A Note
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello Travis Audubon friends and members,

We hope you and yours are recovering from our most recent collective trauma—the winter weather that caused the lights (and water) to go out in Texas. In addition to the unfortunate community impacts, we’re starting to learn about the ways that birds and wildlife were affected. We can easily see how nature is fragile, but also we see its resilience. The thaw is a reminder that spring comes again. I am proud that Travis Audubon is working to reduce the impacts of climate change not only for birds and their habitats, but also for the humans who love them.

With COVID numbers falling in Austin and Travis County, we are looking forward to the day when our field trips can safely start again! Perhaps we’re starting to see that light at the end of the tunnel. In the meantime, we’re planning socially-distanced and COVID-safe versions of Birdathon, Birding Brawl, and a new celebration of TAS’s birthday, “Golden-cheek week.” Thank you for finding ways to support our community as we continue to navigate the pandemic.

My backyard birds are bringing me joy, just like they always have. I recommend the Kyles’ recipe in this issue for homemade peanut butter “Cardinal Cookie Dough”—I’ve never seen such an excited reaction to the lunch line. I hope you continue to find joy in nature and the changing of seasons.

Looking forward to more opportunities to be together this year.

Take care, and best wishes,
Nicole
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AT TRAVIS AUDUBON

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# Upcoming Events

WITH TRAVIS AUDUBON

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**Thank You**

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Texas Ornithological Society
Travis Audubon's Commons Ford Prairie Committee
Victor Emanuel Nature Tours
Jo Wilson & Carol Bennett
U.S Supreme Court rebuffs effort by conservative Austin group to gut endangered species protections

But the foundation had lost its broader constitutional challenge in District Court and then an appeals court panel ruled, on procedural grounds, that the challenge to the Bone Cave harvestman’s listing wasn’t timely.

The Supreme Court on Monday declined to revive the challenge.

“We’re glad this attack on the Endangered Species Act’s constitutionality will go no further,” Ryan Shannon, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group that joined with Travis Audubon and Defenders of Wildlife as parties to the case, told the American-Statesman.

He said the matter before the Supreme Court was a “narrow procedural one” and the foundation “didn’t give (the Court) good reason to be interested in the case” — making it hard to draw conclusions about the Supreme Court’s broader approach to issues coming before it.

Robert Henneke, a Texas Public Policy Foundation attorney, told the American-Statesman “this case has come to an end, but the central question to this case remains unresolved.”

“After five-plus years of litigation, it’s disappointing the merits of our case were never addressed by a court,” he said. “The Department of Justice and the environmental groups were successful in bringing procedural tactics to avoid an argument on the merits.”

Interstate commerce

When Congress passed the Endangered Species Act, it relied on the Constitution’s granting of powers to Congress to regulate interstate commerce, according to legal experts.

But Yearwood’s coalition argued the government has no right to regulate single-state species such as the harvestman.

“The Obama administration is abusing its power under the Endangered Species Act by unlawfully listing a species on the endangered list that only lives in the state of Texas and has no impact on interstate commerce whatsoever,” Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said four years ago as he filed his brief in support of Yearwood and Williamson County.
In 2003, in another commerce clause challenge to the harvestman’s listing, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held that protection of the harvestman was warranted because real estate development could, as a lower court had put it, “easily be classified” as involving interstate commerce.

Citing what he calls an “evolution of the case law,” Henneke said a series of cases suggests federal courts are favoring a narrower approach to the powers available under the interstate commerce clause.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation gets major contributions from oil and gas and real estate interests that stand to benefit from a loosening of endangered species protections.

Ethics breach

Meanwhile, the case got wrapped up in a Trump administration ethics kerfuffle.

In 2017, a top Department of Interior official, Douglas Domenech — who formerly worked at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, where he led the group’s Fueling Freedom Project, which fought the Obama administration’s efforts to tamp down fossil fuel emissions — met with his former foundation colleagues to discuss the rollback of endangered species protections.

Shortly after one of the meetings, which touched on the harvestman litigation, Domenech sent an email to foundation officials that said: “Keep fighting.”

Domenech told investigators that his follow-up email was his way of encouraging the group “to continue to pursue its constitutional rights,” the inspector general wrote, “and he denied that he was commenting on the litigation in any way.”

The Department of Interior’s inspector general in 2019 concluded that Domenech had violated federal rules by improperly meeting with his former employer. Federal ethics laws prohibit government officials from meeting with their former employers for at least a year after they take public office to prevent those employers from improperly influencing the outcomes of public policy.

