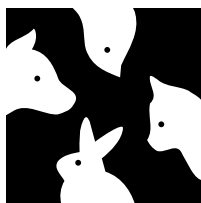


NON-LETHAL & NON-PUNITIVE CONTROL OF FERAL CAT POPULATIONS AT A GLANCE



PALO ALTO
HUMANE SOCIETY
SINCE 1908

A Publication of the Palo Alto Humane Society

Contents

Non-Lethal & Non-Punitive Control of Feral Cat Populations At a Glance

Introduction	3
Background	3
Population Control Methods (Eradication v Managed Care)	4
Methodology of Managed Care	5
Failure of Eradication Programs (Repopulation & Related Problems)	5
Public Health & Safety Issues (Injury, Vector control, Rabies)	6
Objectives of Managed Care	7
Oppositions to Programs & Responses: Cats, Humans, and Birds	8
Coda	10

Recommendations for Property Support of Cat Rescue Efforts

Introduction (Failure of Cat Licensing & Other Punitive Measures)	11
Raising/Eliminating Pet-Limit Laws	13
Spay/Neuter Support	14
Other Material Support	15
Use of the Veterinary Community	16
Humane Education	16
Conclusion	17

Appendix 1: The Stanford Cat Network

Overview Of A Formal Feral Cat Program	18
--	----

Appendix 2: Special Report

Managing and Controlling Feral Cat Populations	20
--	----

NON-LETHAL & NON-PUNITIVE CONTROL OF FERAL CAT POPULATIONS AT A GLANCE

A Publication of the Palo Alto Humane Society, April 1995

Introduction.

THE PALO ALTO Humane Society is a 70-year-old organization dedicated to the humane treatment of animals. As part of our efforts to curb cat overpopulation, the Society has formed a partnership with local feral and homeless cat groups. We provide free and subsidized spay/neuter surgery for homeless and feral cats, the free use to humane traps, information and fact sheets, and assistance in feral cat colony care and management. Experience has shown that feral cat colony management which includes spay/neuter, release, and daily maintenance substantially reduces the numbers of unwanted animals coming into shelters to be killed, and is a necessary part of any effective, important, and humane solution to the presence of feral cats.

Partnerships such as ours are not unique. The stabilization of feral colonies through a program of neuter, release, and maintain has found much success. The Hawaiian Humane Society, the San Francisco SPCA, Alley Cat Allies, and numerous other humane societies and animal protection groups are currently sponsoring effective feral cat programs. In addition to projects throughout the United States, these programs have also found success abroad. It is the preferred method of animal control in Great Britain, for example, where it is endorsed and supported by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

The enclosed information and proposal are designed to acquaint people with how the program works, what its goals are, and how individuals, organizations, institutions, and municipalities can help this effort. In the meantime, we implore individuals, organizations, institutions, and municipalities to allow ongoing efforts to sterilize and feed homeless cats to continue unabated.

Background.

SOME ESTIMATES CLAIM that there are as many as 30 to 60 million feral cats living in the United States.¹ Groups of cats may be found living in industrial, commercial, educational, residential, and rural areas. Feral cats persist as a result of the adaptable nature of the cat, which enables them to survive for a time away from direct human contact.

Feral cats will wander until they find a place with the basic resources of food, water, and shelter. Such cats will then form a loose social group in which they tolerate

¹ Louise Holton and Pervaiz Manzoor, D.V.M., "Managing and Controlling Feral Cat Populations", Veterinary Forum, March 1993 (Holton).

each other.² While territory size will depend on environmental conditions such as food and water availability, unaltered females will produce litters of up to eight, two to three times per year. Although kitten mortality is generally high³, the sheer numbers of kittens and feral cats, and continued human abandonment, allow for populations to grow in number, and other colonies to form in surrounding areas.⁴

Population Control Methods.

METHODS OF POPULATION control have centered around either colony eradication (a program of trapping the cats and euthanizing them) or maintaining colonies (a program of trapping, spaying/neutering, releasing, and maintaining the cats).

Eradication Programs:

Eradication programs are generally favored by businesses, institutions, and individuals as a way to get rid of the unwanted feral cats. Their concerns are centered around noise (cats fighting over territory or mating), smell (of ‘spray’), vector infestation, disease transmission, and possible injury. Property owners are also concerned about the issue of legal liability should injury occur.⁵ Moreover, the assumption of a quick and clean solution makes this avenue of population control especially attractive.⁶

Yet, eradication programs are ineffective.⁷ They also tend to be costly and unpopular. In addition, as food sources are difficult to eliminate, new cats enter the area and start the breeding process all over again.⁸ (The elimination of food not only means controlling human feeders, but also controlling garbage, as well as rodent populations – a daunting task). While attractive from a theoretical and short-term perspective, eradication has proven to be an elusive goal.⁹

Maintaining Colonies:

Maintaining colonies includes the humane trapping of cats, altering, and then releasing them back into their colonies. The cats are then regularly fed and maintained. Because this program is a long-term solution to the problem of cat overpopulation, it tends to be disfavored among businesses, institutions, individuals, and other property

² P. Neville, “Control of Urban Feral Cats”, British Pest Control News, No. 8 (Aug. 1984); and P. Neville and J. Remfrey, “Effects of Neutering on Two Groups of Feral Cats”, Veterinary Record 1984 (Neville).

³ Holton, 1993.

⁴ Neville, 1984.

⁵ These concerns are all addressed below.

⁶ Surprisingly, eradication programs have even found favor among some “animal welfare” organizations.

⁷ Karl I. Zaunbrecher, D.V.M., and Richard E. Smith, D.V.M., M.P.H., “Neutering of Feral Cats as an Alternative to Eradication Programs”, Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association, August 1, 1993 (JAVMA).

