



**Tales from a  
Sisters  
Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**A way to protect  
our birds**

Are cats cuddly companions or fine-tuned killing machines? They're both, and owners know that.

Cats that live in the wild (or our indoor pets allowed to roam outdoors) kill from 1.4 billion to as many as 3.7 billion birds in the continental U.S. each year. Their owners respond with a shrug of their shoulders — "Oh, well, that's nature."

Yes, it is natural for cats to kill things; that's what cats are designed by nature to do. But it is not "natural" for domestic cats to kill indigenous wildlife just because it is there; that's the influence of Man and his feline pets on the natural world.

At last birds and other native wildlife roaming around outside homes and businesses can be safe from domestic cats. The photo of a BirdsBeSafe collar on

a friend's cat above may make it look awkward for it to get around in, but scientific tests have demonstrated cats are not harmed (though they may be annoyed) when wearing it. The device is 87 percent successful at keeping cats from catching birds.

Can't beat that with a stick!

Dear Readers, cats killing birds and other native wildlife has — for years and years — been the bane of my existence. Not only do the incredible numbers of dead birds and other native wildlife bother me, but it is also the business of domestic cats bringing their victims into the house that worries me to no end.

A dear young girl who died of the bubonic plague many years ago lives in my mind like a stick of dynamite in our local kindergarten. Her pet cat carried a dead ground squirrel it had caught into the home, and a flea carrying the Black Death deserted the squirrel and jumped into the child's clothing where it eventually bit her. She came down with the plague and died.

I know the population of Belding's ground squirrels is growing exponentially, thanks to the expanding irrigated hay farms in the countryside. Farm and house cats are catching and killing ground squirrels, and it's

just a matter of time before another cat brings another ground squirrel into someone's home and that abominable flea carrying the Black Death jumps into someone's bed and infects a child or an adult.

My worries about cats carrying dead ground squirrels into someone's home may be less if, yes IF, the ground squirrel reacts to that colorful collar as birds do. Here's hoping...

But it is also the reaction to birds being killed by feral cats that now comes into focus. The rules of engagement with captured feral cats are to spay and neuter them and then release them back into the wild. How about if we go one step further and how about fitting the BirdsBeSafe collar on the cat before releasing it?

Just think of the native songbirds we'll be saving.

A report in *Nature Communications* estimates a much higher figure than the billions of annual bird deaths previously attributed to cats. The study also reports that from 6.9 billion to as many as 20.7 billion mammals



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Domestic house cat wearing the BirdsBeSafe cat collar, lit up by the strobe.

— mainly mice, shrews, rabbits and voles — are killed by cats annually in the contiguous 48 states.

The local cat-owner who told me about this remarkable device was pleased with the results.

"No more dead birds at my doorstep!" she exclaimed and she heaped more praise on the BirdsBeSafe collar when she said, "My cat doesn't even know she's

wearing it, and if the collar gets tangled in the brush it'll just break away and the cat comes home unharmed."

You can get them at [www.birdsbesafe.com](http://www.birdsbesafe.com). If our local Humane Society decides to change the rules on handling feral cats, they can depend on me to supply them a bunch of BirdsBeSafe collars. Please, for the sake of our wild birds, join me.

**LETTERS**

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will start at 8:30 a.m. and get out at 3:20 p.m.; our middle school will start at 8:30 a.m. and finish at 3:15 p.m.; and our elementary school will start at 8:35 a.m. and end at 3 p.m.

I want to thank our staff for all of their hard work supporting our students. As we continue into next school year, I look forward to building on the strong relationships that make Sisters such a great community.

June was the last meeting for our out-going Board Member Stephen King. I would like to thank Stephen for his service to the Sisters School District — he will be missed.

In this month's meeting, we welcomed Don Hedrick back to the School Board. Don has a long history of working in and supporting public education — welcome aboard, Don. Additionally, Jay Wilkins was voted in as Sisters School Board Chair during the July organizational meeting.

I wish everyone a great summer as we prepare for the 2019-2020 school year.

Curt Scholl,  
Superintendent, SSD

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this week's  
Nugget inserts!**

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