



BIRDS AND FISHES IN THE GARDEN

Birds

Any gardener who is also an animal lover and a cat owner is faced with a dilemma: cats are dangerous to birds. Admittedly, cats' natural behaviour makes them better suited to mousing, so they will very seldom catch a healthy bird. Nevertheless, it is perfectly conceivable that your domestic cat may one day lay a songbird at your feet. Young birds that have not yet left the nest are particularly at risk.

Here are a few tips from FOUR PAWS on how to protect birds from cats:

- If you have birdbaths in your garden, put them in a freestanding location with a good overview. This will allow birds to spot approaching cats in good time and fly away.
- Do not remove the foliage from thick bushes: the rustling will serve as an early warning for the birds.
- Smooth metal sleeves wrapped around trees will prevent cats from climbing up them. They will then be unable to reach nesting boxes or nests.
- Remove low branches that cats will be able to access by jumping from a wall, the garden table or the garden shed.
- Using a wire loop, nesting boxes should be suspended to hang freely from branches. Should your cat be bold enough to jump on to them anyway, a wide projecting roof will prevent "fishing trips" from above. Alternatively, you can attach such boxes near the very top of the house.
- Nests in bushes or on the ground can be protected with wire mesh. The meshes must be large enough to allow birds to slip through. You should therefore ensure that there is enough distance between the wire and the nest to prevent your cat engaging in "fishing". The various commercially available obstacles designed to stop cats climbing tree trunks are not suitable because of their reliance on sharp spikes or similar – the danger of injury is simply too great. An alternative solution is to fix a fairly wide plastic screen around the trunk.

- You should carefully monitor the progress of the young birds in the nest. Once they start attempting to fly, your cat should be confined indoors for a day or two or only allowed in the garden under strict supervision. If the cat is approaching the nest or the young birds, spray it with the garden hose (keep the jet weak, to avoid injuring the cat). This will keep it away from the birds, at least for a while.

Fish in the garden pond

To a cat, any fish sunning themselves in the shallow areas at the edge of a garden pond are nothing less than an invitation to go fishing. A helpful defence against this is a barrier of stones piled up high enough to prevent the cat's paws reaching to the water's edge.



Above: Bird boxes should be set-up in an area cats can not reach.

Centre: It is natural instinct for cats to chase small animals, such as mice and birds. Young birds may be especially at risk.

Below: Cats love to go fishing, if you keep fish in a pond or aquarium make sure they are protected.



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