⁸ Feral cats occupy an ecological niche where as cats are trapped and removed, other feral cats enter to take their place. JAVMA, 1993; Holton, 1993; & Neville, 1984.

⁹ JAVMA, 1993 & Neville, 1984.

owners. As explained below, however, it tends to be the only effective solution to the existence of feral cats.

Methodology of Managed Care.

THE GENERAL GUIDELINES involved in maintaining colonies involve trapping, testing, vaccinating, altering, releasing, and maintaining.

- Trapping: trapping of feral cats is done only by caregivers trained in humane trapping and handling of animals.
- Altering: cats are spayed/neutered using *dissolvable* sutures. For identification purposes, cats have the top 10 mm of the ear tipped.¹⁰
- Release: after recovery, cats are returned to the original trapping site and released.
- Maintenance: the colony (colonies) is supplied with food and water. It is monitored on a regular basis by a caregiver for, among other things, newly emerged kittens (to be trapped, socialized, and adopted out), newcomers to the colony (to be trapped, altered, etc., and adopted out if tamed stray), injured or sick cats, etc.

Sterilizing colonies of cats stabilizes the population at manageable levels, eliminates annoying behaviors associated with mating (noise and spraying), makes animals less aggressive and easier to deal with, is more effective and less costly (over the long-term) than repeated eradication campaigns, and is humane to the animals.

The Failure of Eradication Programs; Repopulation & Related Problems.

BECAUSE A UNIFORM, organized program makes logistical and global perspectives possible, the cat population is monitored and readily identified such that any new cats, or cats needing veterinary care, receive prompt attention, and control of a healthy cat population is established. In contrast, because an eradication program is predicated on minimal community awareness in order to avoid negative publicity and opposition, there are no humane education efforts, and dumping may remain an ongoing problem. Undirected feeding compounds the problem, frequently attracting cats to the populated areas where random feeders are likely to leave food. As a result, trapping and euthanizing will not be a one-time effort but must be done continuously. Nor can cats be monitored as they would be in a managed care colony. This means that cats who are sick and need veterinary care do not get it and suffer until they die or until (if) they get trapped.

In addition, as food sources are often difficult to eliminate, vacated areas are soon filled by other cats that start the breeding process all over again. The result, in addition to those mentioned above, is that an eradication program, aside from being humane, is often ineffective.¹¹

¹⁰ This is always done by a veterinarian.

¹¹ JAVMA, 1993.

One of the primary misconceptions involving managed colonies is that they perpetuate the problem. It is the absence of coordinated and managed efforts that results in continued problems. Managed care cleans up the problem with an understanding that these are long-term efforts not amenable to a quick fix mentality.

Public Health & Safety Issues.

CONCERNS HAVE BEEN raised that feral cat colonies result in increased health risks. However, the Stanford Department of Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) found little risk to humans from the cats and diseases associated with pests carried by cats. Additionally, EH&S concluded, after consultation with the Santa Clara County Health Department and Stanford's Department of Comparative Medicine, that there was a general consensus that feral cats pose little health and safety risk to individuals.

Feral cats are naturally disposed to keep away from humans. In addition, by implementing feeding guidelines that keep cats fed away from populated areas, further contact is minimized. In the absence of directed feeding efforts, the cats forage populated areas in search of food and individuals tend to feed those cats close to where they either work or live. This is the result of ad hoc feeding by "underground" and uncoordinated concerned individuals. Managed care would reduce the chance of injury to humans by keeping cats away from human population areas.

This is also effective in reducing the chance of encounter and controlling the vector population close to humans. Without a coordinated program, clean-up of the active feeding areas is not always assured. In addition, more than one individual may be feeding the same cats, resulting in excess food, unsightly feeding areas, and food waste that attracts pests. This is a problem associated with the eradication programs. By contrast, colony feeding guidelines limit the number of active feeding stations. In addition, these would be located as much as possible away from populated areas, and would have a caretaker that ensures cleanliness.

Feeding stations should be located in areas where neither they, nor the feeding cats are visible to passersby or building occupants. Areas should be kept clean, food should be gauged for minimal leftover and easy removal and should be permanent and regular. Thus, the number of feeding stations will be reduced, cats will be clumped into mini-colonies where they can be easily monitored and maintained for spay/neutering, veterinary care, and spotting of tamed newcomers that have recently strayed in. Regularly fed, these cats will no longer forage for food in populated areas or wander into places where they may get injured.

This is in direct contrast to an eradication program. Because of fears that the cats will be trapped and euthanized, individuals are more apt to take matters into their own hands – freeing trapped cats,¹² feeding them, picking them up, and trapping without experience if the cats are injured. Moreover, the vacuum created by the removal of cats

¹² This will also hamper future efforts since trapped cats will not easily allow themselves to get trapped again.

leading to repopulation, continued community dumping due to a lack of humane education, along with continued breeding in the interim, and cats foraging for food in populated areas because feeding guidelines of managed colonies are prohibited mean that, if anything, an eradication program *increases* the risks of injury. This is magnified because of the ignorance (e.g., purposeful minimal public awareness) that is the staple of eradication programs. Humane education is integral to managed care.

Moreover, if an organization is in place that oversees the feral cats, an injured cat probably would not be out there in the first place. In addition, concerned individuals would have had someone to call should they find one rather than attempting to take care of the problem themselves. As a result, a designated, experienced trapper working with local veterinary facilities could respond. The idea that removing the cats will avoid liability issues flies in the face of experience. In fact, the evidence points in the opposite direction. Management of the *inevitable* colonies may in fact reduce the potential for injury, and liability.

