



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemarkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

30 July 2020

Domestic cats impact Cape Town conservation areas

New research published this week in the journal *Global Ecology and Conservation* shows that Cape Town's domestic cats are killing far more animals than previously realised – more than five times the number of animals they bring home. The research highlights the need to address the impact of cat predation on Cape Town's wildlife, particularly near protected areas such as the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP).

The study by University of Cape Town (UCT) researchers, in collaboration with the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), found that the approximately 300 000 domestic cats in Cape Town kill around 27.5 million animals per year, and that TMNP is likely to lose around 203 500 animals annually to cats living within 150 metres of TMNP.

The study is one of the first in the world to make use of cat-borne video cameras ("kitty-cams"). Most cat predation studies rely on counts of prey returned home questionnaire surveys, so they tend to underestimate kills, because they miss prey consumed or abandoned away from home. The kitty-cam footage revealed that the average Cape Town cat kills 90 animals a year, which can include a number of threatened or endemic species, including Western Leopard Toads, Cape Rain Frogs, and Orange breasted sunbirds.

Although cats are furry, cuddly and cute companions, they are also often kept for their ability to control pests like rats. Yet only 17% of animals taken by cats living in deep urban environments were what are considered "pest" species (i.e. introduced rats, house mice or European starlings), and for cats living near the park, the percentage of "pest" animals killed was 6%, implying that many indigenous animals are killed.

According to UCT's Dr Rob Simmons, co-author of the study, "this is a high price for controlling a few pest species. We need to ensure that we are able to create a balance so that we do not lose any species of wildlife in the Cape to cat predation."

The footage also revealed that cats did much of their hunting at night, and perhaps the most impacted single species was the Marbled Leaf-toed gecko, a species that is easily

captured by cats and almost always consumed immediately. Reptiles constituted 50% of prey, but only 17% of returns; mammals constituted 24% of prey, but 54% of returns.

A number of mitigation factors might help reduce these impacts such as cat-free buffers around the TMNP and "catios", enclosures in the garden used elsewhere in the world to allow a domestic cat to roam in the garden but not beyond. These have been employed successfully elsewhere to limit cat predation.

Dr Colleen Seymour from SANBI and co-author said: "this study highlights the need for us to devise strategic initiatives that will preserve the Cape's conservation areas. By working with cat owners we can find solutions that benefit both the cats and wildlife areas."

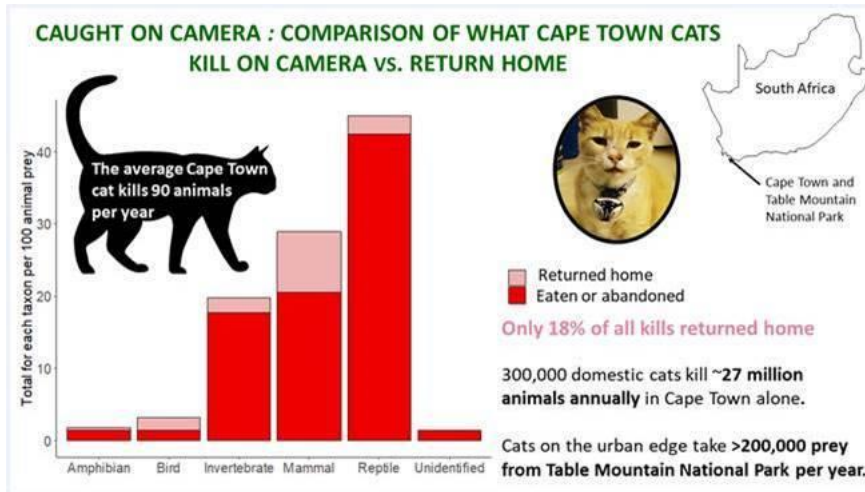
International wildlife law requires national authorities to adopt and implement policies to prevent, reduce or eliminate impacts of free-ranging domestic cats on biodiversity. Although this may be challenging, it is possible to implement, and some promising solutions, for example involving cat owners in citizen science programmes, are now emerging.

The team comprising Dr Colleen Seymour, Dr Rob Simmons, Frances Morling, Sharon T. George, Dr Koebraa Peters and Professor Justin O'Riain are grateful to the numerous Cape Town cat owners who volunteered their pets and completed questionnaire surveys, re-charged KittyCams day and night, downloaded data and collected prey. "Without their help this study would not have been possible," shared the team.

Note to editors

Access the study: [Caught on camera: the impacts of urban domestic cats on wild prey in an African city and neighbouring protected areas](#)

This study was a collaboration between the FitzPatrick Institute, Department of Biological Sciences, UCT; SANBI, Kirstenbosch Research Centre; the UCT Department of Biological Sciences; and the Institute for Communities and Wildlife in Africa, Department of Biological Sciences, UCT.



Comparison of what Cape Town cats kill vs. return home
Picture: The authors of Caught on Camera

[Download image](#)

[Download images of the cats](#)

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Aamirah Sunday

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5427
Cell: (076) 947 6071

Email: aamirah.sunday@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za