

Invasive Species

By Lance Bookless (edited by Karen Bryan)

The constant influx of invasive species is one of the most serious problems facing Hawaii's ecosystems. Of all the invasive species, one stands out as the most disruptive ecological threat—CATS—according to the American Bird Society (<https://abcbirds.org/threat/cats-and-other-invasives/>) and the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council (<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/hisc/info/invasive-species-profiles/feral-cats/>). Feral and domesticated cats were noted as one of the most detrimental introduced species along with fire ants, coconut rhinoceros beetles, rats, and mongoose. Free-roaming cats, or "Cats at large," are known to be a threat to terrestrial and marine animals and tend to prey on native species. They are responsible for killing endangered birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians across the U.S. Cat predation on birds leads to billions of dollars in economic loss each year. This predation is a particularly problematic issue in Hawai'i, where a large proportion of native bird species are federally listed as threatened and endangered. Because our native birds evolved in a habitat free from mammalian predators, many evolved to be ground-nesters which makes them especially susceptible to predation.

Invasive species can increase the rate of native species extinction, decrease biological diversity, spread disease, and reduce water quality. When fecal material from cats contaminates water sources, it can lead to a deadly disease called toxoplasmosis that has killed at least 12 endangered Hawaiian monk seals according to NOAA (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/toll-toxoplasmosis-protozoal-disease-has-now-claimed-lives-12-monk-seals-and-left>). Indirectly, invasive species such as "cats at large" impact trade and commerce, undermine operations, affect recreational activities, and decrease ecosystem services vital to our nation's economy. Native landscapes can quickly become overrun with invasive species. Preventing and controlling invasive species at MCBH requires a unique approach that considers the environmental implications for the Base and neighboring communities.

There are many reasons people allow their pet cats to roam freely. Some common cat myths:

- *"If I feed my cat well, then my cat won't have a desire to hunt birds."*
- *"I put a bell on my cat's collar, so the birds will know where the cat is and fly away."*
- *"My cat is healthy and neutered. It's not a threat to anyone!"*
- *"My cat was born to be outdoors, and it's unhappy if I keep it inside."*

If you have a pet cat, please make sure it is microchipped so it can be returned to you if it is lost. For more info, visit the MCBH veterinary clinic page at: <http://mccshawaii.com/veterinary/> . For more info about invasive species on MCBH, visit: <https://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil/Offices-Staff/S-4-Installations-Environment-Logistics/Environmental/Natural-Resources/Wildlife/Introduced/>

Activity: Please share ideas to entertain your house cat. Is your cat leash-trained? We'd love to see Felix going out for a walk! Post comments and short video clips below. Random drawings for participant prizes will be held after COVID-19 social distancing is lifted.

Mālama i ka 'āina—care for and live in harmony with the land. Earth Day every day.