



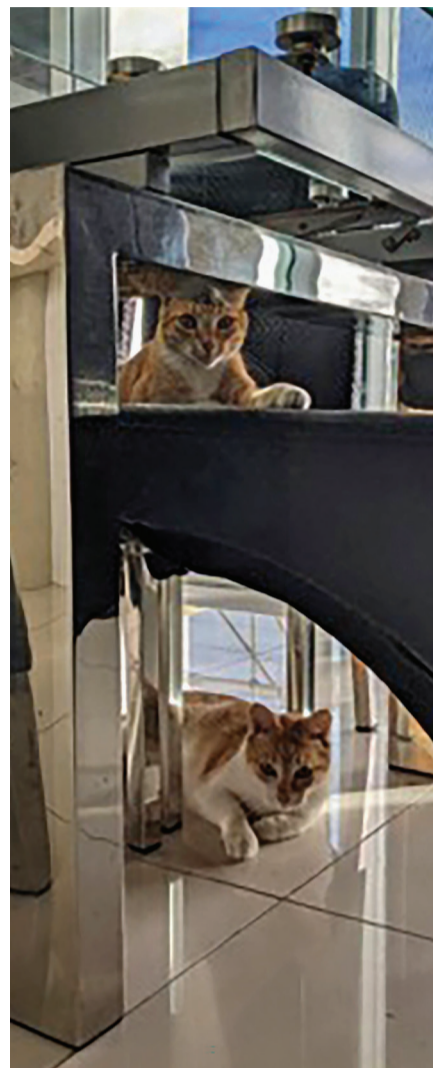
Opinion



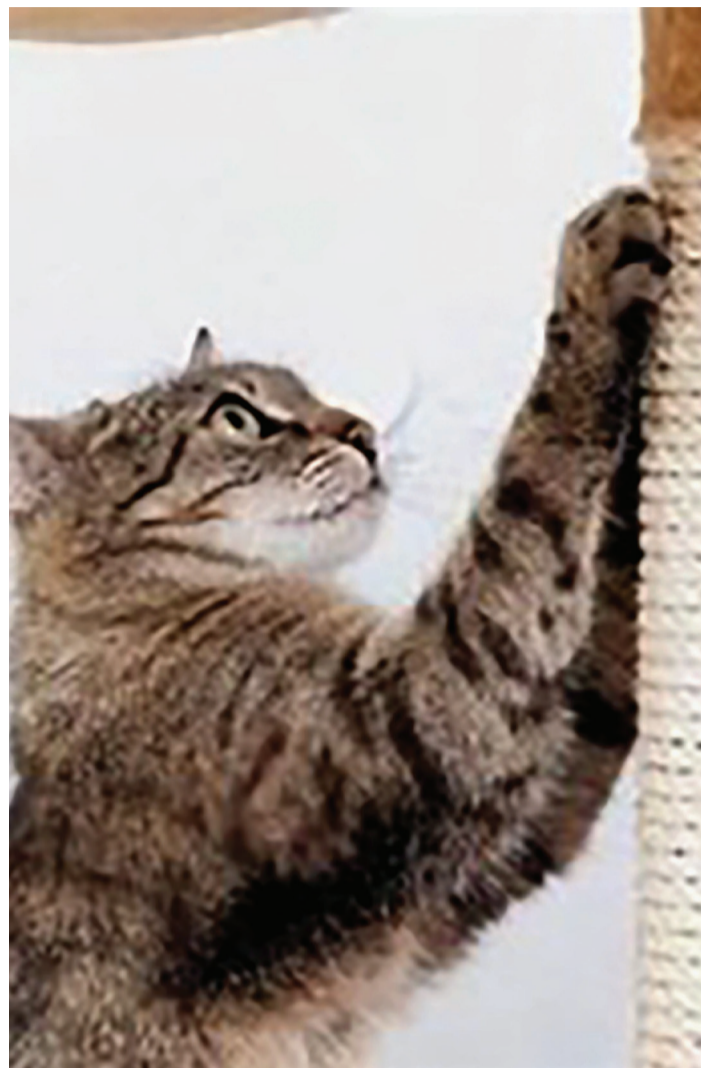
Mary-Anne Fiebig

Mary-Anne is a volunteer on assignment with Animals Fiji as part of the Australian Volunteers Programme, an Australian Government Initiative.

