

Outdoor cats: Identifying differences between stakeholder beliefs, perceived impacts, risk and management

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Highlights

- We examine stakeholder differences driving management preference for outdoor cats.
- Groups differed significantly on all attitude, belief and perception measures.
- Non-lethal methods, such as Trap-Neuter-Return, were preferred by all respondents.
- There were important areas of agreement about identification, vaccination and cat management.
- Active stakeholders must be included in the development of cat management policies.

Abstract

Conflict over the management of outdoor cats has contributed to debate between animal welfare and wildlife advocates and stymied efforts to control outdoor cats. We distributed a mail survey to a random sample of participants in Trap-Neuter-Return programs for outdoor cats, Audubon Society members and the public across four counties in Florida ($N = 1363$) to identify differences between these stakeholders' perceptions and support for the management of outdoor cats. We used a perception of risk framework to evaluate group differences in attitudes and beliefs about outdoor cats, perceptions of positive and negative impacts, ecological risk perceptions, and support for management options. Multivariate Analysis of Variance results indicated significant differences between groups across all of our measured scales. Discriminant Function Analysis helped identify two distinct groups; explaining 79% and 21% of the variance between groups. Group membership was predicted by cat ownership, attitudes toward and beliefs about outdoor cats, perceived impacts, risk perceptions, and management attitudes. This research is the first to explore differences in cognitions and preferences related to outdoor cat management with three important stakeholder groups. To reduce response bias, our survey included both positive and negative impact items and neutral terminology. Our findings suggest that surveys, based solely on public opinions about outdoor cats, do not reflect the diversity of opinion of all relevant stakeholder groups.

Keywords

Domestic cats; Stakeholder conflict; Ecological risk perceptions; Lethal management