

HOW TO STOP YOUR CAT FROM HUNTING

Some cats hunt more than others, and while it's natural it can be frustrating. The only way to stop cats hunting altogether is to keep them indoors, but there are some ways to help reduce the instinct in outdoor cats as well.



Why aim to reduce hunting?

Hunting is natural behaviour for cats. In many settings it can be desirable - for example as a method of rodent control on farms or stable yards - but it becomes more of a concern when garden birds are taken, especially if they are rare or protected species.

Wildlife can also carry parasites, and cats that hunt run the risk of injury if their prey fights back - including abscesses, wounds and the transmission of TB. There is also a risk of indirect rodenticide toxicity if a cat consumes a rat that has been poisoned by bait.



HOW TO REDUCE HUNTING BEHAVIOUR

Reduce the opportunities to hunt

Position bird boxes and tables carefully, away from fences and trees that can allow cats to jump across, and away from bushes in which cats can hide. Hang feeders on branches that cats cannot access.

Spiny plants around the bottom of bird tables, and Vaseline on the pole, can help stop cats from jumping up.

Small animals and birds are most active at dawn and dusk, so these are the times to try and keep your cat in if he's an avid hunter.

UNDERSTANDING NATURAL HUNTING BEHAVIOUR

Cats are, of course, obligate carnivores and natural hunters. Compared to dogs, cats have been domesticated only recently and still maintain most of their instincts today, despite being much-loved family pets.

It is important to note that hunting behaviour in cats is **NOT** driven by hunger. In the wild, cats have to eat 9-10 small rodents daily to meet their calorie requirements, but they will hunt a great many more times than that. Not every pounce results in a kill, so it doesn't make sense for cats to wait until they are hungry to hunt.

Instead, they are driven by the instinct to catch anything that moves, just in case, regardless of how hungry they are. Hunting behaviour can also result in the release of endorphins, giving them a 'rush', so it does suit cats to display hunting behaviour.

Cats won't always kill what they catch. There are a few reasons for this:

- Many cats have not learnt how. Hunting techniques are learnt from their mothers, and if their mother was not a hunter then the chances of her having passed down these skills are small.
- Well-fed cats may still instinctively catch prey, but won't be as motivated to eat what they catch.
- Wild and feral cats hunt over a wide territory, but tend to take their catch back to their core territory where they feel secure. Many pet cats will bring their prey back home as 'presents' because that's their core territory.

Play with your cat!

Play is a more reliable way to reduce hunting than just feeding more, as cats don't hunt based on hunger levels. Doing as much as you can to play with your cat in a way that mimics natural hunting behaviour can help satisfy these instincts, reduce frustration and reduce 'real' hunting outside.

This is also of great importance in indoor cats, to help them display the natural hunting behaviour they would normally show outside.



How to mimic hunting through play:

- Short, frequent bursts of play best replicate the natural hunting patterns of cats.
- Chasing games, using a ball or wand toys, are the best type of play to mimic hunting.
- Laser pointers can be effective, but remember to reward your cat with a small treat or tangible toy at the end or they will become frustrated by the lack of a payoff!
- Keep varying the toys. Because hunting consists of short bursts with just two outcomes - a kill or a loss - cats can become bored with the game if the toy remains the same. Swap between toys every few minutes.

Attach a bell to their collar (care needed)

It has long been a common practice to fit cats with bells on their collars to try and reduce hunting. Bells will do nothing to reduce the instinct, but they can stop the cat from being so successful as the bell provides the target with a warning. Studies have suggested that bells reduce the chances of a successful catch by up to 50%.

If you choose to use a bell, be aware that anything dangling from a cat's neck can potentially be hazardous. Choose a bell with a wide groove that does not taper and risk catching their claws, and always use a safety release collar (not elasticated or buckled).



Remember to keep up with worming

Hunting can expose cats to an increased risk of parasites such as worms and *Toxoplasma*. We recommend that prolific hunters are wormed more frequently than cats who don't hunt; speak to a member of staff for more advice.

If you would like any more advice about your cat, please don't hesitate to give us a call on 01782 522100. Our team are happy to help whenever and wherever we can.

