

Alley Cat MEWS



Vol. 7, Issue 3

www.saveacat.org

Introduction to Feral Cats:
What Exactly is a Feral Cat?
By Louise Holton

Any domesticated animal such as a pigeon, pig, horse, dog, or cat who lives away from human contact can revert to a wild state. These animals are called "feral." Feral kittens are the offspring of a

feral mother cat, or they could be born to a domestic mother who has become lost or abandoned, or chooses to have her litter away from humans. In order for kittens to become friendly and completely domesticated, they should be handled from a very early age— around two weeks old. Feral mother cats teach their young offspring to be wary of humans and to run and hide if they feel threatened.

Young kittens who have not been handled by humans will spit or hiss when you approach them. Older feral kittens will be wary of humans and flee when approached. A stray domestic cat who has had to survive on her own for a while will initially be wary of humans. However, she will regain her confidence fairly soon after re-establishing contact. There are varying degrees of wariness and shyness among both ferals and other cats who have been abandoned to fend for themselves. It requires a certain amount of experience working with stray and feral cats to be able to properly judge just how feral a cat may be, or if the cat is feral at all, or just a frightened domestic cat. Many domestic cats are killed merely for acting fearful and defensive in a frightening situation— assumed to be feral.



In Prince George's County, Maryland, a yellow eight-month-old housecat was picked up by animal control officers along with a few other stray cats at an apartment complex. The cat, Hunter, had been neutered and vaccinated just two weeks earlier, and had apparently escaped from the apartment when someone accidentally left a door ajar. The cat was examined by two experienced veterinary technicians and an animal control officer, and was deemed "feral." He was destroyed that same day. When the family went to claim their cat they were told that he was destroyed because he "was attacking, spitting and hissing, and trying to bite the officer through his gloves." The agency said they held most cats for three to five days, but often destroy "fractious" cats sooner.

Defining and predicting feral cat behavior can be somewhat murky territory. Some older feral cats can become fairly tame in time,

Continued on Page 1

FEATURES

Cover
Introduction to Feral Cats

Page 1
Treating Feral and Stray Cats

Page 3
TNR: Groups Cannot Go It Alone

Page 4
Cats and Ticks

Page 5
ACR News and Notes

Page 6
Member Survey: Please Fill out and Return to ACR as soon as possible! Thanks!

yet other ferals, even when trapped as young as four months of age, may remain feral forever. Some ferals bond with their original caretaker but may never bond with a new person. During my many years of working with feral cats, I have experienced a wide range of situations with hundreds of ferals. I've seen them in a wide variety of circumstances—in my home, at the veterinary clinic, in city alleys, and in the ACR office with the ferals we often keep till we can find barn homes for them.

The only conclusion one can reach from these experiences is that no two feral cats are alike and one can never predict how any feral cat will react to human contact. Just be wary, and use the proper equipment. A cat bite can be painful to humans, and mean probable death for the cat, as many agencies will insist on killing the cat to test for rabies.

Do not keep an adult feral cat in your home if he is obviously unhappy. Some will stop eating and this can lead to serious health problems. Those cats will be better off in a barn, or back with their colony.

A New Challenge for the Veterinary Community: Treating Feral and Stray Cats

By Louise Holton

In 1988 I was fortunate enough to build up a relationship with Brentwood Animal Hospital, in Maryland. Soon after starting to rescue cats and to work with feral cat colonies, I realized this relationship had to be special, as cat caretakers needed all the medical support they could get for these very exceptional circumstances. Soon, with Dr. Manzoor's help, I wrote the first Veterinary Guidelines for Working with Feral cats, which won an award for excellence from the prestigious Cat Writer's Association.



This is meant as a guide for veterinarians and their staff, who may not have worked with feral cats. Feral cats are usually difficult to handle, and the less handled, the safer for veterinary staff and the cats.

Preliminary Plans

ACR and its network of colony caretakers and veterinarians have successfully trapped and sterilized tens of thousands of feral cats. When planning a colony management program, the caretaker should consult a veterinarian before trapping— it's amazing how many people call the ACR office and tell us they have a feral cat in a trap and what should they do?

