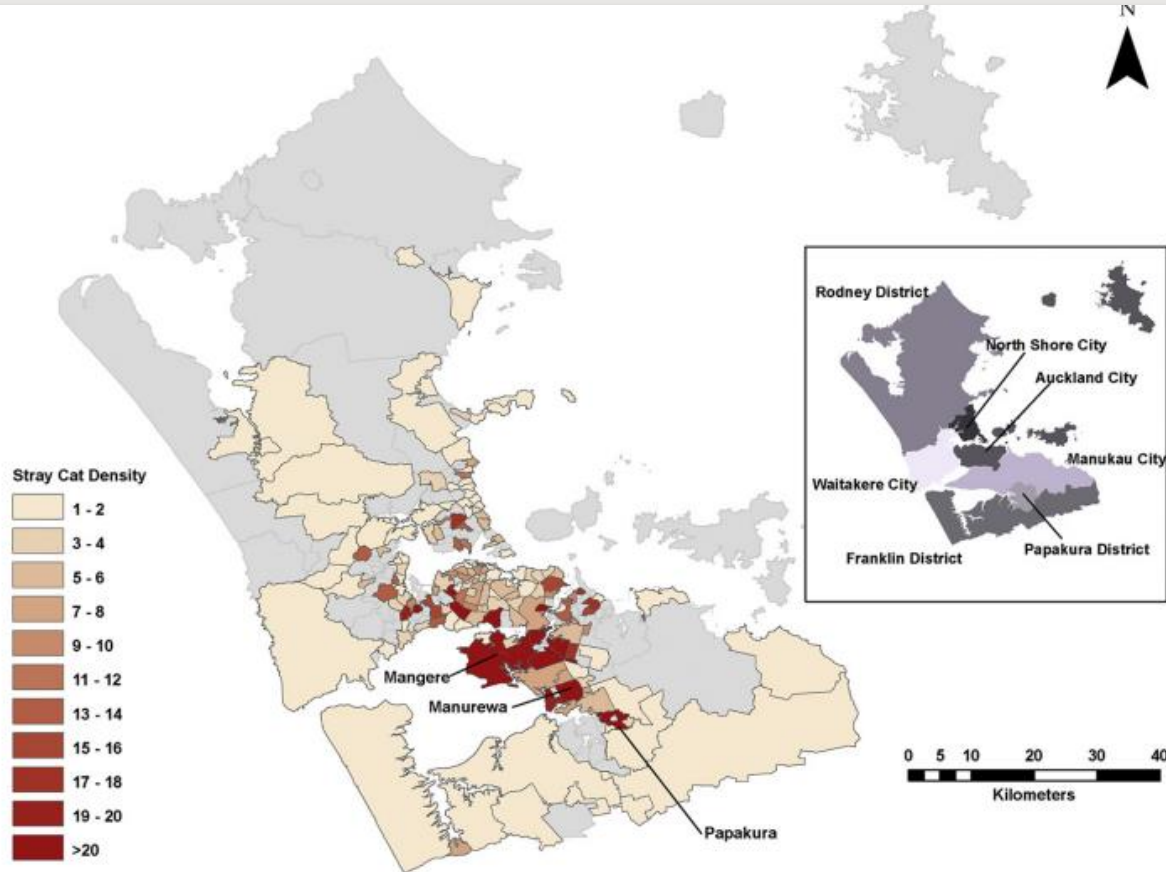


Fig. 2. Distribution of stray cats in Auckland, New Zealand from data recorded March 2010–March 2011 by SPCA.

Across Tāmaki Makaurau, the vast majority of owned cats are desexed.

However, cost is a key barrier to desexing, so it's not surprising that stray cat density is strongly related to poverty.



Microchipping

- Microchips help ensure lost cats can be returned home safely.
- After Christchurch earthquakes, 85% of microchipped pets reunited with owners vs 15% of unchipped pets.
- Also helps us return cats home safely if we're trapping unowned cats to protect threatened species.



Microchipping



Top motivators to chipping:

- To recover cat if lost (74%)
- To use chip activated cat door or food bowl (17%)
- Vet advised it (16%)
- Accessed free or subsidised (10%)

Top barriers to microchipping:

- Think it's unnecessary (57%)
- Cost (25%)
- Haven't got around to it (21%)
- Concerned about process (4%)

Take home message: it's important to show cat owners how microchipping helps keep their cat safe



