



Care and Conflict at Cats Corner: A Multispecies Ethnography of Cat Colony Living on the Costa del Sol

1. Introduction

Situated at the intersection of tourism, migration, and human-animal studies, this multi-species ethnographic study focuses on the relationship between residents, visitors, and a colony of free-living cats inhabiting a popular 'sun and sea' style vacation destination on the Costa del Sol, Spain.

Published Research from 2022-2024 Fieldwork

- Hill, K. (2024). Humano-Cat Cultures and Tourist Attitudes Towards Local Free-Living Cats of the Costa Del Sol, in *Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism*, edited by J. Hooper & C. Kline. Chapter 9, pp. 99-114. CABI.
- K. Hill (2025). Cats, Community, and Tourism on the Costa del Sol: A Transspecies Ethnography. *Tourism Geographies*, 7(8), 1700-1718.

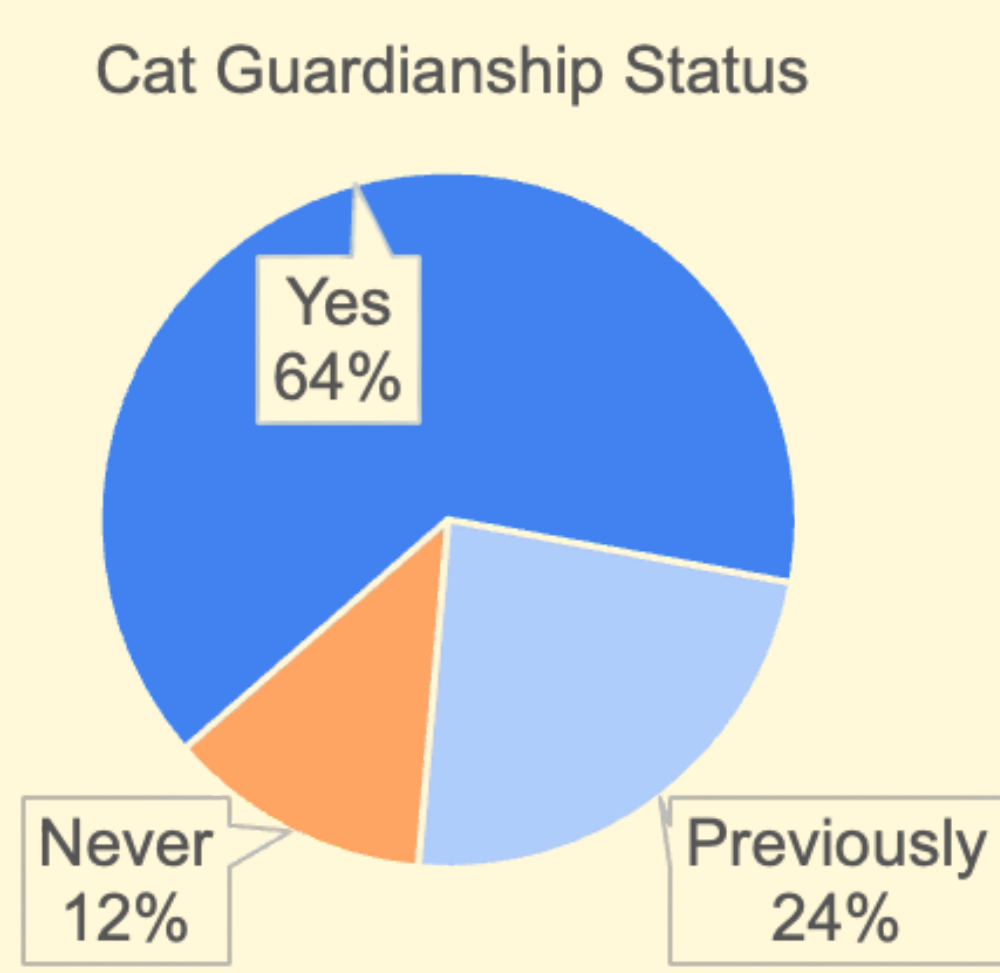
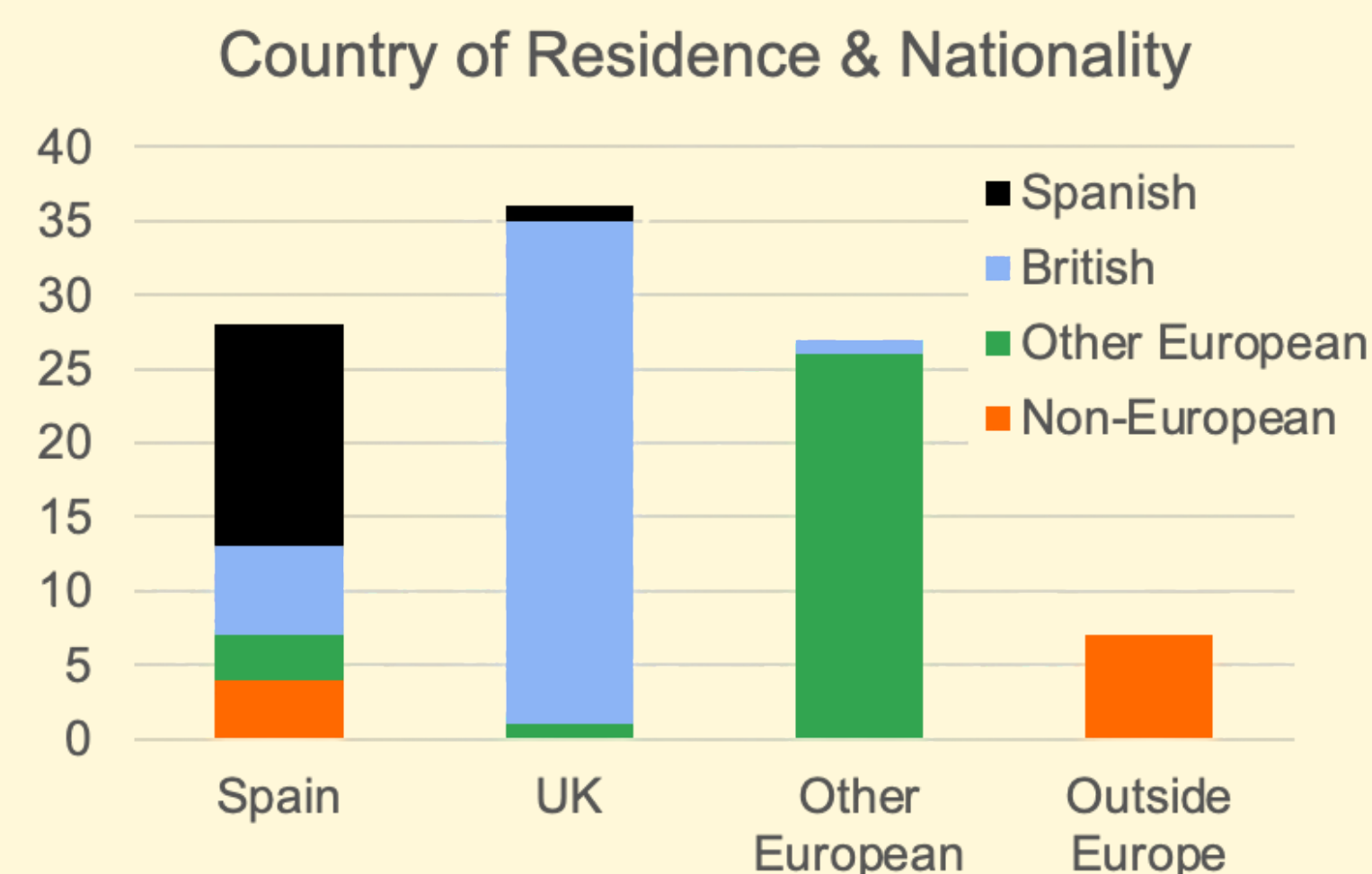