Sadly, not all veterinarians will accept feral cats in their hospital. Often this is because they have had a bad experience with a feral cat. It could be that the feral cat escaped and climbed the walls and damaged something. It could be that the cat was not sufficiently restrained and bit a vet tech.

That is why it is so important to take ACR's Fact Sheet along to your new veterinarian. Ask him or her to read it first. You should also be prepared to buy a few extra traps so you can leave the cat in the trap at the clinic. This will make it safer for the vet to give the anesthetic through the bars of the trap. After surgery they can put the cat back in the trap, and put newspapers underneath and leave the cat in the clinic overnight to recover.

As it is difficult to guarantee that cats will be trapped on a predictable schedule, flexibility to receive cats is needed. ACR recommends that clinics draft a list of what they require.

Continued on Page 2

Treating Feral and Stray Cats Continued

Other important points to mention:

- * Let the veterinarian know that the cat will be returned to an outdoor colony. This means the cat should have dissolvable sutures, as she cannot be brought back for their removal.
- * Ask for a long acting antibiotic to make sure it will cover any possible infections.
- * Ask for a 3-year rabies vaccination, You don't want to try to retrap feral cats every year.
- * Make sure the cat's LEFT ear is ear-tipped. This will help you or animal control identify the cat as a sterilized cat in the future. Only complete removal of the tip of the left ear is acceptable as a world-wide international sign.
- * Make sure the cat is dewormed and defleaed with Revolution. This will at least ensure a month or so without fleas and parasites. There are tablets like Capstar that you can put in the food for later use.

Do ask your veterinarian if she would be willing to give you antibiotics on occasion for your outdoor feral colony if they get colds or eye infections. She should understand that you cannot bring in a feral cat like a domestic animal for a consultation.

Now the Sticky Part: To Test or Not to Test

Julie Levy, DVM, PhD, Diplomate ACVIM, was the first veterinarian to advise against testing feral cats for Feline Leukemia (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). Dr. Levy is also the founder of Operation Catnip, a veterinary group that has spayed and neutered over 20,000 feral cats in North Carolina and Florida. Dr. Levy's main reason for not testing is that resources for feral cats are very limited. ***Feral cat groups should focus on mass sterilization as the primary goal.***



Sterilization reduces certain behaviors in cats which are the main cause of these viruses being transmitted between cats, i.e. FIV in unneutered male cats through bite wounds and FeLV spread through infected mothers to their kittens. Simple sterilization is the one most important thing you can do to stop the spread of these viruses.

FeLV and FIV is present in around 4% of the owned and the unowned feral cat population. We do not demand that outdoor domestic cats be tested for these viruses and if positive, that they be killed, so why should we demand that the feral cat population be tested and killed if positive? Thousands of feral

cats all across the country have been sterilized without being tested for many years now. And there is no increase in these viruses, nor has there been any outbreak of these viruses in any of the areas where these untested cats are released.

ACR has also spayed and neutered 20,000 strays and feral cats here in Maryland. We have tested all these cats, as many of the tame strays do go into new homes. Our rate of FeLV and FIV positive findings is well below 1%.

Conclusion

The task of caring for stray and feral cats is pretty new to the American Veterinary Community. In one way, many of them may say this should be the task of local shelters, but on the other hand, it is a tremendous opportunity for the Veterinary community to step up and face these new challenges. After all, it is the failure of the public to spay and neuter their own animals that has caused this problem. We at Alley Cat Rescue feel that it is up to the community, which should include local veterinary clinics, to help these animals.

Trap-Neuter-Return: Groups Cannot Go It Alone

By Kylie Luik

As anyone who has tried to face a problem as large as pet overpopulation knows, it can be like trying to plug up the Hoover Dam with a wine bottle cork. Cat rescue groups who do Trap-Neuter-Return may especially sympathize with this, as they often find themselves overwhelmed and under-staffed for the number of cats who need their help. It often seems that for every cat you are able to help, there are ten, twenty, or a hundred more you can't.

