



## UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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### PRESS RELEASE

Issued: 8/10/2025

## New paper warns against misleading “win-win” claims about cat confinement, and calls for frank acknowledgement of welfare trade-offs

A new article in *Animal Welfare*, the journal of the [Universities Federation for Animal Welfare](http://www.ufaw.org.uk) (UFAW), warns that framing cat confinement as an uncomplicated “win-win” for wildlife and cats risks misleading the public and undermining trust in conservation and animal welfare messaging. Although this exploration centres on Australia, the issues raised are relevant to cats confined worldwide.

The paper, *Calling a trade-off a trade-off in arguments for cat confinement*, argues that while continuous confinement of domestic cats in Australia clearly reduces predation pressure on vulnerable native species, its welfare implications for cats themselves are far more contested. Despite increasing claims in public education campaigns that confinement benefits both biodiversity and companion cats equally, the authors stress that this portrayal oversimplifies a complex ethical issue.

Restricting cats indoors, they note, can limit the expression of natural behaviours such as roaming, hunting, and socialising. If indoor environments lack adequate enrichment, confinement can lead to significant negative welfare outcomes. Considering six decades of advances in animal welfare science, the authors contend that confinement is not categorically good for cat welfare, even if it may extend lifespan or reduce exposure to certain health risks.

The paper highlights several key points:

- Wildlife protection is clear-cut, but cat welfare outcomes are conditional: confinement reduces predation but its impact on cat welfare outcomes depends heavily on how indoor environments are managed.
- Health and lifespan do not equal welfare: while confined cats may live longer and face fewer external dangers, this does not guarantee freedom to express natural behaviours and experience positive states.
- Simplistic messaging undermines credibility: presenting confinement as a cost-free solution risks eroding public trust in conservation and welfare organisations, while obscuring alternative long-term strategies, such as limiting cat ownership in areas of high conservation concern, or reconsidering cat ownership more broadly.



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The authors urge policymakers, conservationists, and welfare advocates to abandon false “win-win” narratives. Instead, they call for transparent acknowledgment of the genuine trade-offs involved, enabling more informed decision-making about the balance between protecting wildlife and safeguarding the well-being of companion cats.

Lead author, Dr Carmen Glanville, said: *“We are not saying that cats shouldn’t be contained where there is sound evidence of owned cats contributing to biodiversity loss. But the “win-win” narrative fails to prepare owners for the behavioural and welfare implications of containment, thereby threatening both cat welfare and the efficacy of containment campaigns. In a field where there is unlikely to be appropriate funding for robust, scientific evaluation, these unintended consequences are likely to go undocumented and unaddressed in the community.”*

Dr Jordan Hampton co-author said: *“I am very sympathetic to any efforts made to preserve biodiversity, including through efforts to lessen predation from cats. However, recognition of the welfare costs of confinement (particularly in livestock) has been central to the modern conception of animal welfare. To overlook these costs in the context of pet cats is likely to have detrimental long-term consequences.”*

Professor Peter Sandøe, co-author, said: *“From my perspective, being situated in a part of the world where cats have been abundant for more than 1,000 years, it would be great to have a less polarised debate on how to keep cats as pets. In my part of the world, roaming cats do not in general pose a threat to biodiversity. However, there are still some trade-offs to be made by cat owners when it comes to deciding to what extent cats should be allowed to roam. These have mainly to do with owners’ concern for the safety of their cats and with potential conflicts with people who are not fond of having other people’s cats roaming in their gardens.”*

Commenting on the paper, Joint Editor-in-Chief of *Animal Welfare*, Dr Birte Nielsen, said: *“This is a timely and thought-provoking paper that hopefully will ignite debate on the issue, as not all readers are likely to agree with the arguments put forward. One of the purposes of Opinion papers in *Animal Welfare* are to encourage an evidence-based debate on different animal welfare issues, and this article does just that.”*

The full paper is available to read open access [here](#).

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors:**

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**Image Attached:** Calling a trade-off a trade-off in arguments for cat confinement.jpg

**Paper:** Glanville C, Hampton JO, Sandøe P. Calling a trade-off a trade-off in arguments for cat confinement. *Animal Welfare*; 34:e65. <https://doi.org/10.1017/awf.2025.10041>

### About the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare:

The [Universities Federation for Animal Welfare \(UFAW\)](http://www.ufaw.org.uk) is an international, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity and membership organisation. UFAW's vision is a world where the welfare of all animals affected by humans is maximised through a scientific understanding of their needs and how to meet them. UFAW promotes an evidence-based approach to animal welfare by funding scientific research, supporting the careers of animal welfare scientists and by disseminating animal welfare science knowledge both to experts and the wider public.

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### About the UFAW Journal - *Animal Welfare*:

[Animal Welfare](http://www.ufaw.org.uk/) is an international scientific journal. It publishes the results of peer-reviewed scientific research, technical studies, surveys and reviews relating to the welfare of kept animals (eg on farms, in laboratories, zoos and as companions) and of those in the wild whose welfare is compromised by human activities. Papers on related ethical and legal issues are also considered for publication. The journal also includes letters to the editor, opinion papers, horizon topics and commentary on topical issues such as developments in legislation and codes of practice relating to animal welfare, as well as book reviews.

*Animal Welfare* is published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of UFAW.

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