

Book Reviews

Book Review Editor's Note: We are continuing to use the current currency codes. Thus Canadian dollars are CAD, U.S. dollars are USD, Euros are EUR, China Yuan Remimbi are CNY, Australian dollars are AUD and so on.

ZOOLOGY

Free-ranging Cats – Behavior, Ecology, Management

By Stephen Spotte. 2014. John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, UK, PO19 8SQ. 320 pages, 123.95 CAD, Cloth.

The topic of free-ranging cats ranks right up there with religion and politics: keep quiet and a fight won't break out. However, Stephen Spotte is ready, very ready, for the fight. The book started out though, by making this indoor cat enthusiast worried, for the dedication was to "Puddy, Tigger, Miss Sniff, Wilkins, Beavis and Jinx"...I'm assuming these aren't the author's children, so with an armada of loved cats as his dedicatees, I was assuming the worst. I was very wrong.

The numbers are staggering...millions upon millions of free-roaming cats (outside housecats, strays and ferals) in the world, hundreds of millions of needlessly killed birds, small mammals and more. I had no idea that so much research was being done on these cats... the reference list for this book alone comprises ~800 papers. This is a very well researched book.

One of Spotte's strengths is that he is not only appropriately critical of the shoddy procedures of some of the other researchers, but also of their interpretations. For example, how can someone claim that cats are social, when they don't follow the definition of "social"? And the claim that cats are promiscuous: females whose offspring are sired by only one male doesn't suggest monogamy at all according to Spotte (as it did to another author), it more simply suggests limited access to other breeding opportunities. There are many other examples of Spotte's skill at interpreting the results of others.

Quite frankly, there seems to be a lot of dogma (catma?) in the stray feline literature, which Spotte questions time and again. Where is the evidence? Do males guard oestrous females? Is there a hierarchy among males? Is it appropriate to refer to groups of cats as "colonies" when really they're just aggregating around an abundant resource (normally food)?

Several chapters start with an exhaustive review of cats' basic biology, which is then followed by the extrapolation of at least some of the basic biology to free-roaming cats. But only sometimes. For example, I'm not sure why a table of the amino acid composition of milk, as it changes during lactation of captive cats, was included. If those data were compared to similar

data from free-ranging cats, that would then make this important to include, perhaps. The book is subtitled *Behaviour, Ecology, Management*, and it's unclear how this, and some of the sections on physiology, fit.

The chapters are presented in a logical order, with the first two chapters largely debunking ideas of dominance and space use. From there, chapters go into some detail about interactions, then reproduction and development (both during weaning and after). The penultimate chapter on foraging provides a framework for the clearly explained ideas in the last chapter dealing with management, and it is this chapter that most people will read with greatest interest. The rest of the book is a framework for this chapter; legislators should read this, if nothing else.

In the final chapter, Spotte is unequivocal about the solution to the problem of feral and stray cats...eradication. Neutering and releasing is a highly vaunted strategy that makes some people feel good (that is, they don't have a death on their hands, but in reality, they have the deaths of many small mammals and birds blood-staining them), but those same people ignore the facts. The odd thing about this chapter is that more examples of foraging, the subject of the previous chapter, are included here. It's important information to include, with many examples of tragedies for bird species, extinctions included, though the information should have been in the appropriate chapter.

Spotte spends a lot of space writing on why Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) programs are not only ineffective, they are detrimental. Neutered cats still kill, they are still vectors of disease, and so on. Spotte backs this information up with many studies, those same studies which are conveniently ignored or sarcastically denigrated by supporters of TNR. The book winds up with eradication, methods and rationales.

This book will be relished by wildlife enthusiasts, and despised by the misguided.

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