

Where the wild things aren't: Cats avoid places coyotes roam

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This camera trap image of a cat with a mouse in its mouth was one of millions collected by students and citizen scientists for the study. Credit: Roland Kays, North Carolina State University

Domestic cats might be determined hunters, but they stick mostly to residential areas instead of venturing into parks and protected areas where coyotes roam. That's the key finding from a North Carolina State University analysis of more than 2,100 sites - the first large-scale study of free-ranging cats in the U.S. published in the *Journal of Mammalogy*.

Why is it important to know where 74 million pet cats spend their time away from home?

"Domestic cats are estimated to kill billions of birds and small mammals each year," says lead author Roland Kays, a zoologist with NC State's College of Natural Resources and the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences. "Knowing where they hunt helps assess the risk to wildlife."

Kays and his colleagues used camera trap data collected by hundreds of students and citizen scientists in six Eastern states. They analyzed millions of images data from motion-sensitive cameras located in 32 protected sites and the urban neighborhoods of Raleigh, North Carolina.

Cats were concentrated in residential areas and small urban forests, such as those along Raleigh's greenway trails.

"We detected cats 300 times more often in residential yards, where [coyotes](#) are rare, than in parks," Kays says.

The more coyotes in an area, the less likely cats were to venture nearby. The one area where both cats and coyotes overlapped was small urban woodlots.

"Most parks had no [cats](#) at all," Kays says. "Our cameras photographed a single cat at some parks, but we only found evidence for more than one cat in two of the 32 parks we surveyed."

Another interesting finding: Cats that did venture into nature preserves kept the same nocturnal schedule as coyotes, while those in residential areas were diurnal.

The study is part of the eMammal project, which enables [citizen scientists](#) to collaborate with researchers at the Smithsonian Institution and NC State University to document animal activity.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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