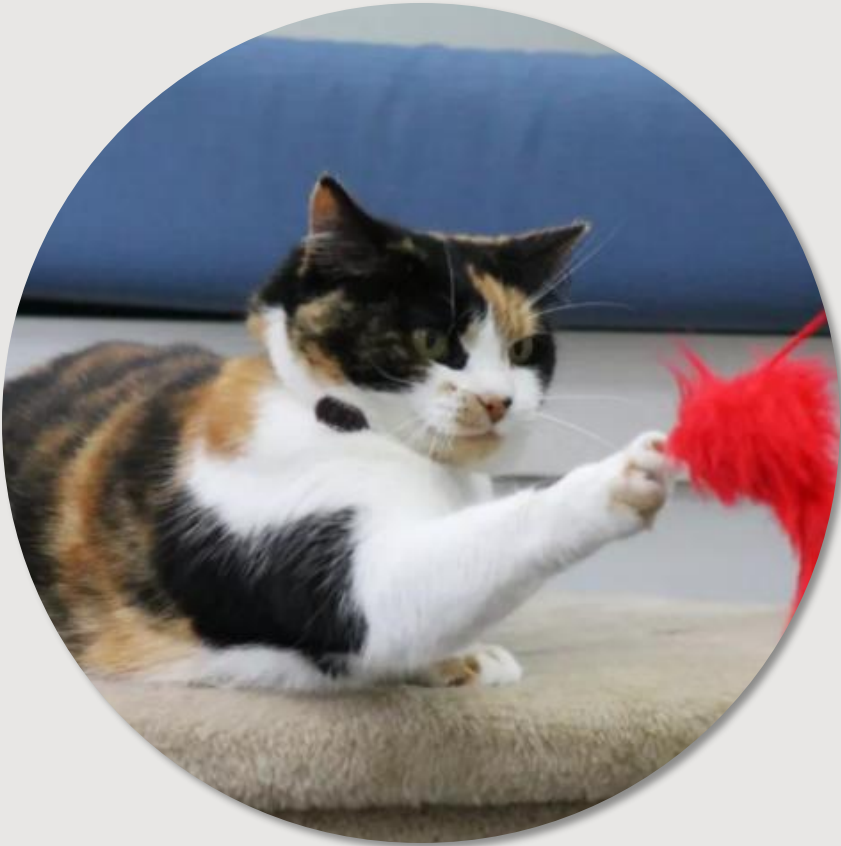
Stay-at-home cats are safe, happy cats



- Inside home or within property boundaries
- Keeps cats safe from traffic, dogs, cat fights and petnappers
- Keeps wildlife safe from cats
- Enrichment is important for stay-at-home cat welfare



Stay-at-home cats



Motivators to keeping cats at home:

- Cats are safe from roads, cat fights, catnappers etc
- Owners are less stressed when they know their cats are safe at home
- Wildlife safety (only a motivator for some owners; for many this is irrelevant)

Barriers to keeping cats at home:

- Social norms in Aotearoa New Zealand – many people think they need to let their cat roam because this is what is expected by others around them, even if they are worried for the cat's safety when they let it out.
- Awareness / access 'how to'
- Underestimating how far cats roam, risks to cats and wildlife

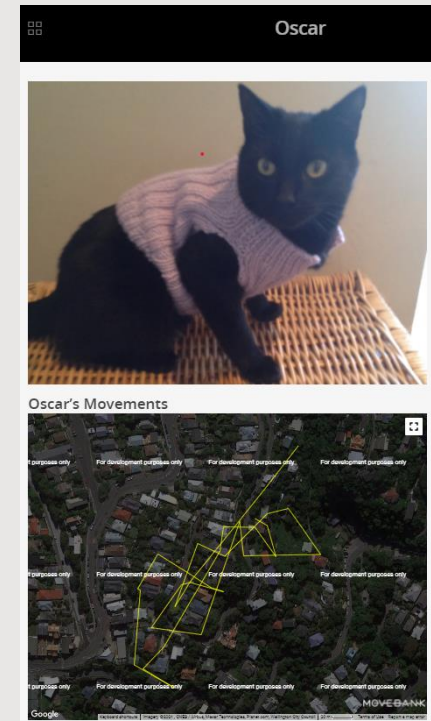
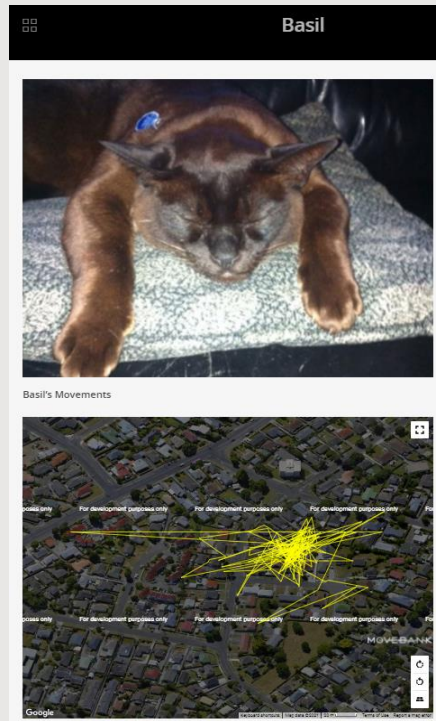
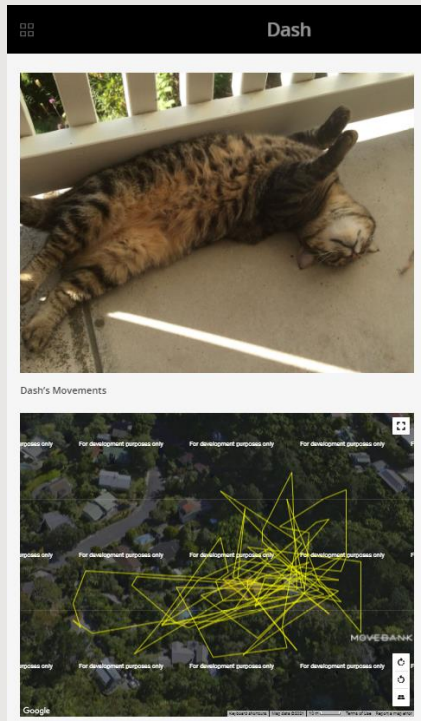
Take home message: changing social norms about what it is to be a 'good' cat owner in Aotearoa is key. In many other countries, stay-at-home cats are the norm.



If we let our cats out to roam...