2. Methods & Ethical Considerations

Field-notes and video footage was used to capture and record the daily habits and behaviours of free-living cats residing along a 1.6 km stretch of the Torremolinos promenade. Data includes interactions between cats and tourists and feeders. Cats were observed from a respectful distance and any interactions were feline-driven. Fieldwork from 2025 included unstructured interviews and an anonymous survey (unpublished).

3. Visitor Survey

The survey was available in English and Spanish and targeted people who had visited the field site in the past 12 months. Demographic data included age-range, gender, vocation, country of residence, country of origin, and cat-guardianship status (yes, previous, never).



A series of 5-point Likert questions related to how respondents perceived and felt about the cats.** The survey asked if respondents had witnessed any unkindness towards the cats, sick or injured cats, or if they had fed the cats or seen others feeding them, and why they think people feed the cats.

** The 98 completed surveys are not sufficient for robust statistical analysis or generalisations. However, some of the open-ended responses and questions that related to feeding inform the qualitative analysis.

4. The Cats

The colony cats are all spayed or neutered and microchipped. Many are long time residents. New cats (typically abandoned pets) are often adopted out soon after arriving, especially kittens. The colony is home to ~50 cats.



I have described them as 'community pets' (Hill, 2025) because many individuals are more human-friendly than typical unowned colony cats, with some jumping onto strangers' laps or tolerating being picked up.

5. Feeding as Care and Conflict

A major theme that emerged from this study was how feeding cats is a form of care that sometimes causes conflict.

Feeders & Feeding Spectacle

Licensed feeders arrive daily, and crowds inevitably gather to watch, film, and ask questions about the cats (Hill, 2025).