Before we even get to the logistical problems that often accompany trapping, we first have to wade through the *other* problems. Mainly, the problem of understanding. I often get questions such as "Will you come and remove the cats?" Then there are the people who don't even ask, they just tell me there are feral cats and to come get them. When I ask where the cats should go, I am often met with silence or "I don't know, don't you have someplace to take them?" Sometimes I think that people believe there is a magical land, with hundreds of acres, where all the feral cats can go and live out their lives and not bother anybody (and sometimes I wish there was!). There are even people who believe they can bully rescue groups into doing what they want (these people almost always are the ones who want the cats removed). The "or else" line is especially popular.

After I explain that there is no place to bring them and that farm homes are scarce, I then have to explain that we can't possibly do all of the work for them. People call Alley Cat Rescue from all over the Washington, D.C. metro area and expect us to come and do the trapping. We are more than happy to lend traps, and teach how to trap, and to help with the expenses, but we cannot possibly come set the traps, monitor them, transport to our vet and bring the cats back (if they will even take them back!).

This is where community comes in. There are several levels of community that are important here. The first is the community where the cats are located. The people who call me obviously know the cats are there, and chances are that other people in the area also know they are there. Is someone willing to feed the cats? Is anyone in the area willing to help? If they want to help the cats, they are going to have to take some kind of initiative. The chances of them finding someone who will come and remove the cats are slim, but if they are willing to

look after the cats, finding a group to help with T-N-R will be much easier.

The second level of community that comes into play is the rescue community. When individual groups act on their own, it is like bailing water out of a sinking ship. When groups come together to attack a problem, they can fix the holes in the ship. Here at Alley Cat Rescue, we are trying to fix the holes in the ship by creating a network of rescue groups across the country. Our Cat Action Teams are all groups who are doing rescue and T-N-R on the local level. If groups can communicate, and let each other know exactly what they are doing and where, each groups' ability to help increases exponentially. When someone calls us from California or Tennessee, we will only be able to help if we know which groups in the area are doing what.

Groups, and even networks of groups,

Continued on Page 4

Are you looking for groups in your area?

- * Visit our website, www.saveacat.or and click on the "Cat Action Links"- Groups are sorted by state
- * Visit www.petfinder.com and search by city and state or zip code
- * Visit www.worldanimal.net which lists rescue groups, vegetarian groups, and animal rights organizations
- * If you call a group in your area and they are full or overwhelmed, ask if they can recommend other groups in the area who may be able to help
- * Most groups will not answer the phone when you call- leave a message clearly explaining what you need help with, along with your name and contact information. This will give you a better chance of receiving a call back.



Cats and Ticks

By Kylie Luik

Almost every person who lives in an area where ticks are prevalent knows to check their entire body when coming inside. How many of these same people take the time to check their cats on a regular basis? Ticks live in woods, tall grass, weeds and brush, and are infamous for carrying Lyme disease, a bacterial infection. If your cat ever goes outside, it is important to check them for ticks. Even if your cat is an indoor cat, ticks can travel into your home on your clothing.

Most cases of Lyme disease occur in the Northeastern and North-central regions of the United States, but cases have been reported across the country. Currently, there is no vaccine against Lyme disease for cats, but there is one for dogs. If you live in an area with a high rate of Lyme disease and have a dog, this is definitely something to discuss with your veterinarian.

You can prevent ticks from biting your cat in several ways. Topical applications are used once a month on the back of the neck. Make sure to read the package carefully, as many only protect against fleas. Sprays can also be used, but you must be careful not to spray around the eyes and mouth of the cat. A cotton ball sprayed with the solution can be used to get close to more sensitive areas. Dips and shampoos can also be used if your cat already has ticks, and may have some residual effect.

Lyme disease is not transmittable from animals to humans. If you suspect your cat has been bitten by a tick, it is important to see your veterinarian. Cats may show lameness, fever, loss of appetite, fatigue, eye damage or unusual breathing, but many cats show no symptoms at all, despite being infected. The earlier the treatment with antibiotics is started, the better.

