

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please don't let your cats roam freely

An open letter to cat owners who continue to allow their cats to roam freely:

I know, I know ... you've heard it all before. All the complaints about your cats and what they do in your neighbors' yards, distributing their urine and feces, males spraying everywhere, killing flowers and stinking up the place.

You've already heard that any stray cats that are not spayed/neutered risk adding more kittens to the streets or the overpopulated shelters. You've already heard how they can pick up fleas, ticks or rabies from wild animals and bring those home to you, your family and your other pets. You've already heard how potentially fatal feline diseases get passed to other cats, even ones that are not running loose.

You've already heard that it needlessly exposes your cat to potential injury or death from cars, dogs, other cats and wildlife, freezing Januarys and broiling Julys. You've already heard that dog owners (in this area at least) have for some time been required to take responsibility for their canine companions and keep them from running loose, and have them leashed and picked-up after on walks – and have done so willingly.

You've already heard all of this and more, yet you continue to ignore it and tell yourself "that's just part of nature". Well, I have one more story for you to hear.

My wife and I both love animals, including cats. We believe that while death is part of the natural order, we humans are also (or at least should be) part of the natural order; and as the dominant species we bear some responsibility to help and protect all the living things we share this planet with. So when my wife recently found a weak and dehydrated fledgling sparrow clinging to a brick facade on Market street with no nest or agitated parent in sight, she brought the chick home. For almost two weeks she provided frequent hand-feedings (around the clock) until it regained its strength, then encouraged it to exercise its wings and practice flight, and did her best to teach it to eat off of the ground. And when it appeared to be ready and anxious for freedom, she released it.

This afternoon she discovered its lifeless body, with its unique and distinguishable markings, lying on the ground beside our shed. Its head was nowhere

to be seen. What WAS seen earlier, however, was a large grey-and-white cat perched on the roof of the shed.

I had to stand by, feeling completely powerless except for the arms to hold her, while my wife sobbed with anguish I haven't seen since we lost our beloved cat Angel to age. Did she invest too much emotionally in this little sparrow? I suppose so. But that's who she is, and I wouldn't change her even if I could.

If you are one of those this letter is addressed to, and especially if you are the owner of that grey-and-white cat, or another that may have been the guilty party; and if this story has left you feeling some small guilt and has prompted you to consider keeping your cat indoors, I'm grateful. If, however, you remain unconvinced I would encourage you to visit the website for the American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org) and really consider the information it provides, particularly the Frequently Asked Questions page which addresses many of the excuses people give for allowing their cat to wander freely.

But if you've read this, added it to all those things you've already heard and are still thinking "Good grief – it's just a bird. Nature took its course. Get over it." ... well, probably nothing will change your mind and all I can do is feel sorry for you. And offer a suggestion: go to Mexico. Or Syria. Or Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, North Korea, or the majority of the African continent. Anywhere where some mixture of ignorance, poverty, greed, corruption, prejudice, and extremism makes it impossible for its people to experience the security and opportunities that (most of) America enjoys every day. Live there for a while – you may find lots of folks who agree with you.

And we'll let Nature take its course.

Michael McKeegan
 Corning

No need to rewrite the Constitution

In her "Still not proud to be an American" letter, Elizabeth Whitehouse makes some valid observations but, in my view, misdiagnoses the disease (rules) and prescribes the wrong medicine (new constitution). The problem is ultimately behavior (which she also touches on), and this is our problem to solve.

Let's take rules for a moment. The Constitution says there will be a House

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WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Combating invasive species

The past week in New York was designated as the state's first-ever "Invasive Species Awareness Week," and there's simply no denying that the impact of invasive species is devastating.

In fact, some estimates have pegged the nationwide economic cost of invasive species at \$120 billion annually in terms of environmental cleanup, eradication, destroyed crops and other agricultural losses, and diminished recreational and tourism opportunities, among other consequences. It's a staggering figure and New York State is far from immune to the threat.