Growing Up Near Blair Woods

This post was written by long-time East Austin resident and neighbor of Blair Woods, Andrea Petit. We met Andrea, her mom Catherine, and other long-time neighbors of the Stonegate Neighborhood Association. We have been lucky enough to hear some cherished memories of Blair Woods from the days when the Blairs still lived there. Andrea and many other Stonegate neighbors are committed to partnering with Travis Audubon to ensure the Preserve remains an asset for the community for generations to come. —Nicole Netherton

***

My name is Andrea Delice Petit. I was born and raised just yards away from Travis Audubon’s Blair Woods.

My parents, Archile & Catherine Petit, liked living next to the woods due to the privacy. Well, at least my dad did. When I was 7 yrs old my dad took my sister Marcia and I over the fence and thru the woods. I guess I was somewhat of a tom-boy. My dad loved going to the woods every chance he would get. And he being from Panama, we’d imagine being in the jungle there! The woods was so thick that you had to make your own path but it was a beautiful space. Dr. Frank Blair, UT professor and Zoologist, used to live there and he and my dad were well acquainted and he always greeted us; seemed happy we came.
There, my sister and I were introduced to many exotic animals and reptiles. I remember making this hike several times in my childhood and recall always feeling welcomed. I also recall visiting Coleman Springs with other neighborhood kids and catching and releasing crawdads & making paper boats. There will always be a sentimental value to The Audubon Society & Blair Woods. Today, we have met many friends at Blair Woods like board member Mark Wilson (and his wife Dana) & Executive Director Nicole Netherton. These wonderful lovers of nature have valuable historical information about the woods and the people who lived, nurtured and/or owned it. My mom and I recently visited the woods for the 1st time in over 37 yrs. It felt like home in a nostalgic way. I will always remember Blair Woods as a wonderful and magical part of my childhood.

Featured Image Above: Left to right: Archile Petit, Marcia Petit Austin, Andrea Petit, Catherine Petit

Winter Residents at Chaetura Canyon

POSTED ON JANUARY 15, 2021 CATEGORIES: SANCTUARY NEWS SIGNAL SMOKE HOME

Chaetura Canyon is best known for the Chimney Swifts that chitter and twinkle above the canyon and over the residence during the summer. But the cooler months are just as interesting when our wintering avian guests dominate the habitat and the feeders.

Regulars include the elegant Cedar Waxwings, raucous American Robins and dainty Chipping Sparrows. Some years, the feeders are overrun by bands of feisty Pine Siskins, and this winter is one. They are small and gregarious, but not particularly cordial with one another – jockeying for position for thistle, cracked sunflower seed, and bits of peanuts.

This year we have also had an uncommonly large number of Hermit Thrushes rummaging in the understory and running on the trails in front of us. Their vocalizations are one of the first sounds we hear when we step outside.

For several falls and winters we have been hosts to two or more Red-breasted Nuthatches. They are frequent visitors to the seed feeders just outside the large window where we eat breakfast and lunch, and we can often hear their comical beeping duets when out on the property.

In addition to a large variety of seeds provided by Gary and Laura of the Wild Bird Center of Lakeway, we also provide live mealworms for our avian neighbors. These are supplied in small, suspended glass dishes that are frequented by normally seed-eating species such as Northern Cardinals, Carolina Chickadees and Titmice, as well as insectivores like Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers, all three resident species of wrens (Carolina, Bewick’s and Canyon), and – lately – the Nuthatches. The Cardinals will camp out on the bowl and stuff themselves, downing one after another of the apparently tasty treats, while most of the other birds grab and go – any mealworm will do. But the Carolina Wrens are much more discriminating. They will sit on the edge of the bowl and stare down as if they were looking at a box of chocolates – trying to decide which piece to try next.

The feeding behavior of the Nuthatches is curious. They come and go very quickly, grabbing bits of seed and peanut butter mix – much of which they stash under the bark of the ubiquitous Junipers. The Carolina Wrens and Titmice have learned to follow after and retrieve the morsels cached by the hard-working Nuthatches.

So, while we wait out the winter in anticipation of the return of the Chimney Swifts in late March, we delight in the seasonal diversity of our Central Texas birds.

