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6<sup>th</sup> Grade

How would an overpopulation of homeless cats and dogs affect our local ecosystem?

There are hundreds of homeless cats and dogs in the city of Arlington. Many are pets that got out of their yards or off their leashes. Some are pets abandoned by owners who could not care for them. Others are born to mothers who are strays. Each year, one mother cat can have two litters of up to six kittens and a mother dog can have one litter of four to six puppies. Then, their homeless babies can grow up to have babies too. This quickly creates an overpopulation of cats and dogs. This many homeless animals can have a real impact on a community's ecosystem.

Stray dogs and cats can annoy citizens and cost a lot to control. Many end up in shelters. Some are adopted, but 50 % of dogs and 70% of cats are euthanized. Taxes and donations pay for these shelters and programs. Other animals roam the parks and streets looking for food. They turn over trash, get into peoples yards and eat the food of people's pets. They can also cause noise problems by barking and howling.

Dogs and cats without homes can be a health risk for humans and other animals. Strays roam in packs that can attack people or hurt their pets. Strays dirty the environment by getting into trash and pooping in public places. They can also bite and spread disease. Sometimes, homeless animals wander into the road and cause accidents. Some of them are killed by cars. It is sad to see their bodies beside the highway.

Homeless dogs and cats can cause problems for wildlife in our local ecosystem, because they compete with them for food. They also prey on some of the small animals like rodents and birds. The native animals may starve, get sick or move to another area.

An overpopulation of homeless dogs and cats can have a negative affect on the local ecosystem, but we can help. Shelters need people to adopt pets and make donations. Neutering our pets will help control the number of unwanted animals. We can prevent our pets from getting lost by making our yards safer. We can also rescue animals and help them find their owners. Being a stray is nothing to wag about. These animals really struggle to survive. If we work together, we can decrease the homeless animal population in Arlington.