As to rabies, in western Europe a very successful oral vaccine, developed in the United States, has proven an effective, economical, and humane rabies control. Wildlife vaccination via food baits has blocked the spread of the disease and prevented small outbreaks from becoming major epidemics by maintaining healthy populations of key vector species as an “immune barrier.” Newly developed vaccines placed in baits insure very high immunization rates and have further increased effectiveness. Laboratory and field tests on over 40 species of animals have demonstrated the vaccine’s safety.

Wildlife management and public health authorities have been reluctant to recognize or adopt non-lethal disease control alternatives, however, due in part to opposition by hunters and their organizational allies that use “rabies” as an excuse for hunting. In fact, current U.S. responses to the disease have focused on the role of hunters and trappers to reduce those vector species such as raccoons most responsible for spreading the disease. This effort has proven largely ineffective and has even hastened the spread of the disease by removing healthy animals and thus opening up territorial “vacuums.” The mid-Atlantic epidemic was actually caused by hunters bringing infected raccoons into the region of Florida. In the meantime, rabies, needless risk to human health, and the deaths of countless animals, continues.

This is where we should focus our energies. Instead, cats which pose a very low risk for contracting and spreading rabies (they are not a natural vector for rabies) are targeted.¹³ The result will be greater impoundment and killing.

Objectives of Global Cat Population Management and Care Program.

THE INTEGRITY OF the program depends upon a cat being conditioned to show up daily at a specified feeding station for meals, both ensuring that the animal is fed and

¹³ In 1993, only two cats were diagnosed with rabies in California (down from three the year before). In addition, there has never been a case of human acquired rabies from a cat in the history of the State of California.

enabling the designated caregiver to monitor the animal's health. Accordingly, cats recently strayed or dumped onto the area gravitate to the feeding stations in search of food. This enables caregivers to readily spot new arrivals and trap them before they start reproducing. Wild cats are sterilized, vaccinated, and released to the program's care; tame cats are offered for adoption, if their former home cannot be found.

The coordinated efforts of a managed cat care plan also enable the monitoring and controlling of feeding locations and schedules. Caregivers should be encouraged to feed their cats away from heavily-populated or trafficked areas. In addition, they should also feed during daylight hours, when the food is least likely to attract wildlife.¹⁴ Random feeding by anyone not associated with the program should be discouraged.

Opposition to Feral Cat Programs & Responses: Protecting Cats, Humans, and Birds.

OPPONENTS OF THESE programs generally cite two basic policy arguments for their positions. First, they claim the desire to protect animals, particularly domesticated animals, from the harm that can befall them outside of human custody including cruelty by malicious humans. Second, they argue that public safety, viz. the damage attributed to feral cats by spread of contagion, attacks on humans, attractive nuisances for children, enhanced municipal expenditures for retrieval from public space, traffic accidents, and wildlife predation, warrants their position.

All of these points, along with their other unsubstantiated claims regarding the effectiveness of colony management, are unavailing. First, some of the arguments are either inapt on their face or are wholly unsubstantiated; others are also applicable to all cats including neighborhood pet cats and/or even human children. Unless we are ready to criminalize all outdoor cats or children, this argument is as silly as it sounds. For example, opponents argue that potential cruelty by malicious humans is one reason why homeless cats should be rounded up and euthanized (the "humane death" preference). In order to prevent the potential painful death of some animals, they argue that all, or substantially all, homeless cats should be killed as a preventive measure.

Second, they argue that preventing enhanced municipal expenditures to provide for these cats via retrieval (impoundment) and care, adoption, or euthanasia at animal control facilities as mandated by law underlies their policy. However, feral cat programs undertake this effort at personal and private expense. In addition, they limit the deleterious effects of cat abandonment by sterilizing to control breeding, adopting out tamed abandoned cats, strays, and kittens, and providing sustenance. Criminalizing this work would shift the burden to the municipalities. Moreover, the history and experience of feral cat colony management in this and other countries, such as Great Britain, indicate that feral cat colonization is a necessary component to any humane and effective population control strategy, and one of the few effective answers to the large numbers of

¹⁴ This is especially important in areas with indigenous wildlife.

feral cats in our communities.¹⁵ And while public safety arguments are legion, studies have consistently underscored the lack of health and safety risk posed by cats in a managed colony either to domestic pet cats or to humans.¹⁶

In addition, impact of feral cat predation has been shown to be widely overstated.¹⁷ One of the favorite tactics of feral cat program opponents is to decry the fact that cats are predators. Common statements include: “cats account for numerous wildlife injuries and deaths every day,” “cats represent a disproportionate predatory pressure on wildlife,” “the cats which do the most damage to wildlife are usually well-fed pets.” These statements are generally unsubstantiated. In fact, they take issue with a huge scientific literature that concludes the opposite. Cats are opportunistic predators. As cats are sterilized, their home ranges decrease markedly; well-fed, they do markedly less hunting; and they naturally rely on scavenger material, insects, plants, and small rodents, rather than birds.¹⁸

It is true that cats are classed as predators. But as Roger Tabor queries, “[i]n biological systems it is insufficient merely to have found one animal will eat another, that after all is what predators do – but is that predation pressure within normal limits?” His studies have demonstrated that the impact of cat predation is widely overstated, and that cats rarely have an impact on bird populations on continents.¹⁹

Stomach content analysis demonstrates that birds occupy an extremely small part of the diet of either the feral or pet outdoor cat (aside from supplemental feeding by humans, rats and mice make up the largest percentage of the cat diet). A New Zealand study from scat analysis showed that birds made up less than 5% of the cat diet, in Australia that number was slightly higher at 5.2%. Concluded the authors of the latter study: “The common belief that feral cats are serious predators of birds is apparently without basis.” Studies on four continents (13 studies in Europe, 12 in North America, 9 in Australia, and 1 in Africa) and 22 islands arrive at this same conclusion.²⁰

In addition, studies show that neutering and releasing and providing daily feeding for feral cats reduces home range, reduces hunting, substantially reduces the numbers of unwanted animals coming into the shelter to be killed, and is both a humane and effective way to deal with the causes and symptoms of cat overpopulation, and hence predation.²¹

¹⁵ See R. Tabor, The Wild Life of the Domestic Cat, Arrow Books, 1983 (Tabor); JAVMA, 1993; Neville, 1984.