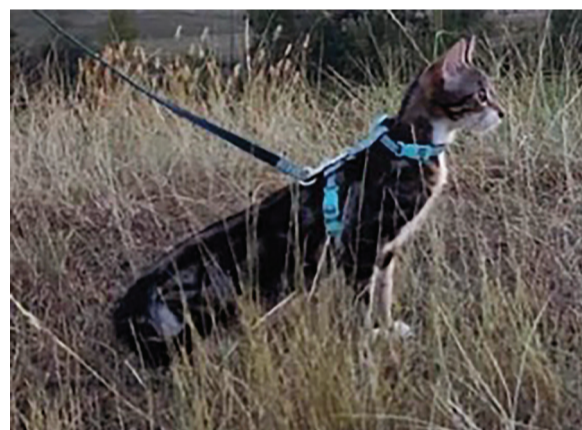
A 10,000 Year Old Companion-Animal: Beautiful by Day, Predators by Night



Indoor cats.



Cat scratching post.



A cat on a leash.



Cat and mouse.

Cats are thought to have been domesticated in the Middle East about 10,000 years ago, and since then, humans have spread cats around the world.

Domestic cats are highly loved human companions, but a large series of scientific studies worldwide, and over 100 years, have shown that cats have become predators of native creatures on every continent except Antarctica.

Wherever cats are left to roam freely, they kill a considerable number of native species.

Domestic cats' friendly and cuddly nature among humans disguises their being highly adapted killing machines with retractable claws, sharp teeth and night vision.

Domestic cats are close relatives to larger animals like lions, tigers and leopards and are carnivores with sharp slicing teeth.

Unlike dogs, they do not have molars, which are used to grind vegetable matter, so cats have evolved to only eat meat.

WHAT DO CATS KILL?

In a recent scientific publication, which combined previously collected data from around the world, about 2100 species have been killed by cats, with about 350 of those species now extinct or in danger of extinction.

Birds, reptiles, and mammals were the most consumed.

It is estimated that there are 600 million pet cats in the world, with an unknown number of feral cats.

Domestic cats that are free to roam outside kill between 10 and 30 billion birds and mammals yearly in the United States alone.

Most domestic cats are fed but allowed to roam and will kill and eat animals within 100 to 200 metres of

their home. Less than 20 per cent of kills are brought home.

Feral cats roam wider and kill more as they rely on hunting for all their food.

FIJI'S SUSCEPTIBLE NATIVE SPECIES

Fiji has about 75 native bird species, of which 27 are only found in Fiji.

The musk parrot is one of the most recognisable birds in Fiji, as are some of the parrot finches and

fruit doves, while the red-throated lorikeet is one of Fiji's rarest birds.

Fiji has two endangered iguanas: the Fijian crested iguana and the Fiji banded iguana.

Fiji's only native land mammals are six species of bats.

There are two common species of frogs in Fiji, the threatened ground frog and the tree frog.

All of these animals and many more have the potential to be killed by cats.

SHOULD I LET MY CAT OUT?

Many cat owners struggle with questions: should I let my cat out or is it cruel to always keep my cat indoors?

Going outdoors is not necessary to have a happy cat, even one that is accustomed to living outdoors.

If a cat is accustomed to living outdoors, getting them accustomed to staying inside is best introduced gradually.

On average, a cat kept safe in a loving home will live 10 years longer than a cat that roams.

According to the RSPCA in Australia, two out of three cat owners have lost a cat to a roaming-related accident, with one out of three to a car accident!

The major safety issues for your cat when it roams include:

- being attacked by dogs;
- fighting with other cats, which

often results in painful skin abscesses (infected sores);

- being killed by a car;
- reducing the risk they will stray and become lost, trapped, abused or stolen;

- avoiding a serious infection, such as FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus);

- acquiring ticks or fleas;
- eating toxic plants;
- being poisoned by eating rodents killed with rat poison; and
- unwanted pregnancy in your female cat if she is not desexed.

