

We are writing in support of Philadelphia Parks and Recreation's policy banning the feeding and sheltering of cats in our public parks, and its enforcement of that policy at Pleasant Hill Park, for the sake of the health of our wildlife and of our citizens.

Our parks serve as habitat for native wildlife and as spaces where Philadelphians can connect with nature. Pleasant Hill Park has hosted more than 150 species of breeding, wintering, and migratory birds - many of which are in decline. Its place along the Delaware River, an important bird migration corridor which is heavily developed along its length in Philadelphia, makes the habitat it provides crucial to the survival of migratory birds. The presence of cat colonies within or on the periphery of such a space turns a needed refuge, for birds and other wildlife, into a deathtrap.

Abundant research has shown that even well-fed cats kill wildlife and that cats are the primary human-caused source of direct mortality to birds, [killing more than a billion each year](#). Feral cats fed in parks are subsidized, and not at all "natural," predators - cared for by humans who artificially boost their population densities far above what the carrying capacity would be for native predators. Our wild neighbors deserve a safe greenspace, and Philadelphians deserve to enjoy parks that provide healthy and clean habitat for wildlife.

Cats fed in our parks defecate throughout the same spaces enjoyed by our families. This spreads toxoplasmosis, which can cause severe brain damage or death in young children and people with compromised immune systems. [This is why the CDC recommends keeping cats indoors and that pregnant women avoid stray and outdoor cats.](#)

The house cat is the [domestic animal most often found with rabies](#) (more so than dogs). Even cats released through Trap-Neuter-Return programs can develop and transmit rabies, as they rarely receive required booster shots. A TNRed cat in [the Tampa, Florida area](#) was found to be rabid; a cat colony caretaker died of rabies in Delaware. Outdoor cat feeding stations also attract and feed native rabies vectors like foxes, raccoons, and skunks, bringing them into contact with cats and with people. [This is one reason that CDC and USDA veterinarians have criticized TNR programs and cat feeding outside.](#)

Cat feeding stations also increase, rather than decrease, the rat population. Cats generally do not kill adult rats, with [research showing that most rats learn to avoid cats](#). Rats have been documented feeding on cat food at other Philly cat feeding stations, [including at nearby Lardner's Point](#).

The value of wildlife watching in general has been documented to benefit the psychological and physical health of individuals and communities. Our parks are spaces where Philadelphians of all ages can enjoy the outdoors. We need to be able to do so safely, without risk of the diseases spread by outdoor cats and other wildlife attracted by the food left by cat feeders. Thank you for your continued support of PPR's policies that keep our parks safe and clean, for wildlife and for people.