

## HUMAN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR REGARDING CATS

Cats are increasingly the pet of choice for Americans. Introduced when Europeans arrived in North America, cats were brought here in large numbers during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in an attempt to control burgeoning rodent populations associated with the spread of agriculture. Before cat litter was developed (about 50 years ago), it was difficult to maintain cats as indoor pets. Cats have many attributes in their favor, and are especially suitable pets for the elderly and people living in apartments.

With respect to keeping cats indoors, a telephone survey conducted for American Bird Conservancy (ABC) in August 1997 by Marketing and Research Resources, Inc. (M&RR) indicates that there is good news and bad news for birds and cats. Sixty-five percent of all respondents believe that keeping cats indoors is safer and healthier for cats.

Many cat owners keep their cats indoors, and many cat



Photo: Clipart.com

owners who currently permit their cats to go outdoors are considering making their next cat an indoor cat. Better understanding and appreciation of how the behavioral and physical needs of cats can be easily accommodated indoors, combined with more calls for responsible pet ownership, appear to be creating a trend in favor of indoor cats.

Unfortunately, despite efforts by animal welfare groups to encourage responsible pet ownership, some people still believe it is acceptable, and even

necessary, for cats to roam. In addition, many cat owners have not fully committed themselves to ownership of the cat. Studies by animal welfare groups have also shown that many people considered to be cat owners have been “adopted” by a cat who has shown up on their door step, rather than the person purposefully setting out to acquire a cat. A summary of the M&RR survey follows.

### Keeping Cats Indoors: Cat Owner Behavior













-  35% keep their cats indoors all of the time.
-  31% keep them indoors mostly with some outside access.
-  About two thirds of the people who now keep their cats indoors do so primarily for the safety and health of the cat.
-  35% of cat owners who now let their cats go outdoors indicated that it is likely that their next cat will be an indoor pet.
-  41% of outdoor cat owners say that they would likely keep their cats indoors if they thought it would be healthier and safer for the cat.
-  49% say they would be likely to keep cats indoors if it were beneficial to wildlife.








Photo: Linda Winter

## Attitudes About Cat Predation of Birds and Other Wildlife

-  41% of all respondents were concerned about cats preying on birds and other wildlife.
-  53% of cat-owning respondents were concerned about cat predation.
-  47% have seen their cats with captured animals.
-  68% of all respondents, and 60% of cat-owning respondents, agreed that stray cats should be humanely removed from areas set aside for wildlife.
-  64% of all respondents believe that putting bells on cats prevents them from killing birds and other wildlife.
-  60% of all respondents believe that well-fed cats kill birds and other wildlife.

## Attitudes and Behavior About Restricting Cats, Spaying and Neutering, Licensing

-  69.5% of all respondents and 54.4% of cat-owning respondents believe that cats, like dogs, should be regulated to prevent roaming.
-  77% of cat-owning respondents have had their cats neutered or spayed.
-  23% of all cat-owning respondents have not had their cats neutered or spayed and gave the following reasons: 39% believe it is not necessary, 16% haven't gotten around to it, and 14% thought it too expensive. 30% of respondents with primarily outdoor cats have not neutered or spayed their cats.
-  78% of all respondents agree that owners should be required to spay/neuter their cats.
-  44% of all respondents have fed stray cats.

## Survey Methodology

A total of 752 telephone interviews were conducted July 29 - August 5, 1997 by M&RR, an independent research firm. M&RR developed the survey instrument with ABC, and selected a nationally representative sample of the general public. A total of 250 interviews were conducted with cat owners, and 502 interviews were conducted with non-cat owners.

The incidence rate for cat owners was 33% and 67% for non-cat owners. The overall maximum sampling error was +/- 3.57% at a 95% confidence level. The maximum sampling error for cat owners was +/- 6.20% at a 95% confidence level, and +/- 4.37% at a 95% confidence level for non-cat owners. The sampling error actually varied from question to question, and depended on the sample size and results for each question.

ABC is encouraged by the results of this nationally representative poll, and concludes that the majority of both cat owners and people who don't own cats will be receptive to our message. While opposition exists, local campaigners should be able to capitalize on increased concerns about the welfare of cats to bring about appropriate changes in human behavior.

For more information, contact:

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