

Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

February 27, 2023

RE: LD 644, *An Act to Include Cats in the Laws Governing Animal Trespass*

Dear Chair Ingwersen, Chair Pluecker, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Francesca Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon's Policy Advocate. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to “conserve Maine’s wildlife and wildlife habitat” by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members and supporters, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 644, *An Act to Include Cats in the Laws Governing Animal Trespass*.

Predation by domestic cats is the number-one direct, human-caused threat to birds in the United States and Canada (Loss et al., 2013). Throughout the U.S., cats kill billions of birds each year (Loss et al., 2013). Worldwide, cats have contributed to the extinction of more than 60 species of birds, mammals, and reptiles – that we know of (Doherty et al., 2016). Cats were specifically excluded from Maine legislation addressing animal trespass to prevent damage to property, public health, and public peace. Under this law, if the owner of a trespassing animal fails to remove their animal once notified, they could be subject to a series of fines. This bill would include cats in Maine’s Animal Trespass Law in an effort to mitigate domestic and feral cat predation on birds.

To our knowledge there have been no Maine-specific studies on the impact of cats on birds, however we know that cat predation is a problem. Maine Audubon has cataloged hundreds of anecdotal reports of cats preying on wild birds in Maine that reinforce findings from nationwide studies. Reports of cat predation come from across the state, and impact both common backyard birds and endangered and threatened bird species. Our organization is part of a coalition that monitors and manages the breeding habitat of endangered Piping Plovers and Least Terns, and we often deal with cats attacking these sensitive species. Just this year, a live Piping Plover had to be extricated from a cat’s mouth in Scarborough. Typically we are not so lucky, and oftentimes the only way we know what

happened to missing plovers are from the distinctive cat paw prints in the sand circling nesting areas. Frequently the owners are not even aware of their own pet's wanderings; a cat was documented prowling a plover nesting area in Kennebunkport a half-mile from its house completely unbeknownst to its owner.

We believe that this legislation will start a meaningful conversation about opportunities to address this issue in Maine. Responsible pet ownership is a critical strategy to reduce the negative impacts that cats have on birds and other wildlife. The world is experiencing a biodiversity crisis and Maine is no exception. Birds in Maine face a multitude of threats – climate change, habitat loss and habitat degradation, disease, invasive species, and more. Helping to address this one major threat to birds in our state will help lighten the load. We urge the Committee to support this bill. Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Policy Advocate

References

- Loss, S., Will, T. & Marra, P. (2013). The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States. *Nature Communications*, 4(1396), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms2380>
- Doherty, T., Glen, A., Nimmo, D., Ritchie, E., & Dickman, C. (2016). Invasive predators and global biodiversity loss. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(40), 11261-11265. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1602480113>