How to Check Your Pet For Ticks

- 1) Put on latex gloves to avoid direct contact with a tick.
- 2) Feel your pet all over, looking for pea-sized lumps.
- 3) Look to see if a tick is protruding from the skin. Ticks are tiny black, brown, reddish or tan disk-like arachnids, have eight legs and are about the size of the head of a pin. If they have attached themselves to your pet, then they can swell up to the size of a grape.
- 4) Grasp the tick with tweezers as close to your pet's skin as possible, making sure not to pinch your pet's skin.
- 5) Pull the tick out using a straight, steady pulling motion. Be gentle, pulling too hard on the tick can cause its head to remain lodged in your pet's skin, which can lead to infection.
- 6) Dispose of the tick by throwing it into a fire, or by squishing it in a tissue using the tweezers, and then flushing it down the toilet.
- 7) Apply antiseptic ointment to the area. Continue to monitor and watch for any sign of infection.

Trap-Neuter-Return continued

need to understand their limits. No group can respond to every call for help, especially when those who are asking for help are not willing to help themselves. It is important to remember that those feral cats that are suddenly a problem for someone have probably been there for years. If you are part of a group anywhere in the world, and would like to be part of our Cat Action Teams, please call us at (301) 277 5595 or email AlleyCatRescue@gmail.com. Remember, we are all working toward a common goal. Lets work together!



California Legislation AB1634

The bill that would require the sterilization of most dogs and cats in California was pulled after senators failed to endorse it. The measure would have required dogs and cats to be sterilized by 6 months old or face a \$500 fine. Licensed breeders could apply for a permit and exceptions would be available for dogs used for law enforcement, hunting, farm work and livestock herding.

Opponents included breeders, service organizations and rural governments. Professional breeders said the bill would unfairly target them and do little to address “backyard breeders.” The bill’s author, Democratic Assemblyman Lloyd Levine said he would narrow the bill so it would only apply to owners who let dogs or cats roam free or who violate animal welfare laws. But he said pet overpopulation is still a problem that needs to be solved.

The legislation was introduced by shelter workers as a way to reduce euthanizing the state’s unwanted animals. About a million dogs and cats enter Californian shelters each year and 450,000 are killed.

At least 25 states require dogs and cats adopted from shelters to be sterilized. Last year, Rhode Island passed a law requiring cats to be spayed or neutered by six months of age. Denver, Camden, N.J., New York and Fort Wayne, Ind., are among cities that have some kind of sterilization law.



Gretchn Wyler– Animal Activist Dies at 75

Gretchen Wyler, Broadway actress turned animal advocate, died in May at the age of 75. Wyler performed in shows such as “Guys and Dolls,” “Silk Stockings,” “Damn Yankees” and “Bye Bye Birdie”. The turning point in her life was when she visited a dog pound in New York. Appalled by the conditions there, she stopped eating meat, gave away her fur coats and opened her own shelter. Her goal was to bring animal rights into the spotlight for the American public. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals made her its first female board member in 1971. She sat on the board of directors for the Fund for Animals and was the vice chairwoman until 1991, when she founded the animal rights group the Ark Trust. In 2002 the Ark Trust merged with the Humane Society of the United States, and she served as vice president of the organization’s Hollywood office until retiring last year. Wyler also created the Genesis Awards, which since 1986, have recognized the media and entertainment industries for incorporating animal protection themes into their work.



A LEGACY OF COMPASSION

Please consider leaving something in your will and estate plans for the long-term care of homeless cats. It is really simple to do and can make a huge difference in the lives of cats long after we are gone.

Suggested Bequest Language

I give the sum of \$_____ to Alley Cat Rescue, Inc., a nonprofit incorporated in the State of Delaware and located in Maryland, for its general purpose to help stray, abandoned, and feral cats.

Federal Tax ID: 52-227 9100

Alley Cat Rescue Staff
Louise Holton– Publisher
Kylie Luik– Editor

Board of Directors
Dr. Pervaiz Manzoor
Desirè Stapley
Peggy Hilden
Virginia Messina
Louise Holton

STRAY AND FERAL CAT SURVEY

In order for ACR to help make changes in the way authorities view stray and homeless cats, we would appreciate your help. We need you to fill out this questionnaire and return it to ACR. Although we greatly appreciate your donations to help us with our vital work to help save cats, please return the completed survey regardless of whether you include a donation or not.