Paul and Georgean Kyle
Sanctuary Stewards

Featured image: Hermit Thrush and Red-breasted Nuthatch at a water feature at the Canyon.
The Saga of Rico Mauve

March 16, 2018 began as any other day during the annual Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCWA) survey. That season we had begun surveying a new plot, the Northwest, in a larger effort to obtain an accurate count of the warblers found at Baker Sanctuary. Being early in the season and a new plot to boot, an emphasis was placed on mist-netting and color-banding as many GCWA as possible that called the Northwest plot their home. On that fateful day, a total of four warblers were captured but only one would become the legendary Rico Mauve [pronounced Mauve/Mauve].

Rico Mauve, also known as 2770-41211 to the USFWS, was easy to catch, this cannot be said of all GCWA. Some males will tacitly ignore the best efforts of us humans to do so; one could argue that perhaps they are wiser but I would say that they are just less passionate about their territory. Rico flew into the net like a blazing, golden comet, ready to defend his territory with his life, if need be.

Before I set up the net, I choose a color band combination from a list supplied by the good folks at Fort Hood who coordinate banding efforts for the state. Color band combinations are then selected so that adjacent banded birds cannot be easily confused. For instance, you don’t want a Red/Dark Blue/Black/Silver next to a Red/Black:Dark Blue/Silver.

Not having any Mauve banded birds nearby, I chose the fateful combination of Mauve/Mauve:Mauve/Silver for Rico but, in hindsight, it may well have been possible that the reverse was true, the bands chose Rico. Never underestimate the wisdom of the forest. GCWA 2770-41211 was processed and morphometric data duly collected – plumage consistent with an ASY (after-second-year) bird, outstanding cloacal protuberance present, no sign of pox, and he exhibited a certain joie de vivre upon release.

As the season progressed, the bird known as Mauve/Mauve:Mauve/Silver became Rico Mauve during an educational hike with some local elementary school students. During these hikes, seeing a GCWA is always hit or miss, typically more ‘miss’ when leading a group of 10-15 fourth grade students. However, on this occasion I knew I had an ace in my pocket. From the re-sighting survey efforts of the prior several weeks, I knew that Mauve/Mauve:Mauve/Silver liked to haunt the trees near the trail and was completely nonplussed with regard to being watched. Sure enough, as if on cue and glowing in the early morning sun, he appeared above the trail and sat fairly still, allowing the youngsters to bask in his glory. One of the kids asked me, ‘Which bird is that, Mr. Murray?’ and I thought for a moment and said, ‘Jimmy, that there is Rico Mauve.’ And a legend was born.

As we got to know Rico Mauve over the next two years, he never failed to impress as he aggressively defended his territory from all upstart GCWA but still found time to present his glory to seasoned and beginning birdwatchers alike. Both years he was monitored, Rico and his mate successfully raised fledglings, which could also regularly be spotted zooming through the canopy, begging for another fat, green caterpillar from their parents. While it was never unequivocally proven, it was strongly suspected Rico may have had another female on the side and perhaps more fledglings than were duly recorded. He was spotted on several occasions feeding fledglings that were not of the proper age class for his known brood, but since adults will sometimes feed the offspring of others, no definite conclusions could be drawn. Field biology is not an exact science, which is one of its charms, but also one of its frustrations. However, it is fitting that Rico would leave us with mysteries which shall never be penetrated by the light of science.

The Ecuadorian-American poet Gerardo once wrote in his masterpiece, “Rico Suave” –

‘And there’s not a woman that can handle a man like me
That’s why I juggle two or three
I ain’t one to commit, you can omit that bit
You pop the question, that’s it

by Chris Murray, Land Manager
In the 2020 season, in spite of COVID-19, the annual GCWA survey was undertaken with allowances to protect the health of the participants. True to the nature of 2020 as a year in general, it was quickly ascertained that Rico Mauve had not returned to his territory. While it is possible he dispersed elsewhere, it is more likely that his tenure in this world had come to an end. Since he was aged as an ASY when banded, it is difficult to say how old Rico was when he passed, he could have been anywhere from four to 12 years of age. What is clear is that he left us with a legacy that will be passed down through the generations. As a tribute, volunteer GCWA surveyor extraordinaire, Toni Taylor, designed a T-shirt which captures the spirit of Rico Mauve for those who knew him and for the generations to come who did not, but probably wish they had.

**Featured Image:** Territory map of GCWAs at a Baker Sanctuary, including Rico Mauve’s (dark pink).

**Don’t Tangle With That Guy. He’s Too Blue.**

POSTED ON JANUARY 26, 2021  CATEGORIES: SIGNAL SMOKE HOME

Grosbeaks are placed in the family Fringillidae—finches—making them cousins to cardinals and house sparrows, deflating their mystique. Their un-finchlike quality is unique to themselves.