Cat owners often underestimate how far their cats roam¹

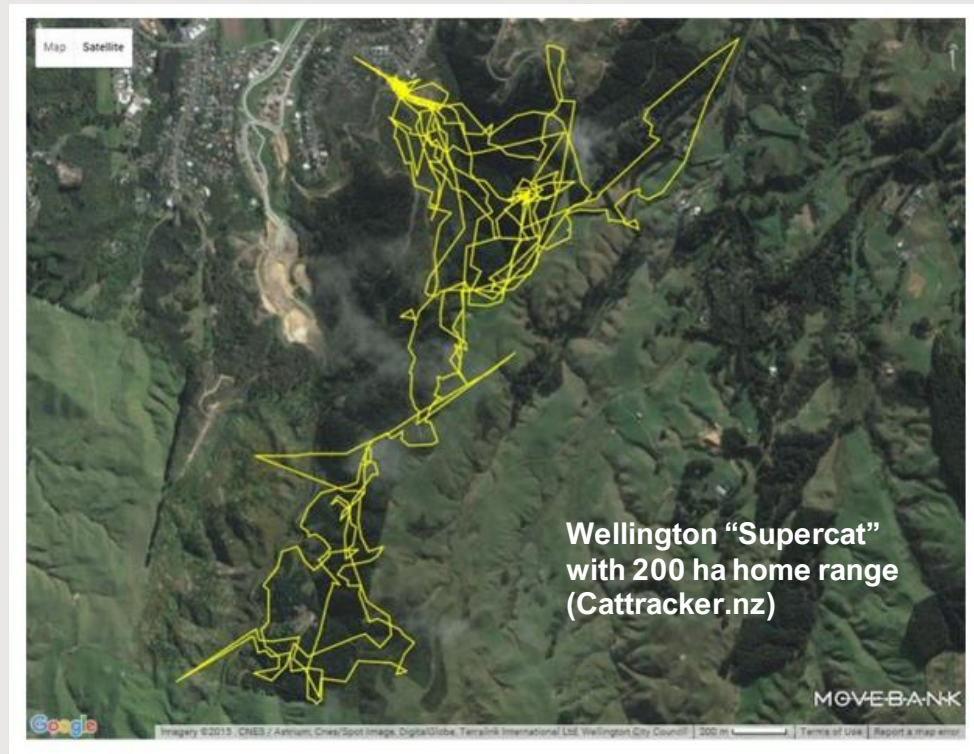
Cat tracker projects reveal just how far our feline family members wander – including crossing lots of roads!



Source: cattrackernz/



If we let our cats out to roam...



Average distance away from wildlife to be confident most cats won't encounter:

- > 1.2 km in urban settings

- > 2.4 km in rural/low density areas

Roaming varies with landscape type and cat personality.

Some individuals roam huge distances.



But how do I keep my cat safe and happy at home?

DIY...

**...the
internet is full
of ideas!**

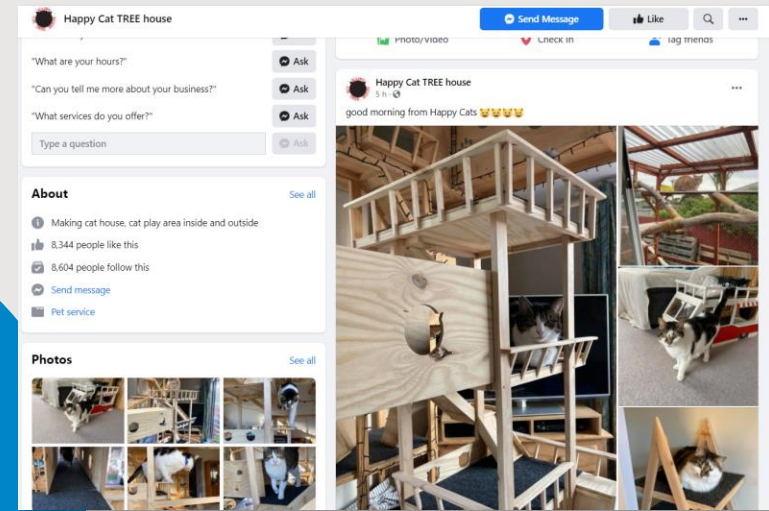
**...or ready-
made
products...**



But how do I keep my cat safe and happy at home?



...the internet is full of ideas!



Auckland woman cat-proofs backyard on the cheap

George Block · 10:51, Feb 23 2020



An Auckland woman has devised a way to stop her cat roaming the neighbourhood. She used netting and mesh to fence her property.

When Vivien Dostine's cat was run over while roaming, she decided enough was enough.



Sources:
<https://catfence.nz>
Stuff.co.nz
@Jo_Fereday
catastrophiccreations.com
Sarah Edmonson on Beasties
istockphotos

For more ideas, check out some of these

**#IndoorCat
#CatFence**

**#Catio
#CatioLife
#CatioCats
#Cacios**

**#CatEnrichment
#EnrichmentForCats
#EnrichmentToy
#CatWall**

#SafeCatSafeWildlife



Object play (enrichment)



Enrichment is really important for cat welfare, especially if they are stay-at-home cats, to prevent boredom.

Enrichment also reduces cats' prey drive:

- at least 5-10 minutes of object play per day can reduce prey capture by about 25%

Take home message: whether it's a stay-at-home cat or allowed to roam, encouraging owners to play with their cats is good for cats and wildlife



High protein diet



A high meat diet with no grains can reduce prey capture by 36%

Feeding a nutritious diet will also help keep your cat healthy.

Take home message: a high meat diet is good for cats and wildlife, especially when cats have access to the outdoors

Source::

Cecchetti et al 2021 Provision of high meat content food and object play reduce predation of wild animals by domestic cat *Felis catus*. Current Biology DOI [10.1016/j.cub.2020.12.044](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2020.12.044)



Bird safe collar covers



Brightly coloured collars are more effective than bells at protecting birds and lizards from cats (42-54% reduction in prey capture).

Cats can still catch rats when wearing these collars because rats don't have the same good colour vision.

