



When Fido and Fluffy attack:

By Jacelyn Downey

If you subscribe to this magazine and others like it, you are probably working hard to improve your land, combat invasive or otherwise undesirable plant or animal species, and create a healthy property.

Time and money have likely been spent creating a landscape that is water wise, visually appealing, and welcoming to wildlife. Looking out a window to see that your butterfly garden actually has, well, butterflies, is very satisfying. If you worked hard to get bird boxes up to encourage bluebird nesting, seeing the fledglings poking their heads out to begin to explore and fly for the first time is a joy.

Unfortunately, sometimes living the rural lifestyle can come into conflict with all your efforts to create a healthy habitat. As you improve your land, dogs and cats will begin to come into contact with wildlife, sometimes to disastrous ends. It is likely to be more unpleasant to witness your dog or cat kill a bird when you worked hard to lure that very bird close to your home through feeders, bird boxes, and wildlife-friendly plants.

Cats can be the worst offenders. Even with a full

stomach, their instinct to hunt drives them to stalk and kill available prey. Birds, small mammals, and even large insects are sitting ducks for the well-designed predatory feline carnivore in a wildlife-friendly yard. Scientists estimate that domestic cats kill hundreds of millions of birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians each year.

Though dogs are usually less successful in catching the many birds and other wildlife they chase, dogs occasionally kill wildlife or injure the wildlife enough to cause their subsequent death.

How can conflicts be avoided? The absolutely best bet is to keep pets indoors or in confined areas, such as a kennel. Wildlife will stay safe, and your pets will also benefit as they'll be exposed to less risk of disease, parasites, predation, poison, and accidents. According to the American Humane Society, cats allowed to roam outside live an average of three years while indoor cats typically reach an average age of 15.

If pets can't be kept indoors or in confined areas outdoors, there are things you can do to try to minimize their negative effects. Start by having

them spayed or neutered. This will eliminate the risk of being overrun by litters of kittens or puppies as well as limiting roaming. Dogs and cats can become feral, or wild, when populations are left to reproduce unchecked. Feral cats can replace native predators such as fox and birds of prey, while feral dogs can form packs and become dangerous to livestock, wildlife, and people.

Additionally, feral dogs have been known to interbreed with coyotes and wolves.

Next, have pets vaccinated and keep them up to date. This protects your faithful friends as well as the critters they come into contact with. Many of the diseases wildlife carry can



The Audubon at Home section of the National Audubon Society Web site www.audubon.org/ lists additional ways to keep wildlife safe. It suggests some modifications and adjustments to property such as:

1. Provide Cover. How can this help? Vegetation or brush piles can provide places for birds and small mammals to escape to and hide. Plants should be close enough to feeders (10-12 feet) to allow feeding birds a safe approach and quick escape but far enough away for

a clear view of approaching cats and dogs.

Practicality – HIGH:

As you develop a yard that is safe for wildlife, including dense vegetation or a brush pile is easy.

2. Deter With Water. How can this help? A gentle spray of water from a water pistol or plant bottle can encourage cats and dogs to vacate your wildlife-friendly environs. It can also help to deter plant-munching wildlife such as rabbits, deer, and raccoons.

Minimizing pet-wildlife conflicts



Practicality – MEDIUM:

An inexpensive predator-deterrent but dependent upon your vigilance when predators are present. Repeated and consistent spraying may be needed to get the point across. Other humane methods of making predators unwelcome include motion-activated sprinklers at entrance points, fencing, and thorny brambles under feeders.

3. Humane Traps. How can this help? Humane traps provide the means

to trap so the animal may be transported safely to a local animal shelter. This also works for wildlife. Wildlife can be trapped and relocated to a different part of your property farther from your home.

Practicality – HIGH:

Traps can be purchased at a local home center and reused if the problem persists. Wildlife can be trickier to relocate; since they found their way to your home, they can usually find their way back. You can also

contact your local weed and pest control district to see if they have traps they loan out.

If all else fails and you can't seem to stop the pet-wildlife conflict, feeders, boxes, and other wildlife-friendly additions to the property may have to be removed. Admitting defeat is hard, but, in the end, it's best not to provide an easy buffet for Fido and Fluffy!

For more tips on how to keep wildlife safe, go to www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/KeepWildlifeSafe.html.

be transmitted to pets. Dogs tend to chase and attack animals they feel are endangering the family and homestead, such as porcupines, raccoons, and skunks. All of these animals can, in turn, cause harm to a dog by using their skillful means of defense in addition to the diseases they may carry.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department reports many conflicts between dogs and big game. Letting dogs roam loose can also lead to attacks on livestock, notably lambs. There are many state laws making it a crime for dogs to attack both domestic livestock and wildlife. The laws can be found at <http://legisweb.state.wy.us/statutes/dlstatutes.htm>. When walking dogs, be sure to use a leash as it can prevent unwanted attacks on wildlife and livestock.

There are other things you can do to help keep wildlife out of harm's way (see story at left). Being with your pet outdoors will help, but not eliminate, unwanted predation, harassment, and disease transmission.

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