Go North and watch Evening Grosbeaks fly like butterscotch lollipops around a feeder. Watch a Rose-breasted male in Texas in April singing like a robin, dressed in the black, white, and red of a German diplomat. And there is the uncommon Blue Grosbeak—smaller than the rest with brown sparrow wings. Their summer range goes all the way up to Pennsylvania and New Jersey but there are more of them living in the South. Bird experiments are run on blues due to their uncommon color. Ditto Indigo Buntings, for the same reason. Blue is rare in birds as in flowers. Therefore ornithologists theorize that rare color to be a key factor in their lives. Field observations reveal bluer male grosbeaks hold superior territories. It was logically concluded blue was also key to mate selection. This proved wrong.

Blue Grosbeak plumage emits a large amount of ultra-violet color that human eyes cannot see—which other Blue Grosbeaks react to. If the birds are placed behind glass that stops transmission of ultra-violet both male and females have little interest in them. In an experiment at Auburn University in 2003, captive Blue Grosbeak males were made bluer or drabber by watercolor markers dabbed onto their plumage. They were put into cages next to females and mating interest observed. It was expected bluer males would attract more females. But the females didn’t care how bright or drab males were. They paired up equally. Unknown choice factors were operating. A similar experiment was run in Central America in 2011 with the same results. Blue didn’t equate to handsome for female grosbeaks.

So, why are Blue Grosbeaks blue? It is now postulated that the strength of blue deters territory challenges by other males. Color intensity varies in the males as it is connected to nutrition at the time of molt. Bright aplets on Red-winged Blackbird wings do the same thing. As with the blackbirds, strength of color in Blue Grosbeak deters fighting where someone could get hurt. Cover a Red-winged Blackbird’s puffy aplets—as scientists have done—and other males immediately take over his holdings. Make a Blue Grosbeak drab and, presumably, other males will bully their way past his land claim.

It is now believed females choose males based on the quality and size of the territory they hold. Females nose around before they commit. They choose males not because they are handsomely blue but because they are land rich. In the words of Oliver Hardy, dumped by his movie girlfriend for a richer man, “Twas ever thus!”
In 2008 I got laid off from a corporate accounting job, wanted to take a break for a while and found a volunteer opportunity at a local cat rescue organization. They had a sanctuary that seemed to constantly need work, and I’d always enjoyed carpentry so I did a lot of work repairing and upgrading indoor and outdoor cat habitats. Eventually I needed to find a job, but the thought of going back to a cubicle was unappealing. Someone asked me to build a catio for them so I gave it a try and found it to be both fun and rewarding.

One thing led to another, and after building a few more catios I felt like I had enough experience to create a website and start a business. Austin has a lot of cat owners, a great year-round climate, and people were just starting to become aware of catios. Soon building catios became a full time job, and now in my seventh year I am hardly able to keep up with the demand.

Being able to combine my love of cats and carpentry has really been a treat for me. It’s pretty wonderful having a job where the definition of success is happy cats! Cat owners are always thrilled to see their cats having a safe and fun way to experience the outdoors, and the birds and other wildlife in their yards are safe from the cats and provide endless entertainment for them. I developed my own style of catio construction and while all my projects are somewhat similar, each is one of a kind designed specifically for that client’s setting. Large screen porch catios, which provide a wonderful space that cats and their people can enjoy together, have become very popular. Every catio I build has lots of perches at many different levels to provide enticing spots for cats to look out and enjoy nature.

In 2020 with everyone spending so much time at home during the pandemic, people have been looking for projects around the house and catios have been more popular than ever. It’s challenging and fun turning an old back porch or empty spot in the yard into a kitty oasis – and while the challenges of being a one person business are many, it sure beats sitting in a cubicle!

Interested in working with David? Check out his business page. Featured image (above): Some of David Murphy’s happy clients enjoying their catio. This post is part of a February 2021 series promoting the benefits catios have for both cats and wildlife. Learn more about catios and why they’re important for protecting native wildlife.
By Rhonda Marple

When Hurricane Harvey took out a small tree in my yard, it presented the perfect opportunity – and place – to build a small catio. The windows in my house prohibit me from leaving them open, and I wanted my two strictly-indoor cats to experience the smells, sounds, and sights of outdoors, but safely and securely.

