

Rainbow cat collars may save birds

February 18 2015, by Michelle Wheeler



A cat wearing the rainbow Birdsbesafe cat collar. Credit: Catherine Hall

It might resemble a flashback to early 90s fashion but a scrunchie-like collar cover could be the key to reducing the amount of wildlife your cat kills.

A WA study of the collar covers, marketed as Birdsbesafe, found they reduced the number of birds, reptiles and amphibians killed by cats by 54 per cent.

But the collar covers did not stop cats catching mammals, meaning they could be used in situations where cat owners want their pets to continue

to prey on rats and mice.

Murdoch University PhD student Catherine Hall, who led the research, recruited more than 100 cats actively hunting prey in Perth's outer suburbs and nearby towns to take part in the study.

Over the course of six weeks, the cats' owners collected and froze everything their pets brought home, and the prey were later identified by the WA Museum.

Ms Hall says the Birdsbesafe collar cover was most effective at protecting birds and herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians), which have good colour vision.

"They're best used by owners whose cats catch a lot of birds and lizards and either don't catch a lot of mice and rats, or their owners don't care whether they catch mice and rats," she says.

"A lot of farmers use [cats](#) to catch rats and mice in their sheds... so they might find it quite useful because it won't stop them from catching those but it will stop them from catching any lizards and birds that live on the farm."

Ms Hall says owners might be better off looking to other products on the market, such as bells and pounce protectors, in areas where there are a lot of small native mammals.

The research examined three collar cover colours, referred to in the study as red, yellow and rainbow.

In [birds](#), the red and rainbow fashions were much more effective than the yellow collar.

"A lot of songbirds eat from flowers... so some colours will be more important to them than others in terms of what they tend to notice," Ms Hall says.

Almost 80 per cent of the owners involved in the research reported that their cat had no problems with the collar and another 17 per cent said their cat got used to the collar within two days.

Nearly four out of five indicated that they would continue to use the collar after the study finished.

The research was published in January in the journal *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*.

More information: Catherine M. Hall, Joseph B. Fontaine, Kate A. Bryant, Michael C. Calver, "Assessing the effectiveness of the Birdsbesafe anti-predation collar cover in reducing predation on wildlife by pet cats in Western Australia," *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, Available online 25 January 2015, ISSN 0168-1591, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2015.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2015.01.004).

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