Can be bought ready-made, or make your own

Take home message: bird safe collars help protect birds and lizards when cats have access to the outdoors

Source:s Cecchetti et al 2021 Provision of high meat content food and object play reduce predation of wild animals by domestic cat *Felis catus*. Current Biology DOI [10.1016/j.cub.2020.12.044](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2020.12.044)

Hall et al 2015 Assessing the effectiveness of the Birdsafe anti-predation collar cover in reducing predation on wildlife by pet cats in Western Australia. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 173: 40-51

www.birdsafe.com

[Make your own cat collar \(and save the birds!\) | Activities | Kidspot](#)



So how do we get cat owners to increase these behaviours?



Knowledge-behaviour gap

- People are irrational
- Unlike a computer, just because I *know* something, doesn't mean I will *do* something

For example: I know climate change is real, but I still own a petrol car

- Therefore, providing facts alone (e.g. risks to wildlife) doesn't change behaviours



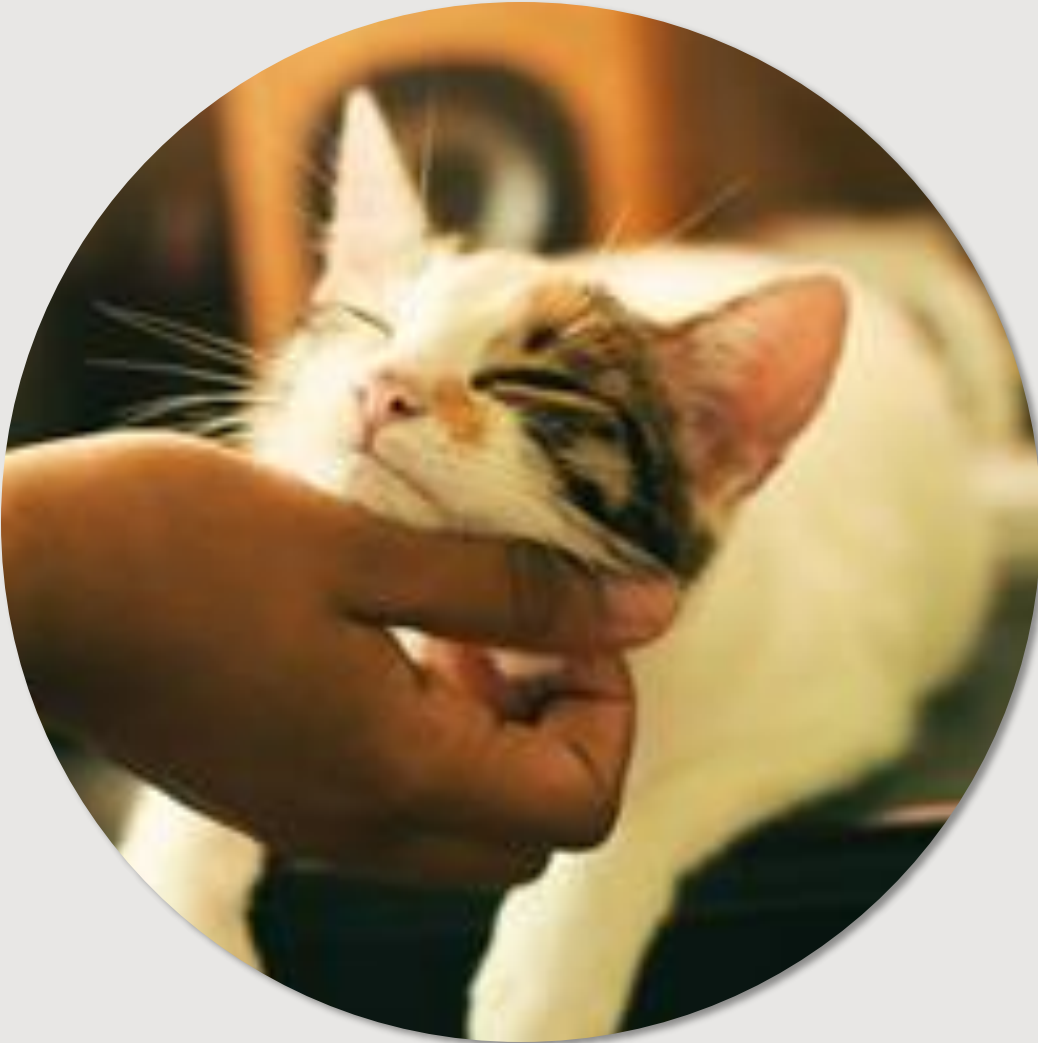
We cannot turn our audiences into us



- Successful communication has the target audience top of mind
- Your audience will have different values, knowledge and experiences to you.
- Respect those values – don't try to change them. Your aim is to change behaviour, not values.
- Find common ground to establish a relationship (this may have nothing to do with cats! – do you share a love of books, soccer, sailing, gardening...?)