I contacted The Cat Carpenter, and the process was so easy that I wish I could put him in charge of every remodel project I might ever need! He came out for a consultation to look at the space and take measurements, plus made some design recommendations, like where to place the catio door. He not only knows construction, he knows his catio business AND cat behavior.

Once scheduled, he arrived and had the entire catio built, installed, and functional in less than two days. One of my cats is blind, but she was braver than my fully-sighted cat, and was on the catio within an hour of completion; it took my fully-sighted cat two days to venture out!

I saw that my blind cat had no trouble climbing UP the ledges in the catio, but she wouldn’t climb DOWN unless she could touch something solid; I was constantly rescuing her from the high ledges. I contacted The Cat Carpenter for his ideas, and he suggested installing additional half-height steps on the ledges to give her a landing place. A few days later he came back and installed them, and my blind cat has been climbing up and down and around the catio ledges like a pro since then!

I probably enjoy our catio as much as my cats! It’s big enough for a deck chair, so I sit in there with them, mosquito-free, and backyard birdwatch. I can enjoy my morning coffee on the catio (and at happy hour time, an adult beverage) while watching titmice, woodpeckers, chickadees, doves, grackles, cardinals, blue jays, red-winged blackbirds, robins, sparrows, wrens, finches, hawks, the rare hummingbird, and so many more (even a wild turkey once!). The cats are interested in the birds at the feeders, but they are more interested in birds and squirrels that scratch around on the ground. They spend more time on the catio in the warmer months (me too!), but still go out often in the colder months. But rarely in the rain; the catio has a tin roof and the sound of the rain will usually send them scurrying back inside!

That catio has provided enrichment for both cats, allowing them to increase where they can independently “roam.” I get to enjoy it, too, safely birdwatching with my cat companions!

*Featured image above is of Rhonda’s cats enjoying their catio.* Photo courtesy of Rhonda Marple.

This post is part of a February 2021 series promoting the benefits catios have for both cats and wildlife. [Learn more about catios and why they’re important for protecting native wildlife.](#)
We have great habitat for birds at Chaetura Canyon that provides shelter and food. However, we are real suckers for having them feed up close and personal – basically so that we can see them from our large “Bird Window” where they are eating while we are eating our own breakfast and lunch.

A quick note about the “Bird Window”. For those of you who have not been to the Canyon, the 4’ x 6’ double-paned, insulated window takes up a big part of the wall on the south side of our house. When we installed it, we were inspired by the birding blind at the Davis Mountains State Park: it is slanted outwards on the top, so the reflection is of the ground and not the surrounding vegetation. This minimizes window strikes.

The Bird Window gives us an excellent view of our plethora of feeders creating an avian smorgasbord complete with live mealworms, thistle, millet, black oil sunflower, shelled sunflower, safflower, cracked and whole peanuts and “Mama C’s Cardinal Cookie Dough”: Georgean’s recipe for a peanut butter mix. The mix is not only placed in feeder logs with holes drilled but also in big clumps in a hanging dish for all to enjoy. And the birds do enjoy it!

Initially the peanut butter feeders were frequented by those we expected to see: Northern Cardinals, Black-crested Titmice and Carolina Chickadees. However, the primarily seed-eaters were soon joined by Bewick’s and Carolina Wrens. During the first winter that the peanut butter feeders were up, they were visited, surprisingly, by insect-eating Yellow-rumped Warblers and then Orange-crowned Warblers. The Yellow-rumped Warblers became absolutely possessive of the feeders, so even larger species were hard-pressed to take a share. We were initially surprised by the mixed species we have now become accustomed to seeing enjoying the peanut butter mix, including both Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Woodhouse’s Scrub Jay, House Finch, Pine Siskin and Lesser Goldfinch.

This month, two new and very unexpected guests joined the feast: Northern Mockingbird and Hermit Thrush. How did they know it would be good to eat? Because there is no perch on the log feeder, the Texas State Bird and a winter resident had to figure out a way to get at the good stuff. At any rate, persistence paid off. The first method was to hover briefly at the feeder log and pick off bits. But that did not yield enough to satisfy the appetite. Eventually the innovative mocker and shortly later the thrush learned to grab hold of an S hook hanging near the feeder log where they could eat their fill. Birds are amazingly innovative when it comes to finding food!

Well, we all find our favorite restaurants!!