¹⁶ Again, the Stanford University Department of EH&S, Santa Clara County Health Department and Stanford’s Department of Comparative Medicine found little risk to humans from the cats and diseases associated with pests carried by cats. In addition, cats in a managed colony are healthier than unmanaged cats as they are sterilized, vaccinated, well-fed, and monitored. See also footnote 13.

¹⁷ Tabor, 1983.

¹⁸ Tabor, 1983.

¹⁹ Tabor, 1983.

²⁰ See, e.g., Tabor, 1983; E.P. Berkeley, Maverick Cats, New England Press, 1992; C.D. Turner and O. Meister, “Hunting Behavior of the Domestic Cat,” 1988, in Turner and P. Bateson, Eds., The Domestic Cat, Cambridge University Press, 1989; C.J. Mead, “Ringed Birds Killed by Cats,” Mammals Review 12:183-6; 1982.

²¹ See, e.g., Holton, 1993; Neville, 1984; JAVMA, 1993.

In fact, virtually all of the claims made by opponents of feral cat care and management lack a total basis in fact, tending toward a suspect use of sensationalism and scare tactics by those who should know better.²²

Coda.

WHILE STERILIZATION PROGRAMS are being undertaken to reduce cat populations, what happens to the unwanted cats already out there is an important concern of feral cat care. The cats' homeless plight is not their fault, but that of the negligent and irresponsible people who did not care for them. These "surplus" cats are forced to pay the ultimate price of death for others' transgressions. Often, they are left to starvation and disease.

Maintaining the *inevitable* colonies is not a quick-fix solution. Realistically, it will be a long-time before a break-even population is reached. In addition, there are problems that periodically arise, and some efforts are less than ideal. It takes a diligent, ongoing commitment on the part of concerned individuals, and the patience and understanding of societal actors. But the goals are worthy, and the support exists. A feral cat care program aimed at spaying/neutering, releasing, and feeding represents the grass roots animal control needed to lower feral cat populations and give these animals a healthy lease on the rest of their lives.

There is no shortage of animals routinely killed because they are neglected, unwanted or abandoned. But it is not happening at Stanford, and it need not happen anywhere else. Feral colonies are successfully managed throughout the United States, in Canada, the Virgin Islands (under the guidance of the Tufts University Veterinary School), South Africa, Denmark, other parts of Europe and Africa, and Britain. We urge other localities to learn from these experiences as it is becoming increasingly essential for humankind to respect the environment and accept responsibility for its care, including cats, wildlife and other living things.

²² Rather than cripple successful programs funded largely at private, not taxpayer expense, public policy should acknowledge the local, grassroots organizations made up of well-meaning, effective citizen volunteers working to bridge the gap between the problem of pet overpopulation and responsible, humane, and non-lethal solutions to that problem. It would be a greater injustice if these animals were *really* abandoned with no one to spay/neuter and look after them. The State need not spend available resources going after local citizens who are trying to take responsibility at their own expense for irresponsible pet owners. While opponents cite enhanced municipal expenditures to retrieve and provide for abandoned cats, this would cut in favor of promoting feral cat programs who further this goal by undertaking this process at personal and private expense. The opponents' agenda would shift this cost to taxpayers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPER SUPPORT OF CAT RESCUE EFFORTS

Introduction.

IT IS GENERALLY accepted that most cities have a large population of feral cats. Animal Control personnel have neither the time, manpower, or resources to trap and euthanize the numbers of cat involved. In addition, experience shows that these types of programs are ineffective and counterproductive. It is far better to have relatively stable populations of sterilized feral cats, than to have uncontrolled numbers of intact feral cats breeding and continually increasing the number of animals and the magnitude of the problem.

It is acknowledged that compassionate people – both as organized and informal groups and individuals – are feeding stray and feral cats. These people can be used by the community to help solve the cat overpopulation problem by trapping and sterilizing these animals. Studies show that stable colonies of cats are created when neuter, release, and maintain procedures are in effect. The same studies indicate that trapping and euthanizing the cats does nothing to solve the problem as other cats quickly fill the void. In addition, penalizing these efforts also shifts the burden to municipalities.

It is ironic that those groups and individuals who, at their own expense or through the aid of privately funded organized animal welfare groups, are undertaking efforts to rescue and provide for unwanted cats should be targeted for restrictive and punitive legislation. Punitive and restrictive ordinances, such as cat licensing or pet limit laws, are counterproductive. Cat licensing ordinances, for example, have been promoted as necessary to reduce the killing at animal control facilities by reuniting strays with their owners. Concomitant to licensing as an identification system are differential licensing and impound recovery fees for unaltered cats. Because the claims made on behalf of licensing have not borne out in practice, and because the euthanasia rate goes up, rather than down, in areas that pass cat licensing laws, support of cat licensing is unwarranted.

While it is true that a higher percentage of dogs compared with cats that are found running at large and taken to the animal control facility are reunited with owners, this is not the result of licensing. The primary reasons for a low reunion rate for cats, as opposed to dogs, are: (1) that feral cats are rounded up; (2) that large numbers of stray cats entering shelters have no owners; (3) the loose conception of cat ownership; and (4) that up to 60% of cats that end up in shelters nation-wide are owner relinquished.

The remedy for this sad state of affairs is not cat licensing and impound mandates for outdoor cats. This will merely result in an increase in impoundment and subsequent killing, as well as abandonment of cats from people who feed and care for stray and feral cats or from those who cannot afford the licensing tax, the high recovery fees, and/or fines.