Feline family members

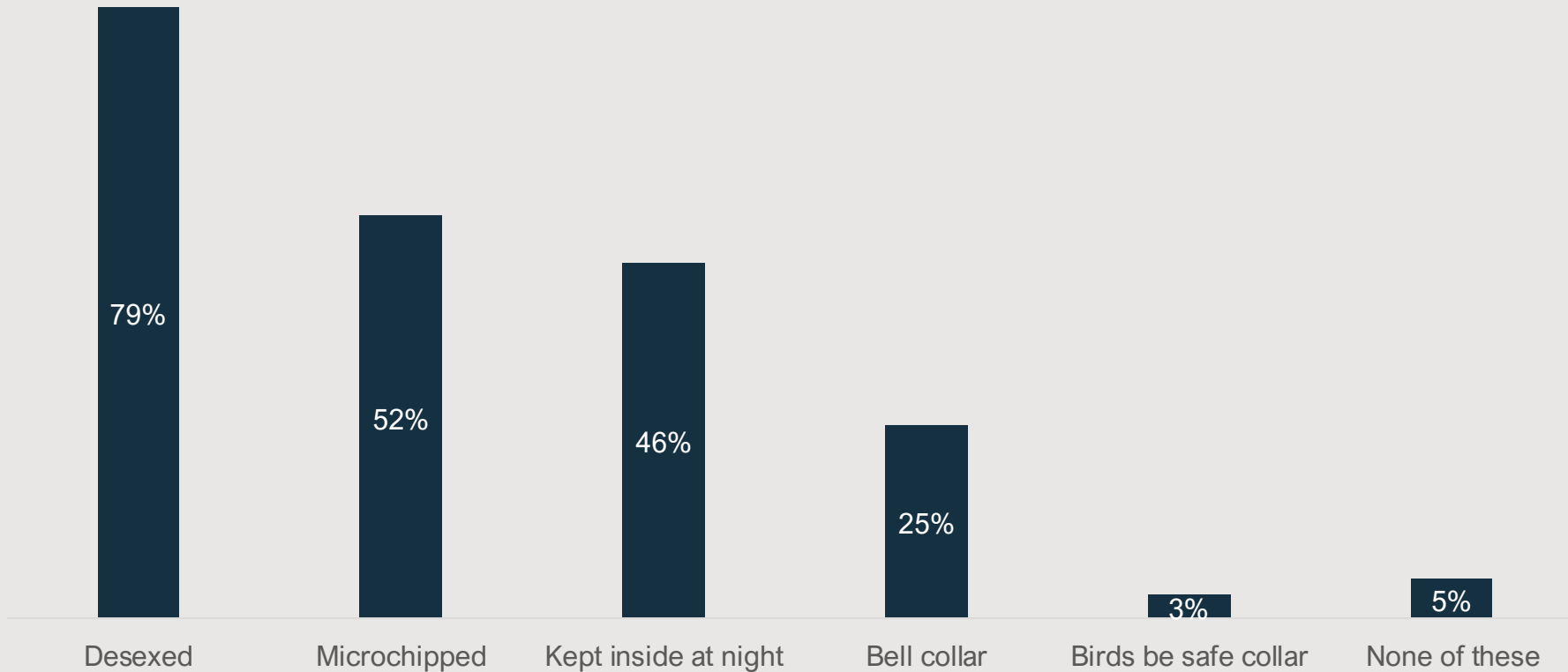


- One in three Aucklanders have a cat¹, 44% of households nationally².
- Companionship is the most common reason³.
- 4 out of 5 cat owners consider their cat a member of the family².

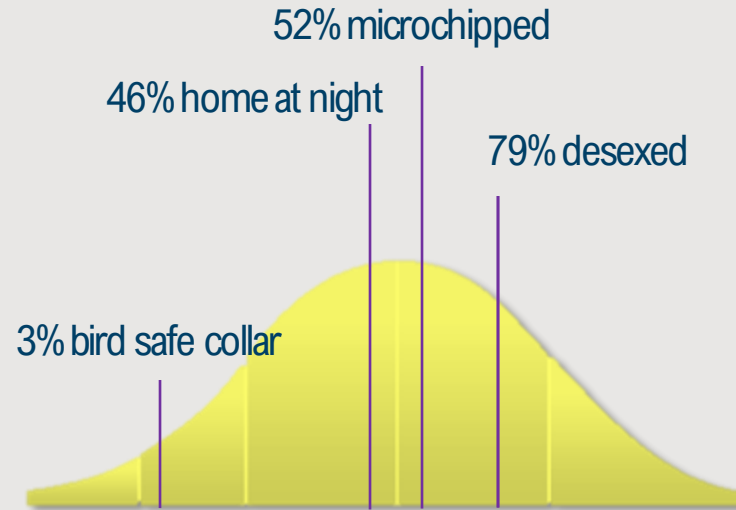
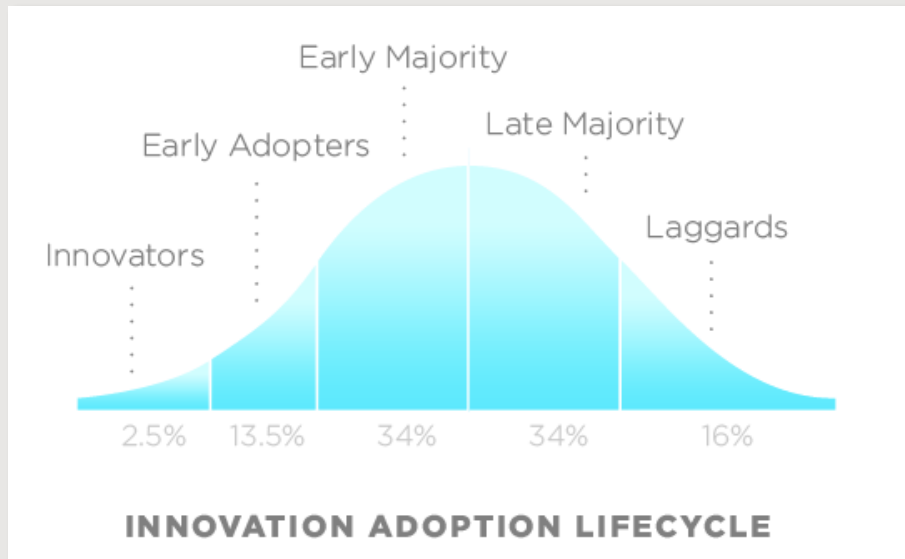
Take-home message: communications with cat owners will only succeed if respectful of the value many of us place on cats.



