



Fall/Winter 2006

Mews & Views

Cat Population Has Exploded

“Shelter, clinic and cat rescue workers say the overpopulation of homeless cats in the Ann Arbor area is the worst they have seen in years.”

— Ann Arbor News Aug 5, 2006



If you read this recent Ann Arbor News article you had a glimpse into the futility of the shelter model of cat welfare. Staying ahead of reproducing cats through sheltering is an *impossible* task. Cats normally breed from March to September, but in years with warmer winter temperatures — like last winter — the season begins earlier and ends later. With pregnancies lasting only 9 weeks, lengthening the season increases the number of litters each cat can deliver from two to three — as mother cats can get pregnant again while still nursing. And, the earlier in the spring kittens are born, the more likely they will be sexually active by summer adding their own litter into the same season.

The spike in cat numbers that shelters reported resulted from an unusually warm winter. But, even in “normal” years, the number of excess cats far outstrips the ability of shelters to place them — with only about one in three of all rescued cats being adopted. Of the others, some end up in no-kill shelters living out their lives in cages — but most are euthanized — in *Washtenaw County alone, at a rate of 5 cats per day.*

Taking feral and stray mom cats with kittens to shelters does not guarantee them a home. And, more importantly, does not stop the reproduction — even when a few of the rescued kittens are adopted out and their mothers euthanized. Why? Because the cats left behind — that the rescuer didn’t see — continue to reproduce — quickly replacing those that were “rescued” — up to the limits of their food supply.

Ending Cat Overpopulation

If sheltering is not the solution, what is? Over 80% of all kittens are born outdoors to unmanaged feral cats — cats with little human contact in their first 8 weeks of life. If you find feral cats living in your yard, what can you do? You can do nothing, — which will inevitably lead to kittens. You can take the cats to a shelter — which will inevitably lead to their euthanasia. Or you can “TNR” the cats

— let them live where they are — preferably providing food, water and dry shelter — and, most importantly, get the cats sterilized. Their presence will keep roaming cats from moving in — cats are very territorial and will protect their food source from most newcomers.

Friendly or Feral?

If you see a new cat outdoors, you may think he’s lost. But, with many feral cats living as wildlife — *and* many pet cats allowed outside (without collars) — proceed cautiously. *Rescuing may not be necessary or even the best decision.* Unless the cat is in danger, observe him for a few days to ensure he really needs help. You should first determine if this is a pet that goes out, a feral cat — or a lost cat — and rescue *only* a lost cat:

Outdoor Pet Cat Characteristics. Friendly, well-groomed cats are probably pets that go outdoors. They’re comfortable with people and may try to come inside. Females and neutered males are usually neighborhood cats — they seldom roam — but intact male cats do — so they may live further away.

Feral & Lost Cat Characteristics. It’s hard to tell a feral cat from a lost cat because pets revert to feral behaviors when they’re scared. Both come out at night and hide during the day. When approached, they can both show signs of aggression (hiss, growl, bared teeth, arched back) and will run if you make eye contact. The differences are subtle. A feral cat may be better groomed than a recently-lost pet who hasn’t adjusted to living outdoors. If you start feeding them, eventually both will trust you — but the pet will begin acting like a companion while the feral cat will stay skittish — especially around others.

Cat News You Can Use

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) Policy Statement March 2006

Humane Society of the United States

“...The HSUS advocates community-based Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs with on-going responsible management as the most viable, long-term approach available at this time to reduce feral cat populations.

Responsible management of existing feral cat colonies should include: humane trapping, sterilization, rabies vaccination, and treatment for illness or injury; removal of kittens and friendly adults for possible placement in homes, euthanasia of animals whose suffering cannot be alleviated; ear-tipping and returning ferals to the same location where they were trapped provided they would not face imminent risks; and providing lifelong care consisting of adequate food, water and shelter as well as regular monitoring of the colony for sickness, injury, and the arrival of new animals.

The goal of any feral cat management program should be to maximize quality of life for the cats and to eliminate the existing colony over time through attrition...”