In fact, other jurisdictions that have passed cat licensing laws have seen euthanasia rates go up as homeless cats, cats who belong to owners who cannot afford the fines or recovery fees for impounded animals, pet cats that are unlicensed, or even pet cats that are licensed but lose their tags are rounded up and killed. San Diego recently considered this issue and firmly rejected it based on evidence that it leads to a higher cat euthanasia rate, it doesn't reduce overpopulation, it doesn't work, and it costs cat owners and taxpayers needed money.²³

The San Diego County Animal Control Advisory Committee Subcommittee on Cat Licensing found no evidence that cat licensing would increase claim rates, promote responsible pet ownership, or reduce euthanasia rates at shelters as proponents claimed. In fact, more commonly the opposite resulted. The claim rates declined and euthanasia rates increased because: (1) unowned or unlicensed cats are placed in jeopardy by a status in violation of the law; (2) marginal caregivers likely respond by refusing to offer the care they were otherwise giving; (3) unowned cats have no one to claim them; and (4) those who cannot afford the costs are likely to abandon their cats.

In short, cat licensing is a profound failure. Where licensing has been enacted, the rate of public compliance is negligible, killing rates increase, and the unification of cats with owners is completely inconsequential.

Effective remedies for cat overpopulation, by contrast, include real low cost and free spay/neutering, removing or greatly increasing the arbitrary limits on pet ownership, allowing privately run and funded rescue efforts to continue without bureaucratic interference, prohibiting housing discrimination for people with companion animals, and community education. These can be instituted without burdening taxpayers, taxing cat ownership, or penalizing those that care for unwanted cats.

In addition, unreasonable restrictions (e.g., pet limit laws) bureaucratically encumber all rescue efforts, potentially disqualify many, and discourage the needed establishment of others. Moreover, since most ordinances do not recognize and accommodate private rescue efforts, many extensive and expansive efforts are underground and their impact cannot be disclosed or documented. Furthermore, the networking, expertise, peer influence, resource sharing, and education of those groups remain an untapped resource by public agencies, private groups, and individuals. Thus, public and private efforts may end up at cross-purposes rather than in constructive collaboration.

A cooperative endeavor of public agencies and private rescue efforts would be effective and proactive, enlisting active involvement of rescue groups/individuals to

²³ Empirical data of other jurisdictions with cat licensing demonstrates that mandating the licensing of cats does not reduce cat overpopulation (and, in fact, results in exacerbating the problems of abandonment, owner relinquishment, impound, and euthanasia of cats), results in increases in taxpayer funded general fund contributions for animal control (paid for by increases in general fund levies for animal control or through cuts in other vital government services), results in a "penalty" tax against responsible cat caregivers, and expands the reach of bureaucracies inappropriately while exacerbating the problem. See Palo Alto Humane Society, Position Paper on Cat Licensing, 1995.

establish reasonable expectations, to oversee and counsel startup, and for management of other rescue efforts (i.e., utilization of peer resources). While support from public agencies is encouraged, dictation of terms is not. In effect, this merely replaces the traditional opposition which has discouraged rescue efforts in the past with other restrictive terms that will perpetuate antagonisms, discourage efforts, and continue the status quo. Unreasonable restrictions should be replaced with reasonable expectations.

Unreasonable restrictions such as cat licensing and low pet limit laws discourage declaration of rescue efforts for fears of reprisals (e.g., impoundment of cats), prevents effective resource sharing that could be used proactively to help animals, and precludes support and oversight as rescue efforts go underground. Reasonable expectations, by contrast, enable declaration of rescue efforts by eliminating fears of reprisals through fines, seizure and impound of animals. In addition, this facilitates proliferation of efforts, resource sharing, and counseling of rescue efforts to correct weaknesses and improve programs.

Rather than mandate limits on cat colony sizes, licensing, submission of spay/neuter and vaccination certificates, zoning, and property owner authorization which can quickly disqualify or unreasonably encumber potentially successful programs, accommodation of rescue efforts should be established through flexible and reasonable expectations with which efforts can reasonably comply without threatening the safety and health of the cats. These include reasonable expectations of spay/neutering, identification (e.g., ear notching), feeding, and education.

Eliminating, Increasing, or Exempting Rescue Efforts from Arbitrary Limits on Pet Ownership.

AS LIMITS TEND to be low, many needy animals are denied loving homes. While proponents argue that limits serve as a reasonable proxy to care ability, in reality, household pet limit laws do not address the problem of abuse, neglect, noise, and sanitation. Whereas one individual may be able to responsibly care for and nurture several animals, another may be unable to care for even one.

Household limits may discourage responsible individuals from providing a good home for more needy animals, but will probably not discourage an irresponsible one from acquiring unlimited animals. Instead of correlating numbers of animals with problems, problems (e.g., noise, sanitation, etc.) should be addressed specifically. In addition, limited resources available to animal control and public health agencies dictate that enforcement is virtually non-existent except on a complaint basis. If there is a problem with level of care, this function of the pet limit laws will not be impaired by raising the limit, eliminating it, or exempting rescued animals or programs.

The expected net effect of this will be to open up more homes, expand rescue programs, and bring those operating underground into the open where education and support can be encouraged and provided.

Spay/Neuter Support.

ONE OF THE single greatest areas of support needed in ongoing cat rescue efforts is for spay/neuter funding and support. Studies demonstrating the effectiveness both on the cat overpopulation problem and from a cost point of view are legion. A Stanford University study of pet population control in the early 1970s concluded that for every dollar invested in municipally operated spay/neuter clinics, taxpayers would save \$6.50 in reduced animal control costs over a period of ten years.²⁴ A second study reflected potential savings of \$9.79 in future animal control costs with a \$1.00 investment in low-cost spaying and neutering.²⁵ That figure was again updated in 1989, the last year for which figures are available, to future animal control savings of approximately \$18.72 in ten years for a \$1.00 investment in spay-neuter.