Responsible cat ownership behaviours in Tāmaki Makaurau



Responsible cat ownership behaviours in Tāmaki Makaurau



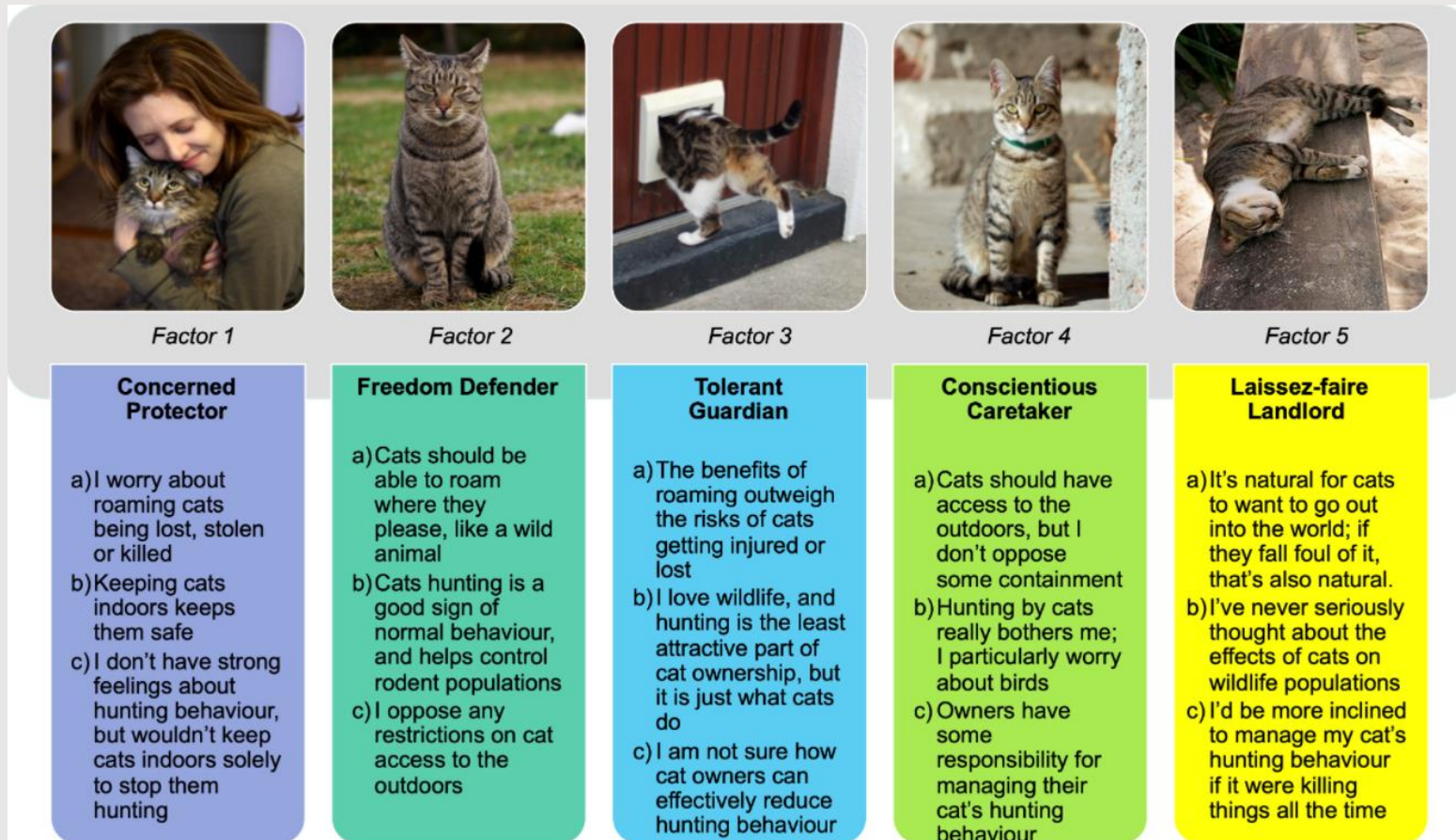
Different behaviours are at different stages of adoption in our community.

Successful behaviour change strategies will differ depending on whether you're talking only to the last handful or the vast majority of the community



Cat owners don't all think alike

- Audience segmentation can be useful
- Target different messages to different segments



Think about who might be good messengers for your target audience



Vets are the most commonly trusted source of info on companion animals



To help change social norms, reach cat owners by using these hashtags when sharing responsible pet ownership content

**#CatsOfInstagram
#KittensOfInstagram**

**#HappyCat
#CatsAtHomes**

**#Kitten
#CatsOfTwitter
#LoveCats
#Kitty**

**#Catstagram
#CuteCats**



**Let's look at some real life messaging examples,
Including good ones and some less helpful approaches...**



Acknowledge owners' love for their cats, find common ground



“Forest & Bird **recognises the important role cats play** in New Zealand society. Cats provide companionship and other positive benefits. **Many Forest & Bird members own cats.**” [F&B Cat Policy]



Reinforce responsible actions as a norm for what it means to be a good cat owner



Caring for your Cat

Cats are a popular pet for Wellingtonians and Wellington City Council supports responsible pet ownership. Ownership means any cat you own or any that are in your care. Part of responsible ownership is providing your cat with nutritious food, a safe and healthy home, and activities and play. This factsheet aims to provide advice on how these elements can be provided for your cat.

