

Human Attitudes and Behavior on Keeping Cats Indoors

CATS INDOORS

According to a 2008 survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, there are 93.6 million owned cats in the United States, making them the most popular pet for Americans (although more households own dogs, the total number of owned dogs is fewer than cats).

The impacts to wildlife and risks to pet and human health from outdoor cats have prompted a growing movement to keep cats indoors. Before cat litter was developed (about 50 years ago), it was difficult to maintain cats as indoor pets. Today, the main obstacles appear to be the lack of public awareness of the benefits of keeping cats indoors and the consequences of allowing them to run loose, and the belief that it is cruel to keep cats indoors all the time and that they should be allowed to roam free.

To learn more about Americans attitudes regarding keeping cats indoors, American Bird Conservancy (ABC) conducted a telephone survey indicating good news and bad news for birds and cats. The majority of both cat owners and people who don't own cats are receptive to the *Cats Indoors* message; 65% of all respondents believe that keeping cats indoors is safer and healthier for cats. However, only 35% of cat owners said they keep their cats indoors all the time.

The survey found many cat owners keep their cats indoors some or all of the time, and many cat owners who currently permit their cats to go



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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 run loose. In addition, many cat owners have not fully committed themselves to ownership of the cat. Studies have shown that many people became cat owners by being "adopted" by a cat that showed up on their doorstep, rather than purposefully setting out to acquire a pet. Below is a summary of the survey results:

Keeping Cats Indoors: Cat Owner Behavior

- ✓ 35% keep their cats indoors all of the time.
- ✓ 31% keep them indoors mostly with some outside access.
- ✓ 66% of the people who now keep their cats indoors do so primarily for the safety and health of the cat.
- ✓ 35% of outdoor cat owners indicated that it is likely that their next cat will be an indoor pet.



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- ✓ 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 their cats indoors if it were beneficial to wildlife.

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.

Attitudes and Behavior about Restricting Cats, Spaying, Neutering, and Licensing

- ✓ 69.5% of all respondents and 54.4% of cat-owning respondents believe that cats, like dogs, should be regulated to prevent them from running loose.
- ✓ 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.



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Survey Methodology

A total of 752 telephone interviews were conducted July 29 - August 5, 1997 by Marketing and Research Resources, Inc., an independent research firm. They 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 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.



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