

## Community attitudes and practices of urban residents regarding predation by pet cats on wildlife: an international comparison

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**Summary:** These researchers sought to understand international differences in attitudes and husbandry regarding restrictions and desexing of pet cats, as well as interactions between cats and wildlife. They administered a common survey to cat owners and non-owners in Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, the UK and the USA, to compare the attitudes of both groups in each country to questions such as the desirability of legislation, support for desexing and confinement, and the level of concern over predation by pet cats. The survey was completed by 1720 respondents. In all 6 countries, non-owners were more likely than owners to agree that pet cats killing wildlife were a problem in cities, towns and rural areas. Agreement amongst non-owners was highest in Australia (95%) and New Zealand (78%) and lowest in the UK (38%). Irrespective of ownership, over 85% of respondents from all countries except China (65%) valued wildlife in cities, towns and rural areas. Non-owners were more supportive of cat legislation than owners everywhere other than Japan. Australian non-owners were the most supportive (88%), followed by Chinese non-owners (80%) and Japanese owners (79.5%). The UK was least supportive (non-owners 43%, owners 25%). Many Australian (62%), New Zealand (51%) and Chinese owners (42%) agreed that pet cats killing wildlife in cities, towns and rural areas was a problem, while only 12% of owners and 38% of non-owners in the UK agreed.

**Comment:** In the last few years, we have seen an increasing number of media discussions surrounding the unfortunate Venn diagram of a) a high rate of cat ownership, b) a large number of owners allowing free outdoor access to their cats, and c) an increasingly endangered endemic fauna. NZ is not alone in having a vociferous community advocating for wildlife preservation, but several studies in different countries have suggested that there might be differences between the countries in the attitudes of their populations to pet cat management. Those differences between countries are important to understand if

we are to learn from the successful experiences of others. However, comparisons between studies are difficult when methodologies differ, and thus this study, which surveyed cat owners and non-owners in several countries, is important. The confinement to urban middle-class respondents was a possible source of bias, though the authors argued they represent those most likely to be politically engaged. Of greatest significance to us in NZ was the startling difference in almost all respects between Australia and NZ, or more specifically, Auckland and Sydney. Whereas 67% of cat owners in NZ allow their cats free outdoors access, only 8% in Sydney do. The large rate in NZ was comparable with the UK (64%), where respondents were the least supportive of introducing legislation or restrictions. Unfortunately, the study did not elucidate the reasons why Australian cat owners are more inclined to restrict their cats indoors, although municipal curfews, concern for wildlife, and concern for the welfare of the cat are all likely influences. However, whether good or bad, cat ownership is declining in Australia, and concern for wildlife is the second most common reason for Australians not owning a cat. In contrast, the authors suggest that access to the outdoors is seen as a positive welfare issue for cats in the UK, and argue that changing attitudes there by raising concern for wildlife is unlikely to be effective. To bolster that claim, they cite a recent article by a renowned ethologist who expressed concern for the welfare of cats housed in small communities in "cat cafés" in the UK.\* It's not just the Queen's corgis that receive royal treatment in the UK. But what is the best argument for motivating NZ cat owners? Are we best to argue for the welfare of the cat, for the Tui, or for both? For us to be effective in reducing the number of cats hunting and breeding outside in NZ, we would do well to be attentive to what has successfully motivated cat owners across the Tasman, and what the impediments are here.

\* Bradshaw J. Are Britain's cats ready for cat cafés? *Vet Rec.* 2013;173(22):554-5

**Reference:** PLoS One. 2016;11(4):e0151962