Your cat

Cats aren't usually confined to their owners' property, which creates potential for conflict with people, other domestic animals and wildlife. As a cat owner you have specific responsibilities to keep your cat and others safe. These include:

- caring for your pet's welfare needs
- desexing
- microchipping and registering the microchip with the New Zealand Companion Animal Register (NZCAR)

Wellington City has special requirements and standards for keeping a cat that must be adhered to. These are:

- Wellington City Consolidated Bylaw 2008, Part 2: Animals (Animals Bylaw)
- Wellington City Council. Animal Policy. 2017

scratch and climb, puzzle feeders and playtime with people. Outdoor time in a contained environment can be done in an enclosed deck or garden area, or a screened window or patio.

Desexing

As a responsible cat owner, you should desex your cat. Cat overpopulation results in thousands of unwanted cats and kittens being abandoned, killed inhumanely or presented to welfare organisations each year. Desexing your cat is an effective way to help lessen this problem. To prevent unwanted kittens, early age desexing can be undertaken. Cats usually reach puberty between six and nine months old, but some can reproduce as early as four months old. To undergo early desexing a kitten must be in good health and have reached a certain weight, usually around 1 kilogram. For further guidance you should discuss desexing with a veterinarian.



“As a responsible cat owner, you should desex your cat.” [WCC ‘Caring for your cat’ factsheet]



Use emotion



“We believe some of those cats have been deliberately dumped and turned feral, which is **distressing and an issue in itself because dumped cats rarely survive long-term.**” [St Pierre, Kōkako article]



Emphasize things people have agency over, ability to make a difference



“The Dunedin research... found that placing bells on cats halved the number of birds caught... Domestic cats are predators that **we have direct control over** – so by being responsible cat owners, **we can make a real difference.**” [Forest & Bird factsheet]



Focus on the solution



“Make your cat conservation friendly.”
[Department of Conservation quiz
listing actions that responsible cat
owners can take]



Focus on the solution

Choose images that show your desired state –
a cat that is happy at home...

...a human interacting with the cat;
enrichment toys; positive emotion.




Amplify good news stories that show the benefits of responsible cat ownership

stuff | southland times

Missing Auckland cat reunites with owners in Invercargill

Jamie Searle · 14:33, Aug 25 2020



Ainsley Ormsby is reunited with her cat Smokey.

Local reporting is vital to a thriving and connected community. Help us keep telling Southland's stories by **making a contribution**.


[Contribute Now](#)

After being apart for five months, the Ormsby family and their cat Smokey have been reunited in Invercargill.

stuff | life & style

Cat and owner reunited in 'incredibly special moment' after six years on the run

Kristie Boland · 05:00, Jun 18 2021



Mary Ruston is reunited with her cat, Lilli, after the feline spent six years on the run.

When Mary Ruston's cat Lilli disappeared six years ago, she never expected to see her again.

Now 14 and having turned up 50km away, the wandering feline is home.

Last week, a member of the public found a stray cat wandering around their property in Oxford, in rural North Canterbury.

The cat was brought into the SPCA's Christchurch centre and was checked for a microchip. Fortunately, she had one.


NEWS | SPORTS | OPINION | SPECIAL FEATURES | SHOP LOCAL | PHOTOS | LAT

Home · News · Missing cat found after 3 years

Missing cat found after 3 years

By Zoe Garden · October 19, 2021

Like 77



Leo was reunited with his owner, Isabel Connor, after being missing for three years.

A cat that went missing three years ago has been returned to his owner.

Isabel Connor was living in Westmere where she'd recently moved house. She had kept Leo, her beloved cat, inside for two weeks to help him adjust.

In June 2018, she let him outside. "But he never came back," Connor says.

Then began her drastic search. She put his litter tray and food outside, posted on the local Facebook pages, and asked neighbours.

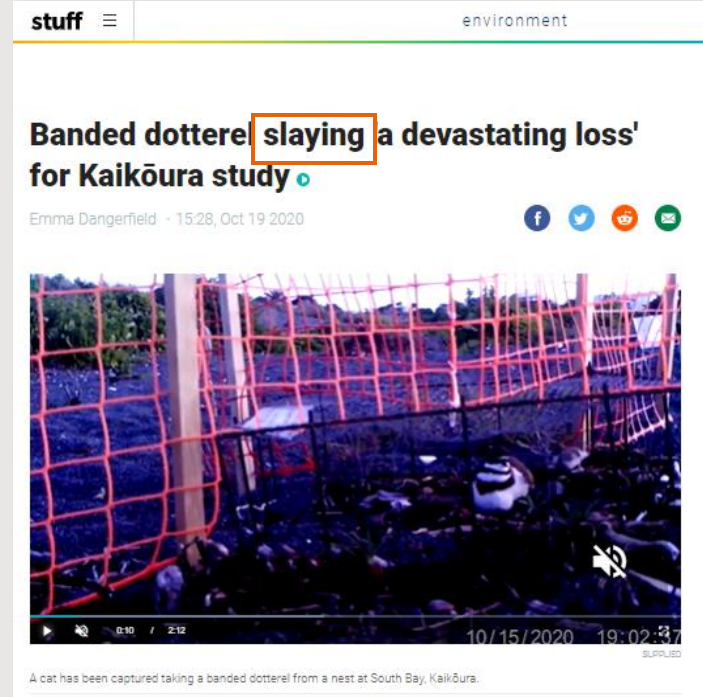
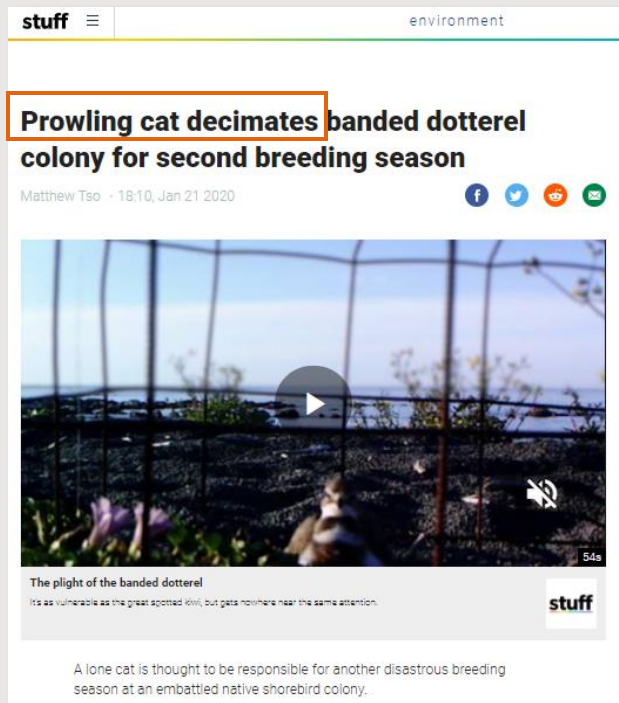
"He is microchipped so we knew if someone had handed him in to a vet or shelter they would contact us," Connor says.