INDIVIDUAL REPLIES WILL BE KEPT STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Section One: Your Own Housecats

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1) How many cats live in your house? ___ Male ___ Female</p> <p>2) How many purebred? ___ How many Mixed breed? ___ How many feral? ___</p> <p>3) Do you keep your cats: Indoors? ___ Outdoors? ___ In & Out? ___</p> <p>4) How did you obtain your cat(s)? SPCA ___ Born at home ___ Rescue Group ___ Purchased-breeder ___ Friend ___ Purchased-store ___ Stray ___ News advert ___ Animal control ___ Other _____</p> | <p>5) How old are your cats? Kitten 0-1 year ___ Young adult 1-5 years ___ Middle Age 6-12 years ___ Older _____</p> <p>6) Have they been sterilized? Males: YES ___ NO ___ Females: YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>7) Have your female cats ever had a litter? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>8) If your cats are not sterilized, what is your reason? Want to breed ___ Too expensive ___ Other _____</p> |
|---|--|

Section Two: Stray and Feral Cats

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1) Does your neighborhood have stray cats? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>2) Are there feral cats around? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>3) Do people feed them? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>4) Do you feed them? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>5) Have they been TNR'd (Trap-Neuter- Returned)? YES ___ NO ___ Some _____</p> <p>6) How long have they been living there? ___</p> <p>7) Have there ever been kittens? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>8) How many kittens? ___ Did you or others tame them? _____</p> <p>9) Did anyone adopt the kittens? You ___ Family ___ Friends ___ Rescue Group _____</p> <p>10) Approximately how many kittens have</p> | <p>died? _____</p> <p>11) If the colony has been TNR'd or relocated, have other cats moved in? TNR'd YES ___ NO ___ Relocated YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>12) If yes, have these new cats been TNR'd? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>13) How old are the adults? 1-5 yrs ___ 6+ yrs ___</p> <p>14) Do they have a shelter? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>15) Have they been relocated? YES ___ NO ___</p> <p>16) Do you have a feral cat group in your area? YES ___ NO ___</p> |
|---|---|

Part Three: Other Information

- | | |
|---|---|
| Name _____ | Age: Under 30 ___ 31-50 ___ |
| Address _____ | 51-70 ___ Over 70 ___ |
| _____ | Annual income: Under \$30,000 ___ |
| _____ | \$31,000 to \$59,000 ___ \$60,000 and up ___ |
| _____ | How much do you spend annual on your house cats? _____ Feral cats? _____ |
| (Note: If you do not want to give your name and address, please give city and state) | Would you ever consider "registering" your colony with local authorities, if they accept TNR as a legitimate method for controlling ferals? YES ___ NO ___ |

HOW YOU CAN HELP

A: By Check

Make checks payable to *Alley Cat Rescue*

- \$10 \$15 \$20 \$25
 \$35 \$50 \$100 \$150

Other \$ _____

Name _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Thank you needed: ___ Yes ___ NO

Alley Cat Rescue *The National Cat Protection Association* is a non-profit 501(c)3
Donations are Tax Deductible
Alley Cat Rescue
P.O. Box 585
Mt. Rainier, MD 20722

B: By Credit Card

Please charge my ONE TIME \$ _____
Contribution to my credit card

I would like to make a **MONTHLY** donation

\$6 \$9 \$12 \$15

\$20 \$25 Other \$ _____

Visa Mastercard

American Express Discover

Account # _____

Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Credit Card donations are processed through the **BRENTWOOD ANIMAL HOSPITAL**, credited to the account of Alley Cat Rescue. Brentwood Animal Hospital will appear on your credit card statement.

Does your company offer matching gifts? You can double or triple your donation!

www.saveacat.org



Alley Cat Rescue
P.O. Box 585
Mt. Rainier, MD
20712

Address Service Requested

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MERRIFIELD, VA
PERMIT No. 1679

