



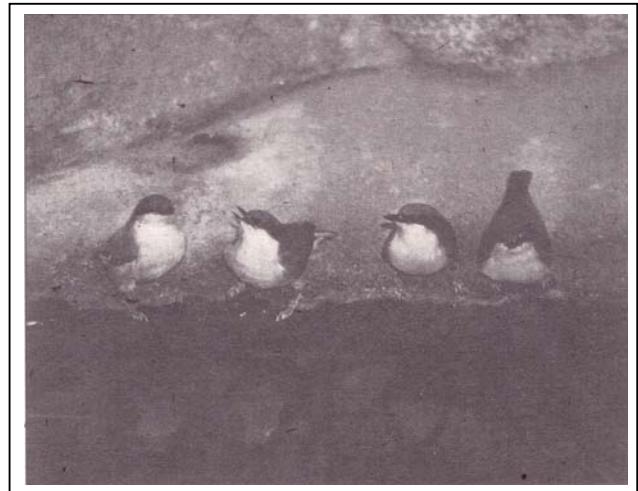
South Okanagan  
Conservation Strategy

# Living in Nature Series

## PROTECTING WILDLIFE from Domestic Pets *A Landowners' Guide*

### Pressure from All Sides

The Southern Interior of B.C. has experienced considerable habitat loss and environmental degradation. This has had a severe impact on native wildlife species. Competing land uses, such as urban development, forestry, mining, and agriculture continue to reduce, isolate and degrade critical wildlife habitat. Native wildlife populations are further stressed by domestic animals. Cats and dogs are predators of particular concern.



*Photo: Steve Cannings*

In suburban areas, native wildlife is threatened by fragmentation and loss of habitat, and predation by cats and dogs.

The domestic cat and dog are not part of B.C.'s natural environment. 'Wild'

descendants of abandoned pets are called 'feral' animals. Feral cats can now be found in all major cities. In suburban areas, cats and dogs occur in far greater numbers than natural predator populations. Research indicates that the number of cats and dogs kept as pets has increased steadily during the past thirty years; currently, over half of B.C. homeowners have pets.



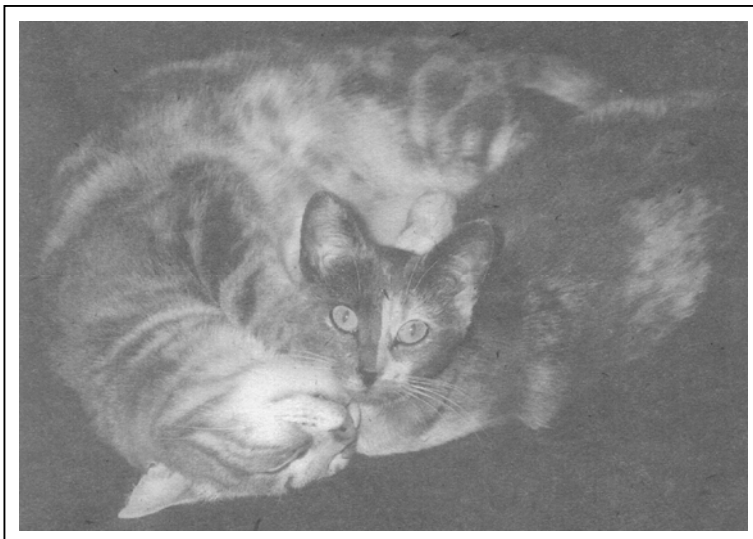
## A Cause for Concern

Cats and dogs kill **millions** of wild animals in Canada each year.

The house cat is an efficient predator, capable of killing many native animal species. These include amphibians, reptiles, insects, spiders, birds and small mammals.

A well fed cat is not discouraged from preying on wildlife. A cat's natural killing instinct is evident whether the cat is hungry or not.

Releasing non-native animals into the wild is illegal, unethical and cruel.



*Photo: Lisa Scott*

A cat can seldom resist the urge to hunt and pounce when given the opportunity. Collar bells do not prevent your cat from catching prey.

Domestic pets can carry and transmit infectious diseases such as rabies and toxoplasmosis, affecting wildlife, livestock and people alike.

In rural areas, dogs will band together to form packs. They will chase deer, sheep, moose, birds and domestic livestock, often harassing the animals to the point of exhaustion.

Irresponsible pet owners often abandon their pets. Animals such as domestic rabbits, turtles, fish, rats, cats and dogs suffer unnecessarily when left to fend for themselves. They may not be conditioned to survive in the wild.

Feral animals can cause serious damage to wildlife populations by killing them directly, by competing for food or by passing on diseases. Unwanted pets should be taken to the local SPCA or a new home should be found.



## Responsible Pet Ownership

Some people will trap nuisance animals on their property, using humane live-traps. These animals must be released at the edge of the property by law.

It is an offence under the Criminal Code of Canada to abandon a trapped cat in another location.



Photo: Steve Cannings

Abandoning someone's trapped pet in another location is regarded as theft, and is an offence under Section 446 of the Criminal Code. If you see someone's pet chasing wildlife on your property, notify the owner.

Under the B.C. Wildlife Act, a Conservation Officer can destroy a pet that is at large and is harassing wildlife. The pet owner will be charged.

There is a great need for responsible pet ownership.

Domestic pets represent a significant threat to native wildlife. To ensure the continued survival of suburban populations of wildlife, it is necessary to control the activities of domestic cats and dogs.

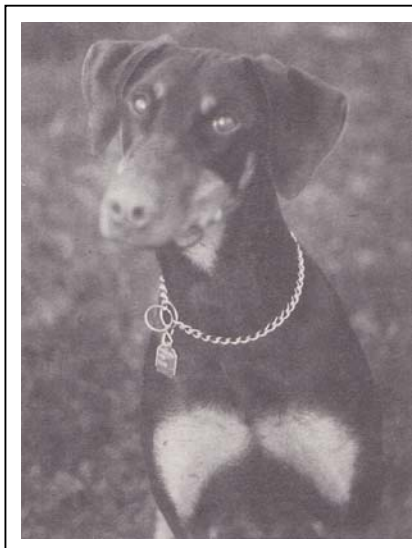


Photo: Lisa Scott

The success of wildlife management in urban areas is dependent on public awareness and involvement.

Pet owners must recognize the impact their pet can have on wildlife.

Roaming pets are a nuisance to neighbours and are vulnerable to cars, other animals and infectious diseases.



## What You Can Do

- ❖ Consider acquiring your neutered or spayed pet from the SPCA.
- ❖ Neuter or spay your pet to reduce the burden of unwanted kittens and puppies on the environment.
- ❖ Find a good home for your unwanted pet. Do not abandon it to the wild.
- ❖ Keep cats inside more often. Indoor cats are generally healthier and live longer.
- ❖ Fence your property to provide a safe, confined exercise area for your clog.
- ❖ Consider training your cat to use a leash and collar. This can be accomplished with a little extra time and attention.
- ❖ Keep no more than two neutered or spayed cats on the farm to control rodent populations.
- ❖ Bird houses or feeders should be at least five feet above the ground and away from objects on which cats can climb.
- ❖ A sheet metal guard around a tree or wooden post also helps to protect wildlife from your cat.
- ❖ Contact your local naturalists' organization for information about the wildlife in your backyard.

*Photo: Steve Cannings*



**Funding for this project is provided by:**



**BC Environment**



*The South Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Program (SOS Stewardship) was set up by The Nature Trust of British Columbia, the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and BC Environment to help private landowners protect and enhance natural areas on their lands.*

*The Nature Trust of British Columbia, director of the SOS Stewardship Program, is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of areas of ecological significance in British Columbia.*