



Cats usually give the impression of being pretty lazy animals: they enjoy napping on armchairs and sofas or gazing out of the window without ever making the effort to contribute to the household as hard-working members. But, in fact, they're just playing it cool.

In effect, if all the world's cats suddenly died, things would quickly go to hell, as – by killing **mice** and **rats** – cats are vital for keeping those pests in check. In **India** cats are believed to play a significant role in lessening the amount of **grain loss** caused by consumption or contamination by rodents. In other words, it may be true that humans feed cats, but without cats, humans would have less food in the first place.

So, how dramatically would the rodent population increase if cats suddenly vanished? Several scientific studies (such as a **1997 study conducted in Great Britain**) have found that the average house cat typically brings home more than **11 dead animals in the course of six months**. That means that the 9 million cats then living in Britain were collectively killing close to 200 million wild specimens per year – not including all those they did not offer up to their owners. A study in **New Zealand** in **1979** also found that, when cats were nearly eradicated from **Waiheke Island**, the local rat population quickly quadrupled. And if the rodent population shot up, this would of course trigger a cascade of other ecological effects. On that same island in New Zealand, for instance, ecologists observed that, as rat numbers increased in the absence of cats, the population of **seabirds** whose eggs rats preyed upon declined. If the approximately 220 million domestic cats in the world all suddenly died, seabird populations would likely fall worldwide, while the populations of non-cat predators that prey on rats would be expected to increase.

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