Spay/neuter subsidies and give-aways are the most integral component for reducing overpopulation, with the potential for very favorable cost-benefit ratios. Both the City of Los Angeles Department of Animal Regulation and the Vancouver, British Columbia SPCA, for example, reported surveys showing the extreme importance of low-cost in making a spay/neuter decision. This included 94% of cat owners who claimed they did not previously spay/neuter because they could not afford the spay/neuter surgery. A 1994 National Study commissioned by the North Shore Animal League on the impact of low-cost neutering has demonstrated that low-cost neutering doubles the number of individuals who get their animals sterilized and cuts shelter intakes by as much as 50%.

In the early 1980's, a referral system called Zero Pet Population Growth offered very low-cost spay/neuters at multiple locations in the Twin Cities, Minnesota metropolitan area. One location alone sterilized as many as 4,000 animals in one year of the program. When the program was discontinued, the number of surgeries at that facility dropped to 600, over 600% fewer animals sterilized because of high cost. It has been shown that the program prevented the births of close to one-quarter million animals over a seven- year period.²⁶ Since each cat impounded and euthanized translates into taxpayer costs of \$74 to \$100,²⁷ the projected savings in both animal lives and taxpayer dollars is substantial.

²⁴ This figure is based on interrupting the reproductive chains of cats whose birth rate is geometric, while "solutions" tend to be based on the impoundment and euthanasia of one animal at a time. Dr. Carl Djerassi, Stanford University, as cited in Les Ward, "The Role of Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Clinics in the Control of Stray and Unwanted Animals," Winston Churchill Traveling Fellowship, 1984.

²⁵ T. J. Sorich, Proceedings of the National Conference on Dog and Cat Control, February 3-5, 1984, Denver, Colorado, p. 214.

²⁶ The estimate ranges from 172,800 to 244,800 animals.

²⁷ In the County of Santa Clara, the costs of impoundment and euthanasia of a cat in a public animal control facility are estimated at \$74 per animal of taxpayers' money--\$46 for impoundment and \$28 for euthanasia (Office of Council Member James Beau and Coalition for Humane Legislation).

Indeed, the Humane Society of Tucson reported that sterilizations jumped from 4,000 a year to 7,000 when they began providing near-free spay/neuter.²⁸ Likewise, the City of Los Angeles Department of Animal Regulation estimated in a mid-1980s report that their low-cost clinic program was saving taxpayers 4 million dollars annually in animal control costs and saving animal lives. By contrast, the Los Angeles County cat licensing program has been detrimental from both a fiscal and humane standpoint.²⁹

Aside from feeding, spaying, and neutering can represent the largest expense of rescue efforts. The dearth of low-cost facilities and the sheer numbers of cats can make some rescue efforts prohibitive, and limit the effectiveness of others. A larger project like the Stanford Cat Network, for example, can alter hundreds of cats. At \$30 to \$60 per cat, all other costs notwithstanding, the cost would be well over \$10,000. While this is cost-effective and represents a significant savings from a societal standpoint, it is a significant and potentially prohibitive personal expense.

Groups like Palo Alto Humane Society and the San Francisco SPCA are allowing hundreds of homeless cats to be altered for free and at greatly subsidized cost, through a voucher system redeemable at a low-cost clinic and at their own facility respectively. These programs are very effective, having a substantial impact both in helping reduce the numbers of homeless animals being born, as well as reducing the numbers of animals coming into the shelters to be euthanized. They need to be copied and expanded.

Since the unaltered pet cat population can also contribute to the numbers of feral cats, there is a great need for low-cost and free spay/neutering to be made available to both owned and homeless cats. This can be accomplished through humane education and reducing the fees at animal control facilities, engaging the veterinary community into participating in low-cost spay/neuter campaigns, mobile spay/neuter clinics, and direct subsidies via a voucher program redeemable at public facilities and participating veterinarians.

Other Material Support.

THERE IS A need for provision of humane traps and instruction on proper usage, guidelines for effective and proper feral cat management, instruction on implementing a humane population control plan, fund-raising advice and assistance, and low-cost or subsidized vaccination.

²⁸ Cost for a neuter was as low as five dollars (\$5.00).

²⁹ Los Angeles spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on door-to-door canvassing and other enforcement for cat licensing. Implemented in 1990, the Los Angeles program saw a high water mark in 1991-1992, when sales of licenses brought in total revenues of only \$45,407.00, significantly lower than administrative and enforcement costs. Los Angeles County has lost money on cat licensing, forcing the County to dip into its general fund to make up the shortfall or risk a roll back in other animal control services. Los Angeles is now asking for more money from the general fund for enforcement. Moreover, Los Angeles County reported a total of 92,210 cats euthanized in the 3-year reporting period prior to the implementation of their cat license program, which subsequently jumped by almost 6,000 in the 3-year post licensing period to 98,161. At \$74 to \$100 per cat, Los Angeles experienced an increase in animal control costs as high as \$600,000 for the 3-year period because of cat licensing.

Humane traps should be purchased for the use of individuals and groups and provided free through humane societies, public health facilities (other than for purposes of trapping and euthanizing), participating veterinarians (see below), and larger and more organized existing efforts. In addition, these institutions can also sponsor workshops, fact sheets, instruction, mediation, and ongoing assistance through financial subsidies and use of facilities.