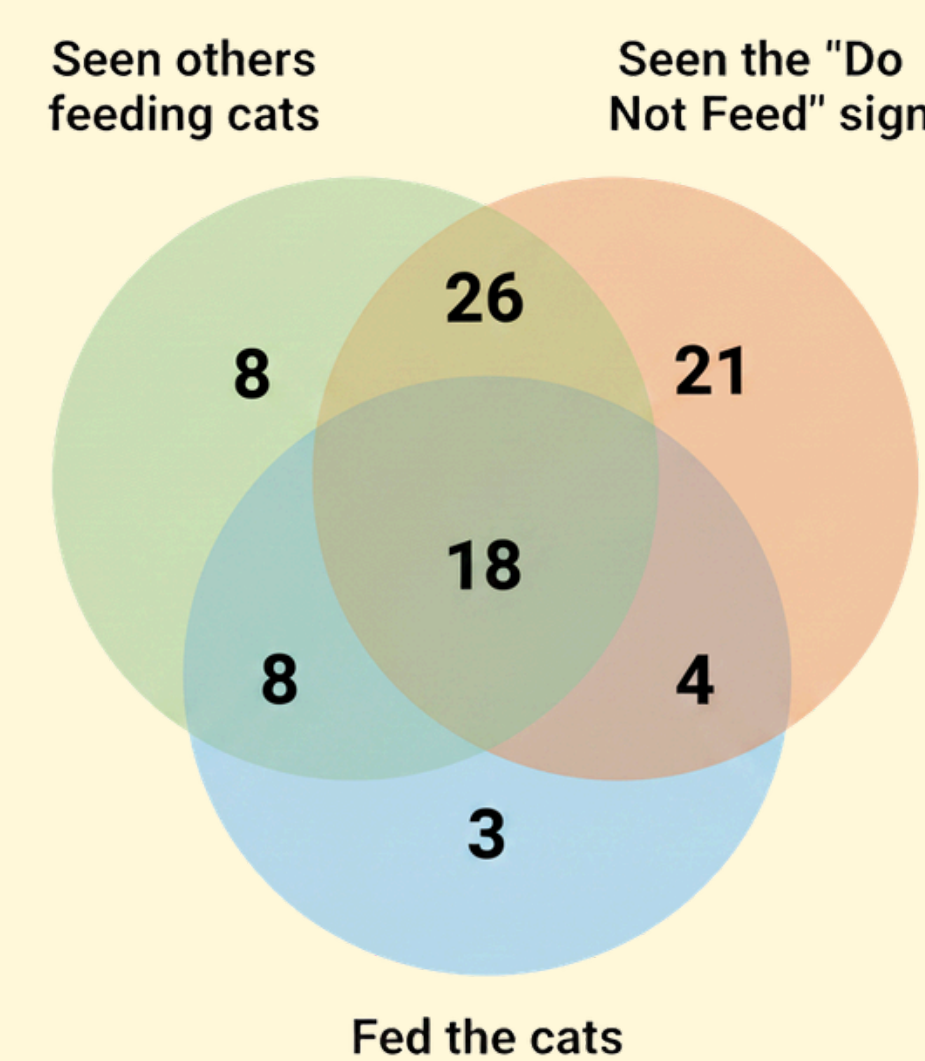


Conflict Over Cats

Not all regular feeders have a license from the council. And there is disagreement amongst locals over who should have the exclusive right to feed the cats. This can lead to confrontation and police intervention, and fines for unlicensed feeding. Furthermore, there is the issue of littering as well as concern about inappropriate food making the cats sick. Another concern is that if the cats are already fed they may not show up for feeders who monitor their health.



Of the 88 respondents who answered the question, 33 had fed the cats. Of those, 22 had seen the 'Do Not Feed' sign (above). A total of 69 respondents had seen the sign, and 60 said they had seen others feeding the cats.



Why do Visitors Feed the Cats?

Despite signs explaining these cats are fed regularly by licensed feeders and asking people not to feed them, residents and visitors continue to put food down for the cats.

Feeding is more than concern for hunger, it is a way to engage with the cats – to show love, to encourage interaction, and sometimes to get a good photo! Some people bring cat food or cat treats. Others give leftovers, especially to the cats who hang out around cafes and restaurants.

6. Acknowledgements

This study is the result of an International Research Teams (IRT) 2025-2026 project, 'Coexistence of humans and free-living cats: conflicts and opportunities in more-than-human neighborhoods', supported by the Philosophical Faculty of University of Hradec Králové.

To learn more (including about my other research and collaborative projects), please visit www.academiccatlady.com (or scan QR code). Email: tinehill@gmail.com



I am searching for an academic position!

I earned my PhD in Anthrozoology from the University of Exeter (2023), and since 2019 contributed 17 peer-reviewed articles, four book chapters, five editorials, and two edited collections to the field of human-animal studies. I am open to collaborative opportunities and keen to write grants to secure funding. As a Visiting Professor in the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Hradec Králové (FF UHK), I developed and taught an introductory Anthrozoology course (2024/2025). I am continuing my affiliation with FF UHK as a co-investigator on an International Research Teams (IRT) award (2025-2026), studying cat-human cultures. However, I am on a part-time contract that ends this year.