As time passed, and she lost hope, Connor moved to Botany.

On October 8, she received a mind-blowing call. A vet informed Connor that Leo had been found and his microchip scanned. A woman named Rebecca had found him and scanned

Share these sorts of stories on social media and other avenues

Use caution when sharing bad news stories



Although these stories can be helpful in raising awareness of wildlife predation, studies show concern for wildlife is not a strong motivator for behaviour change among cat owners.

Media portrayal of cat predation can fuel polarized narratives that are unhelpful for bringing your target audience on the journey with you.

Always accompany with some positive framing about the solution.



Avoid reinforcing that hunting or roaming is “natural” for cats
(i.e. people think it’s inevitable, can’t be avoided)



“cats hunt and unfortunately their prey
sometimes includes native wildlife.”
[Wellington City Council factsheet]



Instead, try “*if* we let our cats out to roam...”
(creates agency, avoids reinforcing unhelpful norm)



Avoid reinforcing that hunting or roaming is “natural” for cats to do
(i.e. people think it’s inevitable, can’t be avoided)



The same applies with image choices – avoid images that reinforce the normative idea that cats must always go outside to hunt



Avoid focusing more on the problem than the solution



Cats: are they pests?



Cats are large predators compared to most of our New Zealand native birds. They are great hunters, and they will eat even large birds like kiwi, kakapo and takahe.

Why cats can be pests

Cats eat native birds, invertebrates and lizards. In the 1940's, cats wiped out most forest birds and at least two types of seabird from Mangere Island where they were taken to try to control rabbits.



Hunting cat. Photo: DOC

But my cat is a pet, not a pest!...

Wild cats are more of a problem than pet cats, but pet cats can still kill native birds, lizards and insects. Put a bell on your cat and try to keep them inside as much as possible to decrease the chances of them killing native animals. Cats should be well looked after and not left to hunt for themselves.

Why are cats in New Zealand?

Cats were brought to New Zealand with people as pets. They were also put into the wild back in the 1800's to try to deal with rabbit and pest problems.



Feral cat paw print. Photo: Jon Anda



Cat dropping. Photo: DOC

Avoid using the word 'pest' in conjunction with cats – it is emotive and alienating for your target audience, cat owners.

It's ok to mention that cats hunt wildlife, but avoid framing it as something inevitable – you want people to believe they have the agency to prevent it happening.

Instead, try “if we let our cats out to roam...”



Avoid negation

“We’re not anti-cat” **X**

As soon as you say you’re *not* something, it puts the idea into people’s minds that you might be that thing...





Here's a real life example that uses several successful techniques

**Acknowledge
love of cats**

Agency

Emotion

Solution

We love cats, and every day we're working to help New Zealand cat owners keep their pets safe and happy.

Safe – with the revolutionary Oscillot® cat fence system

Happy – with our exclusive range of big and rugged cat climbing posts



**Emotion
(calm cat)**



Another real life example that uses several successful techniques

Vet is an effective messenger

Agency and solution

Prof. Kevin Stafford
Veterinarian
Massey University

- Cats have a greater risk of being hit by a car at night when they are less visible to drivers
- 74% of veterinarians treat a cat that was hit by a car at least once a month. A quarter of veterinarians see car-injured cats every week.
- Three out of four cat owners visiting veterinarians said having their cat in at night is safer

KEEP FLUFFY SAFE FROM CARS

--- BRING YOUR CAT IN AT NIGHT

This research about cat welfare for cat owners is a cooperative effort by researchers at Victoria University of Wellington, Massey University, Otago University and University of Plymouth (UK) and is supported by funding from the New Zealand Companion Animals Trust.

If you would like to know more about this study contact Wayne Linklater at Victoria University:
(04) 463 5233 ext. 8575 or
wayne.linklater@vuw.ac.nz.

Concern for cat welfare is strong motivator

Uses a helpful collective norm

Emotion

Research showed this DOC pamphlet was more effective than one that just provided information in a neutral manner





Another real life example that uses several successful techniques

Effective messenger



Emotion



Agency and solution



Anneles
Aged 7

I LOVE IT WHEN FLUFFY

SLEEPS ON MY BED

... BRING YOUR CAT IN AT NIGHT

- 75% of cat owners agree, having their cat in at night is beneficial
- A cat's company at night is great for reducing stress
- 2 out of 3 cat-owning families think having their cat inside at night is the right thing to do

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Emotion



Uses helpful collective norms



Emotion



Research showed this DOC pamphlet was more effective than one that just provided information in a neutral manner





We hope this presentation has given you some food for thought.

All the best for your own responsible cat ownership behaviour change initiatives!