Finally, boarding facilities for sick animals, adoptable animals, lactating mothers and their offspring, and for trapped animals awaiting spaying and neutering are in short supply and expensive. These need to be made available in public facilities for the low-cost, subsidized, and free use by private rescue groups, as well as subsidies at participating kennels who agree to provide reduced cost services. Again, individuals, organizations, institutions, and municipalities can and should take the lead in funding, promoting, and enlisting support for these programs.

Use of the Veterinary Community.

VETERINARIANS NEED TO be informed on the proper care and treatment of feral cats. Fact sheets are available for veterinarians which include procedures for ear notching, handling, surgery and dissolvable sutures, potential hazards, what to do if the cat escapes, parasites, lactating females, post-operative care, stress reduction, and long-term health plans. These should be expanded and made available on a wider basis through public funding.

In addition, public agencies should encourage veterinarians through supplemental funding, tax breaks, and other means to adopt programs and support rescue efforts. These should not only include low cost and free spay/neuter for all animals (homeless and owned pets), but also even lowered fees for rescue animals and group discounts.

Moreover, low cost veterinary services in addition to spay/neuter and vaccination should be made available to rescue animals through voluntary program participation, funded subsidized voucher coupons, or a no-interest revolving loan fund redeemable only through participating veterinarians who agree to perform services at reduced cost. In addition, humane traps should be purchased for the use of and made available to participating veterinarians for rescuers to utilize these services.

By enlisting their support, a list of low cost and participating veterinarians should be made available and widely disseminated to the public through humane societies, animal protection groups, public facilities, schools, veterinarians, pet-supply stores, and the like.

Humane Education.

HUMANE EDUCATION IS multi-faceted. It includes the efforts of rescue groups through newsletters, interaction, and exposure. It includes a humane education

component in the schools, as is currently being done by municipalities throughout the State of California under the auspices of humane societies. It includes brochures available at veterinarian offices and pet supply stores, and public service announcements. These include spay/neuter drives, anti-abandonment campaigns, and the like. These should be encouraged and greatly expanded.

The Palo Alto Humane Society, for example, has a humane education component. For a nominal cost to the City of Palo Alto, schoolchildren, young adults, adults, and seniors undergo humane education on various aspects of animal care, the values of spaying and neutering, responsible pet ownership, and proper relationships between animals and humans. It has received accolades at all levels, and has been credited with lowering animal-related problems in Palo Alto by the City of Palo Alto Animal Services Department.

Less formally, but of equal importance, acknowledgement, encouragement, and support of private rescue efforts allow peer rescue groups to consult and mentor less experienced, formal, or new groups. In addition, these groups can help establish and manage programs, as well as mediating problems.

Conclusion.

THE VERY GROUPS who do the day-to-day work of cat rescue and protection are also the groups that have done the most to reduce the cat population level, to reduce the numbers of homeless and unwanted cats being born, and to decrease the number of cats entering shelters to be euthanized. The status quo—a compilation of restrictive and punitive legislation, open hostility from animal control facilities, human ignorance, and lack of public support—however, forces many of these groups to go underground, limits their effectiveness, and squanders effective and widespread resources that continue to go untapped. By openly acknowledging and supporting these efforts through the repealing of restrictive measures, spay/neuter subsidies, disseminating information, and humane education, their effectiveness and availability will be greatly expanded.

Because a majority of the resources involved will still be undertaken at private expense, municipalities can realize large beneficial returns through a comparatively moderate investment. In addition, because of the networking and peer support aspects that will be expanded through public acknowledgment and accommodation, the level of care received by the cats, the degree of services, and the effectiveness of their endeavors will also be greatly improved, at no cost to the taxpayer.

Together, we can take responsibility, and help care for and humanely reduce the numbers of feral cats.

Appendix 1

The Stanford Cat Network: An Overview of a Formal Feral Cat Operation

1. The Stanford Cat Network (SCN) is a feral and homeless cat care program which cares for the 250 feral and homeless cats that live on the Stanford University campus. SCN is at the forefront of feral cat population management and care programs that are being established throughout the country, in a growing response to problems of animal overpopulation. SCN is a model for such efforts; and Network volunteers serve as consultants, especially to other institutions of higher education.
2. SCN was organized in 1989, in response to Stanford University's announced plans to trap and exterminate a feral cat population of around 500 on the Stanford University campus. An agreement was reached with the University that would allow SCN to take over the care of the campus cats. This program to control the population of and care for the cats at Stanford University includes sterilization, vaccination, veterinary care, and daily feeding of 250 feline campus residents; as well as finding homes for the tame strays and kittens who are young enough for domestication.
3. At SCN's inception, estimates of the stray and feral cat population at Stanford ranged from 500 to a university estimate of 1,500. The population is now less than 250. Stanford cats are near zero population growth and, overall, the population is declining through natural attrition. In addition, Stanford's current cat population is healthy and well-cared for.
4. SCN has accomplished all of this without financial support from the University. (SCN runs entirely on volunteer efforts and private donations.) SCN's successful five year program with a very large cat population demonstrates that feral cat colonies can be effectively managed and controlled, and that a workable, viable alternative to extermination does exist.
5. The Stanford Administration originally raised concerns about whether feral cats result in increased health risks. The Stanford Department of Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) found little risk to humans from the cats and diseases associated with pests carried by cats. Additionally, EH&S concluded, after consultation with the Santa Clara County Health Department and Stanford's Department of Comparative Medicine, that there was a general consensus that feral cats pose little health and safety risk to individuals on campus. In five years of operation, there have been no human health problems or injuries attributed to the cats on campus despite 250 to 500 cats at any one time living in close proximity to students, staff, faculty, and wildlife.
6. There has been no evidence presented that the cat population at Stanford University has made a deleterious impact on wildlife. Stanford University is a campus abundant with indigenous wildlife (it is not an urban campus). It thus serves as an excellent test case to determine impact on wildlife populations—including small animals and birds.

