

Cat tales: the social side of a citizen science project investigating cats in New Zealand

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“Without cats, there would be no reason for facebook” – this is just one of the answers that we received when we asked New Zealanders to tell us their cat stories. Cat Tracker is an international citizen science project investigating the movement and management of pet cats. It was established in the USA and has expanded through collaborators to other countries. In New Zealand we have run a social survey alongside the GPS tracking of pet cats. The social survey has explored attitudes towards and management of domestic cats, including an open-ended section where participants are encouraged to “tell us your cat story”. Previous social surveys on urban wildlife have shown that the stories people tell about animals can reveal a great deal about the nature of their affectional bond with animals they know as individuals. Conversely, stories can also reveal negative attitudes and concerns about management practices. This talk will highlight some of the themes that emerged from the cat stories, from adventures of individual cats, public attitudes towards cats and their management, and the story of how the information collected has influenced policy on cat management.