Invasive species like the Emerald Ash Borer and the Asian Long-Horned Beetle, for example, are devastating to New York's timber and forest products industry. Many other threats to waterways across the state have been alarming, including Hydrilla, an aggressive aquatic invader that we continue to battle in the Cayuga Lake Inlet in Tompkins County.

Invasive species threaten New York's environment and economy by out-competing native species, diminishing biological diversity and radically reshaping entire ecosystems. One of the great challenges is that many invasives are widely available in commerce for landscaping and aquaria. Many are unknowingly transported by boaters, on fishing gear and other



TOM O'MARA

means and thus the overriding emphasis on public awareness and education.

Raising awareness is critical, which was the goal behind last week's designation of Invasive Species Awareness Week and the statewide events associated with it. The chair of the New York's Invasive Species Council said, "It is great to see state agencies, local governments, industry, academic institutions, environmental organizations and citizen groups working together to prevent and manage invasive species ... We are speaking with a shared voice to say 'New York is worth protecting – you can help, here's how'."

That's precisely the goal of legislation I sponsored this session, together with Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton of Ithaca, that's been approved by both houses of the Legislature and now goes to the governor to be signed into law. If it's approved, this year's new law will seek to help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide, by requiring boaters to take reasonable precautions when launching their boats.

The legislation requires the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to develop procedures for boaters to take to prevent the spread of invasive species, such as removing all visible plants and animals from, or cleaning, draining and drying both motorized and non-motorized watercraft and related gear when entering and leaving a launch site.

Individual boaters are one of the key front lines of defense against the spread of invasive species. This new law would offer a straightforward approach asking all boaters to do our part to help protect waterways, regional tourism economies and local jobs. Taking every possible step to stop the spread of destructive invasive species before they take hold is the most cost-effective and common-sense response. It represents a comprehensive and proactive strategy to enhance public awareness, strengthen accountability and save taxpayer dollars.

Similar efforts are being undertaken across the country and major outdoor outfitters such as Cabela's and Bass Pro are helping educate boaters on clean, drain and dry procedures to prevent the spread of invasive species. Hydrilla was found in the Cayuga Lake Inlet in the summer of 2011. Over the past three years since this invasive species was discovered, several of my legislative colleagues

and I have continued to work closely with local leaders and other state officials to urge increased support for an aggressive eradication program, which remains ongoing. We're fast approaching the \$1-million mark in the effort to wipe out the plant.

And that's just one example of why stopping the spread of destructive invasive species is essential to protecting the quality and economic potential of waterways throughout the Finger Lakes, Great Lakes and Erie Canal regions.

The undeniable fact is that the uncontrolled spread of invasive species like Hydrilla would devastate regional tourism and cost local communities hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs.

In Albany, we can only continue building on the bipartisan commitment to cooperative action between the governor and the Legislature for responding to the dire environmental and economic threats posed by invasive species of all kinds.

Find out more by visiting the New York Invasive Species Clearinghouse at <http://nyis.info/index.php>

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

ANOTHER VIEW



GUEST VIEW | LESLIE DANKS BURKE AND DAN LAMB

Misunderstanding surrounds Supreme Court decision

A lot of misunderstanding surrounds last week's Hobby Lobby decision by the US Supreme Court.

First, birth control is not cheap. Paying out-of-pocket when insurance doesn't cover birth control can tear into a family's finances. In most cases, employees are already significantly paying into costs of an employer-provided plan. Because

employer health insurance plans are generally not "free" to the employee, stripping out specific items from coverage means the employee pays double for those items.

Second, dismissing this as "just" birth control is short-sighted. Men and women use birth control to be responsible about the number of children they can afford. The National Institutes of Health found that 99

percent of women of reproductive age use birth control at some point, and a lot of men are involved in that decision, too. One-third of women's wage increases over the past 40 years can be attributed to the availability of birth control. Birth control decreases future health care costs. As Court briefs pointed out, "Pregnancies that are too frequent and too closely spaced, which are more likely when

those pregnancies are unintended, put women at significantly greater risk for permanent physical health damage."

Third, the Supreme Court has made clear, in a special, second ruling, that the case is applicable to every form of birth control. Over 100 companies across the country have already declared plans to limit employee

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