Georgean and Paul Kyle
Chaetura Canyon Stewards

Mama C’s Cardinal Cookie Dough

INGREDIENTS
3/4 cup “crunchy” peanut butter
1/4 cup shortening
3/4 cup cornmeal
1/4 cup oatmeal (not instant)

INSTRUCTIONS
Cream together shortening and peanut butter.
Stir in cornmeal and oatmeal.
Fill holes in the log feeder.
Refrigerate the unused portion of Mama C’s Cardinal Cookie Dough until needed.

Featured Image (above) of a Yellow-rumped Warbler on the Kyles’ feeder log. Photo courtesy of the Kyles.
Catio Stories: Liz Adams

POSTED ON FEBRUARY 23, 2021 CATEGORIES: SIGNAL SMOKE HOME

By Liz Adams

My husband and I love cats. We spent several years volunteering with rescue groups and fostering cats and kittens. Over the years a good number of the cats intended for adoption became permanent residents in our home. At times, the number of resident cats was one or two more than our house could comfortably accommodate. We had seen a cat enclosure before and wanted something like that to give our cats more room and help them be more active. Plus, though we felt that keeping the cats strictly indoors was best for their safety and health, I didn’t like that they couldn’t experience the outdoors – the sun, the breeze, the different smells...

With our neighbor’s help we came up with a plan to screen in the concrete slab porch off the back of our house. Our neighbor and our carpenter worked out the construction design, and what materials to use. The catio frame and the cat perches are made from untreated cedar, and the roof is galvanized metal. The screen is a heavy-duty mesh intended for use with cats and dogs and is fine enough to keep mosquitoes out.

Because we have raccoons, possums, and foxes in our neighborhood, we layered chicken wire over the mesh screen for reinforcement. We built perches going up both sides of the catio that are in a stair step design and connected them together with a “catwalk.” To keep our elderly cat safe from falling, we covered the front of the perches and the catwalk with chicken wire, and in some places made the chicken wire into doors that can be opened in order to clean the perches – or nab a cat that refuses to come inside. We added a litter box, water bowl, and cat beds to the space, and a pet door.

The results were better than we ever imagined! The cats absolutely love their catio. They’re so much more engaged and active. The young ones chase each other up one side of the catio, across the catwalk, down the other side and through the cat door into the house. Our elderly cat loves to take naps in the sun, on his big cat bed.

All the cats spend hours watching the squirrels, birds, butterflies, lizards, and everything else that moves in the backyard. They all have their favorite spots. The catio is the best thing we’ve ever done for them, and for us, it’s heartwarming and rewarding to watch them enjoy it!

Featured image above is of Liz’s cats enjoying the catio. Photo courtesy of Liz Adams.

This post is part of a February 2021 series promoting the benefits catio have for both cats and wildlife. Learn more about catio and why they’re important for protecting native wildlife.
Catio Stories: Nan Hampton

POSTED ON FEBRUARY 25, 2021  CATEGORIES: SIGNAL SMOKE HOME

By Nan Hampton

When my last cat, Neko, died, I asked my daughter to help me find new cats. She found Harry Potter and his mom, Annie, at a local shelter. The shelter didn’t want to separate them and that suited me fine. Harry and Annie moved in with me about 10 years ago. I knew I wanted them to be strictly indoor cats since I had lost another cat, Scooter, to a coyote who caught him in my front yard one morning. So, I had the catio built. It is built into the house via my patio door so I can easily access it. The cats have their own cat door built in at the other end of the patio door.

The cats love to go out and watch what’s happening on the patio on the other side of the wire mesh. The catio is built of 2-inch heavy wire mesh over a cedar frame. The wire mesh is heavy enough that it would not be easy to cut through. There is a shelf about halfway up around the inside of the mesh for the kittens to sit on or lie on to take a nap in the sunshine. At each end next to the house is a small bench halfway between the shelf and the patio floor to make it easy for the cats to jump to the shelf.

Other uses can be made of the catio. A friend found a tiny baby bird that had fallen out of the nest and was sure to die. When the bird was about ready to go on its own he brought it over (along with 1-inch plastic netting to put over the 2-inch netting so the bird couldn’t get out). The bird stayed in the catio (the cat door was locked so they couldn’t get in) for several days eating meal worms before we released it. After release it stuck around in the trees “talking” to us. All in all, the catio really protects the birds and the cats and my cats love it and spend lots of time there. *Featured image above is of Nan’s catio (taken from the patio door).*

This post is part of a February 2021 series promoting the benefits catios have for both cats and wildlife. Learn more about catios and why they’re important for protecting native wildlife.