There has been no discernible impact on these populations despite 250 to 500 cats at any one time over a five-year period.

Addendum: In 2006, the 17th year of operation of the Stanford Cat Network, SCN estimates the campus cat population at around 50, a decline attributed to an aging population as well as a strong adoption program that removes cats appropriately from campus. This result attests to the success of carefully managed cat care programs.

Appendix 2

SPECIAL REPORT Excerpted from *Veterinary Forum*, March 1993

Managing And Controlling Feral Cat Populations

Killing The Crisis And Not The Animal

By Louise Holton and Pervaiz Manzoor, DVM

For many years the United States has been undergoing a major crisis – the overpopulation of companion animals. A by-product of this has been the burgeoning population of feral (domestic turned wild) cats. An estimated 30 to 60 million cats live near food sources, such as alleys and parks, behind restaurants and fast food places. Some years ago, a survey conducted in California found that 60% of unneutered cats were no longer living in their homes after three years. Most of these end up forming feral cat colonies.

In the United Kingdom, Europe and in parts of Africa, for more than a decade the humane management of feral colonies has been advocated as a cost-effective and long-term solution to the problem. After decades of using unsuccessful eradication programs, the major animal protection groups, including the RSPCA, began recommending trapping, neutering and releasing the cats back to supervised sites.

As whole colonies are eliminated, new cats move in to repopulate the area. Another factor is that often some neighborhood people have taken to feeding the cats and will not call animal control for fear the cats will be destroyed. It has proven more effective to work with these feeders to sterilize the cats.

In the U.S. many individuals successfully use these methods. A national network, Alley Cat Allies (ACA), has formed to assist by distributing information and scientific data on the subject. Our hospital in Brentwood, Md., has been providing medical care for feral cat colonies in the District of Columbia and some Maryland suburbs since 1990. As some veterinarians have never treated feral cats and as these innovative methods are becoming more popular, we would like to share our experiences with the veterinary community.

With careful planning, the correct equipment, common sense, and understanding the natures of these cats, anyone can be of assistance without endangering themselves or the animals. Sterilization and management of colonies help to stabilize and control populations, eliminating many of the annoying behaviors such as spraying, fighting and yowling. The cats become healthier, stop roaming and, therefore, car accidents are cut down.

One of the most distressful complaints from people about unmanaged colonies is the sight of sick and dying kittens. There is a high mortality rate among feral kittens; more than 50% suffer from treatable diseases and die. Those that survive kittenhood will usually be healthy, having built up an immunity to many diseases domestic cats are prone to. In rabies endemic areas, vaccinated feral cats help to form a buffer zone between wildlife and humans. Anyone working with feral cats should have a pre-exposure rabies shot.

Humane traps should be obtained. A “squeeze-side” cage is a must for veterinarians to use. A movable panel immobilizes the animal against the side of the cage, allowing it to be tranquilized before handling. Funding the project is often a problem, so the best use of available funds should be made. For instance, only the first four or five cats of a colony of 20 to 25 cats need to be tested for feline leukemia and FIV, unless clinical signs of illness are observed. If any test positive, unless they can be isolated for 30 days and retested, these should be euthanized to prevent the spread of this disease to the rest of the colony. Further testing of the colony should then be done.

If these initial tests are negative, it is usually safe to assume that the colony is free of these diseases. Results of a survey done by ACA show that only a small percentage of feral cats have FeLV or FIV. Stray domestic cats are more prone to these illnesses. Any new cats entering the colony should be trapped, tested and sterilized. (Survey results show that a few cats sometimes join established cat colonies, especially if some cats or kittens are removed.)

The most common ailments are upper respiratory infections, including eye infections, and internal and external parasites. These should be treated prior to the surgery. Often the colony caretakers can distinguish each cat, most even have names. However, for those that cannot be identified, a suggested method of identification is to clip one centimeter off the top of the left ear. If the ear is properly cauterized, the procedure does not cause any problems. To avoid the necessity of a second trapping, use dissolvable sutures. Males should be fostered for two days and females should be fostered for three days after surgery, unless any health problems are present. A long term antibiotic should be administered to each cat.

Some advice for your clients:

Trapping

Use tuna fish or any other strong smelling food as bait. Never leave traps unprotected. Do not trap in inclement weather. Traumatized cats are susceptible to heat stroke. Discourage the use of “rabies poles” and nets; these can harm the animals. Humane traps, patience and endurance are still the safest way. Tranquilizers should not be used, as the cat may leave the area before they take effect and can get into dangerous situations. Cover traps with a blanket or towel immediately after trapping as this will have a calming effect on the animals. Often trapped cats will struggle in the trap and injure their claws or noses. These wounds are usually superficial and will easily heal. Do not trap lactating

mothers unless all her kittens can be trapped. They will die if left behind. If a mother is accidentally trapped, return her back to the site and trap when the kittens can fend for themselves.

Feral Kittens

Kittens, if caught at 6 to 8 weeks old, can be tamed and placed in homes. However, if no homes are available, wait until they are 12 weeks old, then trap, sterilize and release back into the colony. If kittens are trapped too young they will require bottle feeding. These will become very tame, however. Remember to deal carefully with feral kittens. They can inflict painful bites and scratches, no matter how cute they look! Alley Cat Allies has fact sheets on how to tame kittens as well as information on implementation of the programs. Careful handling will ensure there is no risk to humans. The recent survey reflects little risk to the health or well-being of humans. In fact, working with feral cats can be a most rewarding experience!

Louise Holton is the director/co-founder of Alley Cat Allies, Inc., a national non-profit organization. For several years, she and Dr. Manzoor (University of Agriculture at Lyallpur, Lahore, Pakistan), Brentwood Animal Hospital in Mount Rainier, Md., have worked together to control feral cat populations in Washington, D.C. and Maryland.