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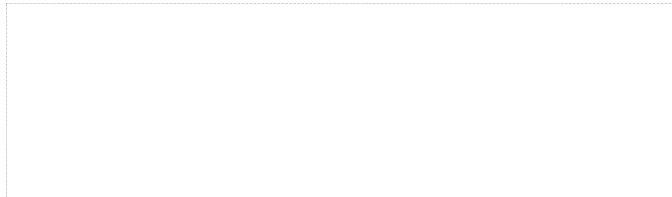
Want to Help?



Do you have a bulletin board at your business, school or housing office? If so, we can supply you with posters to advertise our free spay/neuter programs. The more people we can reach, the more cats we can spay and neuter.

Staying Ahead Of Your Pet Cat

Is your cat wetting outside the box? First make sure there are no medical reasons and if not, try placing an empty (no litter) litter box or a framed puppy training pad in the area where the cat wets. Odds are the cat will use these over the floor, making clean-up easier while you work on the problem.



One Family's TNR Account



Few caregivers set out to manage a feral cat colony — they simply see cats outdoors — make eye contact — and start feeding. Then, the first kittens arrive, and they look for alternatives. Here's one Ann Arbor family's story illustrating this process:

"Late last fall we started providing food for a very wary, feral cat. During late winter, a second more trustful, but feral, cat showed up and stayed. two got along, and since they established their territory, no other feral cats have been about. BUT in May, the first very wary, now very healthy, feral cat had her litter of four in a woodpile. In all likelihood, her "partner" sired the litter.

As for the kittens, we managed to catch, take in, and tame 3 of the 4. With your help, we're willing to try to trap the remaining kitten and two adults. If we can catch and tame the remaining kitten, we should be able to find a home for all of them. As part of your managed TNR program, if we can catch the two adults, we're willing to sponsor their return to our property"

We followed up with an application and our Feral Cat Handbook, and they returned the application with the following note:

"We purchased our own live trap and are acclimating the feral cats to enter. Recently they started going in for their wet-food "treat". We will make arrangements with a vet and set the trap as soon as we receive the vouchers. As an update, we decided to keep one kitten and found good homes for the two others."

We followed up with vouchers and the outdoor cats are now sterilized, vaccinated for rabies and distemper, and ear-tipped (see photo) identifying them as sterilized feral cats.

Benefits of Feral Cat Management

Through this family's efforts, six cats that may have become shelter statistics are now living appropriate lives. And, because the outdoor cats have a dedicated manager, any new cats that appear can also be promptly sterilized through our ongoing TNR assistance. They are linked to our kitten-free network and are helping to humanely and effectively reduce the cat population.

If you feed cats on your property, link to our kitten-free network. We issue free spay/neuter vouchers to qualified colonies — yard or barn — in much of southeastern Michigan. To date we've fixed about 4,000 outdoor cats in over 700 different colonies.

Dear Friends,

It's easy to encourage homeowners to TNR their outdoor cats — usually the property owner is also the caregiver. By the time a homeowner calls us, they've already been encouraged by their vet or learned about TNR on the Internet. Getting through to other locations — apartments, universities, restaurants and mobile home parks — is more difficult because the caregivers are usually employees or residents — not the owner. Their site managers view cats as a nuisance and are in denial that the cats will be there regardless — or that sterilized colonies would make better neighbors — with no more kittens or adult cats yowling, fighting and spraying. The caregivers hesitate to ask permission to TNR for fear of raising the cats' visibility which may result in the managers attempting to remove them.

Even though we can't fund TNR in these limited situations, we are making inroads at getting the pet cats that live in these areas sterilized through our **Snip 'N Chip Program**. What management is not willing to do outdoors may eventually get done by the residents indoors. Their now-sterilized indoor/outdoor pets will no longer contribute kittens to the feral colonies living around dumpsters. What is really needed though, is a two-pronged approach of sterilizing the pet cats while at the same time, sterilizing the outdoor cats.

Our **Snip 'N Chip Program** issues free vouchers for cats in families with incomes under \$40,000. Our **TNR Program** issue free vouchers to managed yard and barn cats regardless of caregiver's income. Both programs now work in a new expanded territory covering much of southeastern Michigan. Donations to our spay/neuter fund help extend the number of cats we can sterilize.

Kitty Zimmer