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FEROCIOUS FELINES

CatBibs stop your kitty from killing BY INKA BAJADAS

Strapping a bib on your cat may seem like one (strange) way to catch the spills from her lunch, but this cat bib actually keeps backyard birds from becoming your kitty's next meal.

The CatBib, invented by Springfield resident Sue Mandeville, is a triangular-shaped bib that hangs from your cat's collar while it's outside. The bib aims to solve the problem many owners of outdoor cats face: receiving unpleasant "gifts" of dead birds or noisy surprises when their cat brings a live bird inside to play with.

Even more of a problem than the need to dispose of kitty's gift of a feathery corpse is the fact that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that "hundreds of millions" of migratory songbirds are killed by housecats each year.

Mandeville was frustrated by the number of birds her three cats were killing, so she locked them inside to stop the carnage. The kitties weren't happy and showed their disapproval by spraying in the house. Mandeville was desperate, so she decided to solve the problem herself. "I knew I had to put something between the cat and the bird," she says.

She came up with the idea of having a flap of material hanging off her cats' collars to get in the way of them catching birds. She cut a rectangular chunk off one of her husband's old leather boots. Using the hole for the laces, she tied it onto her cat Pearl's collar and let her outside. When Pearl didn't catch birds for a week, Mandeville knew she was on to something.

She patented her idea and eventually began making it out of neoprene because it is light, flexible and waterproof. The bib attaches with strong Velcro to a cat's collar and, just like safety collars, will quick-release if too much force is put on it. Mandeville says cats can do everything they normally do wearing the bib (except kill)

and says her cats even sleep with it on.

Mandeville offers several theories on how the CatBib works. The bib might get in the way of a cat's paws or block its vision when it pounces on a bird, or the bright colors might alert the birds to the cat's presence.

*'I knew I had to
put something
between the cat
and the bird.'*

— Sue Mandeville, CatBib inventor

Mike Calver, a biology professor at Murdoch University in Australia, did a study of CatBibs after stumbling across Mandeville's website for her online business, Cat Goods. His findings, based on a study of 63 cats, were published in July 2007 in *Biological Conservation*. He found that the CatBib stopped 81 percent of cats from catching birds and also stopped 45 percent of cats from catching mammals. He's hoping to do research on whether the bib reduces catfights.

Mandeville has taken heat from people who say they'd never humiliate their cat by putting a bib on it, but her website has more than 100 satisfied customer testimonials and sales have doubled since Calver's study came out.

Mandeville, an avid gardener and nature lover, is just happy to be able to relax in her garden with her cats, but most importantly she's doing her part to save the birds. "That's what it's all about," she says. "I'm saving birds, and the kitties are happy."

EW

The CatBib can be purchased at local pet stores Catcare Limited and The Healthy Pet and online at catgoods.com



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