

Cat Tracker: an international citizen science project exploring the movement and management of cats

Dr. Heidi Kikillus¹

¹*Victoria University Of Wellington*

Cats are one of most popular pets worldwide, providing their owners with enjoyment and companionship, but can also be a nuisance to neighbours and may have a negative impact on native wildlife. The ways cats are managed by their owners could influence the behaviour and ecological impact of cats, but there is a lack of data that can address these complex cross-disciplinary issues and guide decision-making. We have initiated a citizen science project 'Cat Tracker' to collect both environmental and social data exploring the relationships between cat management and cat behaviour. The project combines a social survey and GPS tracking to turn cat owners into researchers. It aims to help better understand the cats' home range, how much time they spend in different kinds of habitat, and how owners can manage pet cats to reduce their impact on wildlife

This project was established in the USA and has expanded through collaborators in New Zealand and Australia. Citizen scientists send the raw movement data to us, which we process and upload to Movebank.org, a publicly-available online tracking database. The project is ongoing, and aims to track thousands of cats around the world. Analysis of environmental data will focus on the movement-range of tracked cats related to natural or built environments and local predator populations. Social data will be analysed to explore links between the management of cats and their movement patterns. The international collaboration will allow us to compare results in diverse environmental and social settings.