If you allow your cat outdoors unsupervised at any time, you risk your cat's life and reduce the number of years you will have with them.

If you allow your cat outdoors, ensure they are microchipped and vaccinated.

Being microchipped allows them to be returned to you if they are found after being lost.

Being vaccinated protects them from diseases that they may get from being around other cats.

It is good to have a cat collar with an identification tag on them as well should they get lost.

If they are outside, it is preferable to have an enclosed area to keep them safe as well as other animals.

A high fence around the area will also keep your cat safe outside.

HOW DO I TELL THAT MY CAT IS BORED?

Signs that your cat is bored can be:

- chewing on household item;
- excessive self-grooming;
- pushing objects to watch them fall;
- harassing other pets;
- showing aggression;
- increased focus on food/treats; and
- attempts to escape.

HAPPY?

Your cat will be happy indoors through you playing and interacting with them daily.

You can buy or make many cat toys to keep your cat moving.

Toys in the shape of a mouse, toys with feathers, battery-operated toys that move or laser pointers.

All will keep your cat pouncing and stalking indoors.

Domestic cats retain the same desire to climb as their wild ancestors.

Pursuing prey into the trees and seeking high places for safety is natural.

There are wooden "cat trees" and scratching poles that can be made or bought, allowing a cat to climb or use their claws.

Indoor cats love to sit on a window ledge and look outside, so ensure that you have somewhere to perch near a window so that they can look outside.

Pet cats can have some outdoor time in a safe enclosure that they cannot escape from, and dangers cannot get to them.

Create a cat run or enclose an area of your yard or verandah.

Cats can be trained to walk on a leash outdoors.

It is easier to start indoors when it is a kitten, but even older cats can learn, especially if they are bribed with treats.

After getting used to a harness or leash indoors, you can also take your cat for a short walk outdoors with the harness on.

The harness can also be used for guided tree climbs.

INSUMMARY

While keeping your cat inside is the safest option, indoor cats can become bored, stressed and gain weight.

It is crucial to provide your indoor cat with plenty of mental and physical stimulation.

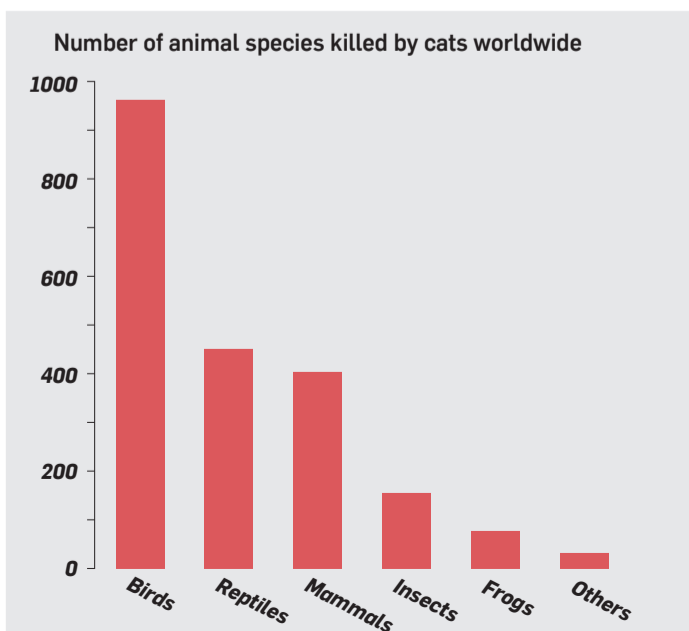
It is very important to provide them with many different toys to play with, things to play with, hiding places and elevated perches so that they do not become bored and have plenty to do.

Stimulation is vital for your cat's health and happiness.

Remember - you are keeping your cat safe and they will live longer if you keep your cat safely inside and you are keeping other animals safe as well!

As a non-profit charity, Animals Fiji depends on the kindness of donations to continue its work of supporting animals across Fiji. To learn more about Animals Fiji and how you can help, contact their Savusavu Clinic at (+679) 998 6253 or Nadi Clinic at (+679) 993 6647 or visit their website at www.animalsfiji.org.

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HOW DO I KEEP MY INDOOR CAT