**ACTIVITY: Feral cats and conservation – role-play**

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| **Activity idea**  In this activity, students use the scenario of feral cat control as the context to explore personal and societal perspectives regarding pests and pest eradication.  By the end of this activity, students should be able to:   * examine a conservation issue from different value perspectives * use social, scientific, cultural and economic arguments to support a particular viewpoint * consider who or what benefits from a particular viewpoint * reflect on what their personal viewpoints reveal about their perceptions of animals. |  |

**For teachers**

***Introduction/background***

Pest management is an ongoing socio-scientific issue for Aotearoa. We know that species such as cats (and deer, hedgehogs and rabbits) are threats to native ecosystems. However, people hold conflicting views about their labels as pests and how to safely and humanely keep their numbers in check.

***Teaching suggestions***

This activity is one of four that explore issues of animal ethics using cats as the context. Consider using one or more of these activities as a warm-up to the role-play:

* [Should cats be allowed to roam freely?](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3304-should-cats-be-allowed-to-roam-freely)
* [Roaming cats – draw the line](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3311-roaming-cats-draw-the-line)
* [Roaming cats – diamond ranking](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3312-roaming-cats-diamond-ranking)

The student handout has [resource links](#bookmark=id.35nkun2) to articles that may help inform student thinking and perspectives regarding cats as companion animals and/or pests and animal ethics. Students may wish to consult these resources before or during the role-play activity.

Use the student handout to introduce the [scenario](#bookmark=id.3rdcrjn) and outline what the activity entails. The handout also includes the [role-play cards](#bookmark=id.26in1rg).

The student handout is in Word – feel free to adapt any part of it to suit student needs.

**Acknowledgement**

This activity was developed in collaboration with Professor Georgina Tuari Stewart (Ngāti Kura, Ngāpuhi-nui-tonu, Pare Hauraki), Auckland University of Technology, and Dr Sally Birdsall, University of Auckland, with funding and support from the Ministry for Primary Industries – Manatū Ahu Matua and the Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART).

**For students**

***The scenario: Controlling feral cats in your local seashore community***

Your seaside community is located next to a large tract of native bush. At the end of the beach is a rocky peninsula covered in native bush where a range of seabirds are nesting. There are little blue penguins (kororā), red-billed gulls (tarāpunga), spotted shags (kawau tikitiki) and white-fronted terns (tara). There is also a Hutton’s shearwater (Kaikōura tītī) colony in the hills above the peninsula.

There is a lot of interest in the community to encourage and support an increase in the populations of these seabirds. Thriving populations of seabirds are considered a tourist attraction. An environmental group has been established. Work has already begun with the building of artificial nests for the kororā in the rocks around the base of the peninsula. Tracking tunnels have been used to find out the pest mammals predating on eggs, chicks and birds. Besides rats, mice and mustelids (stoats and weasels), feral cats have been identified as the most common predators.

The environmental group has decided to include the trapping and killing of feral cats in its eradication programme as well as the rats, mice and mustelids. This group calls a community meeting for people to voice their views.

***What to do***

The [role-play cards](#bookmark=id.26in1rg) feature eight special-interest groups/individuals with views about the eradication of feral cats and other pest species.

Form eight groups and read through the assigned role-play cards.

Each group is responsible for making a case to present their view at the community meeting – aim for 2–3 minutes maximum.

***Preparing for and making the presentation***

Each group should explain:

* their case, based on information provided on the role-play card
* why they believe that theirs is the right decision for the local community using social, scientific, cultural and economic arguments to support their case
* who/what will benefit from their proposed case
* how and why their view is more valid than any other viewpoint.

***During the presentations***

Take notes on the information presented by the other interest groups.

***After the presentations***

In your group:

* summarise the others’ points of view
* decide which case has the most merit
* report your decision – along with your justification – to the whole class.

***Questions for personal reflection***

* What is your personal viewpoint? Justify your point of view.
* What does your viewpoint and reasoning show about your perception of animals?

**Role-play cards**

***Local iwi***

We have discussed the proposal and are in favour of the proposed eradication. We would like to work alongside the conservation group to plan and then eradicate the predators so that our bird numbers can grow, especially tītī. Once the tītī are re-established in sufficient numbers, we want to be able to resume our customary harvesting to help rangatahi learn about our traditional ways of gathering food.

***Department of Conservation***

The Department’s aim is the re-establishment of native New Zealand species. Without the intervention of an eradication programme, seabird numbers would dwindle, with some species becoming extinct. If we could boost populations to more sustainable levels, we could then look at some translocations to help particular species at other roosting sites around the coastline, further growing seabird populations.

***Recreational fisher***

I don’t want this eradication programme. I’d have to compete with even more birds for fish. They catch the young fish that then won’t grow up to bigger fish that I can catch and legally keep. I think the numbers of seabirds are enough. They don’t need any help.

***Local conservation group***

Our group would love to see more seabirds. We think they’re an important part of the wildlife around our coast. They look so beautiful and majestic flying over the ocean and are an important part of the ocean’s ecosystems. Our group wants our unique coastline to be like it was before Europeans arrived and brought all of the pest animals.

***Scientist***

Our research group regards maintaining biodiversity as very important. We support this eradication programme and would like to work alongside iwi during the eradication programme to monitor the growing populations so that, when a sustainable population has been achieved, they can resume customary harvesting.

***Commercial fishing company representative***

Our company is not interested in supporting any eradications. We find seabirds annoying. They hang around our boats scavenging on offal, and we have to be careful not to accidentally catch them, resulting in their deaths. With more seabirds around, we’d need to take even more care to discourage them from hanging around.

***Tourism operator***

I think this proposed eradication is a fantastic idea. With a boost to seabird numbers, I’ll be able to attract more birdwatchers to our community. If more birdwatchers from around Aotearoa New Zealand and from overseas come, it will boost our local economy. It will benefit motel/hotel owners, café owners, souvenir shops – so many local businesses – and possibly help keep our young people home because there will be job opportunities for them.

***Local resident***

I’m worried about this proposed eradication. I think it’s a good idea because the seabird populations will grow, making it good for the tourist operators because more people will want to come and see our seabirds, but I have a cat. He’s my darling boy and I’m worried that he will go out one night, down to the beach and get caught in a trap and die. I’d be so upset. How can I protect my cat? I have neighbours who also have cats that they adore – just like me. We’re all really worried that it won’t be just the feral cats that will be caught. Our pets will be caught and killed too.

**Resource links**

***Cats and impacts***

* [Living with nature in an urban world](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2860-living-with-nature-in-an-urban-world)
* [Cat fight](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2781-cat-fight)
* [Keep your cat inside](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2739-keep-your-cat-inside)
* [Time to talk about cats](https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/resources/time-talk-about-cats) – Forest & Bird
* [Feral and stray cats](https://www.bionet.nz/assets/Uploads/A11-Feral-and-Stray-Cats-2018-04-LR.pdf) – National Pest Control Agencies (see benefits and negative impacts on the New Zealand environment on page 7)
* [Feral cats](https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/animal-pests/feral-cats/#1) – Department of Conservation

***Labels and animal ethics***

* [Māori perspectives of animal ethics – introduction](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3291-maori-concepts-for-animal-ethics-introduction)
* [Māori ethical ideas](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3313-maori-ethical-ideas)
* [Do our biases affect what we protect?](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2863-do-our-biases-affect-what-we-protect)