

Predation of wildlife by domestic cats *Felis catus* in Great Britain

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ABSTRACT

1. A questionnaire survey of the numbers of animals brought home by domestic cats *Felis catus* was conducted between 1 April and 31 August 1997. A total of 14 370 prey items were brought home by 986 cats living in 618 households. Mammals made up 69% of the items, birds 24%, amphibians 4%, reptiles 1%, fish < 1%, invertebrates 1% and unidentified items 1%. A minimum of 44 species of wild bird, 20 species of wild mammal, four species of reptile and three species of amphibian were recorded.
2. Of a sample of 696 individual cats, 634 (91%) brought home at least one item and the back-transformed mean number of items brought home was 11.3 (95% CI 10.4–12.2). The back-transformed means and number of cats retrieving at least one item from each prey group were: 8.1 (7.4–8.9) mammals for 547 (79%) cats, 4.1 (3.8–4.5) birds for 506 (73%) cats, 2.6 (2.2–3.0) herpetofauna for 145 (21%) cats and 2.2 (1.8–2.7) other items for 98 (14%) cats.
3. The number of birds and herpetofauna brought home per cat was significantly lower in households that provided food for birds. The number of bird species brought home was greater in households providing bird food. The number of birds and herpetofauna brought home per cat was negatively related to the age and condition of the cat. The number of mammals brought home per cat was significantly lower when cats were equipped with bells and when they were kept indoors at night. The number of herpetofauna brought home was significantly greater when cats were kept in at night.
4. Based on the proportion of cats bringing home at least one prey item and the back-transformed means, a British population of approximately 9 million cats was estimated to have brought home in the order of 92 (85–100) million prey items in the period of this survey, including 57 (52–63) million mammals, 27 (25–29) million birds and 5 (4–6) million reptiles and amphibians.
5. An experimental approach should be taken to investigate the factors found by this descriptive survey to influence the numbers of prey brought home by cats. In particular, investigation of potential management practices that could reduce the numbers of wild animals killed and brought home by cats will be useful for wildlife conservation, particularly in suburban areas.

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