

State of California
Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Management Division

**NEUTER-RELEASE FERAL CAT MANAGEMENT:
EXCERPTS FROM ARTICLES PUBLISHED BY ORGANIZATIONS
PROMOTING FERAL CAT COLONIES**

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The following excerpts are from leaflets and other literature recently issued by various groups in this country that are promoting long-term management of feral cats in "controlled colonies." These include written material from animal rights and humane groups that are national (The Fund for Animals; Alley Cat Allies) or local California organizations (Humane Society of Sonoma County; Forgotten Felines of Sonoma County; Cat Caring Connection, Tiburon). These represent a sample of the organizations in the country that are actively promoting and establishing managed feral cat colonies.

Entries are grouped into seven subject areas: Justification/Strategy; Goals; Management; Funding/Help; Disease; Relocation; and Wildlife. Grammatical errors have been left as written and are not tagged. To assist in placing excerpts in context, compiler's clarifications are given in brackets, [].

JUSTIFICATION/STRATEGY

"The feral cat population in this country has reached critical proportions. It must be contained. The preferred way to do this is to trap, neuter and release these animals back into monitored colonies. Fortunately, an increasing number of concerned humans are doing just that." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #1: Health Care for Feral Cats and Potential Health Hazards for Humans*, by S. Cliver, DVM)

"The initial cost may seem high but the long term costs are half of what can be spent on attempted eradication. The major costs are for equipment, veterinary services and food." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #3: Feral Cat Population Control, Implementing a Humane Sterilization Plan*)

"In combination with aggressive education, implementation of sterilized and maintained feral cat colonies, and full implementation of Santa Rosa's new outdoor cat spay/neuter ordinance (which requires owners to spay/neuter their outdoor cats), the Society animal shelter ... is seeing a 26 percent decline in the number of stray felines admitted to the Santa Rosa Animal Shelter!" (Humane Society of Sonoma County, *North Bay Pets*, Oct./Nov. 1993)

"Experience has shown that cats are somewhat territorial and will establish and protect colonies. Left to breed uncontrolled, these colonies will compound the pet overpopulation problem, and pose a potential health risk to wildlife, domestic pets, and humans. In areas where habitat can not be modified, continual trapping and euthanasia has been ineffective, in that other feral cats repopulate the territorial niches left void by those previously removed." (TTVAR [*] Statement of Policy and Practice, Humane Society of Sonoma County)

[* TTVAR stands for Trap, Test for disease, Vaccinate, Alter, and Release.]

"The Stanford Cat Network was founded in 1989 after the University administration decided it was going to euthanize the campus' feral cat population. The Network stepped in and tamed hundreds of cats, and found homes for them. They spayed, neutered, and gave shots to the rest and now care for about 30 colonies of feral cats on campus. They have 20 volunteers, some feeding 60 or more cats a day using their own money." (Excerpt from *Best Friends Magazine*, contained in *Cat Caring Connection*, Dec. 1992, p. 3)

"Cats, like all predators, have built-in ecological intelligence which guides them to breed only up to the carrying capacity of their environment. Left alone, no predator species will overbreed to the point where its prey is too depleted to support the predator population." (Alley Cat Allies, *Alley Cat Action*, Summer 1992, p. 1)

"... feral cats are the wild offspring of unsterilized lost or abandoned domestic cats. If we do not stop the source of feral cats, which is people's companion cats, we will never succeed in controlling the feral cat colonies, despite the hard work of people who are involved with trap, sterilize, and release programs." (The Fund for Animals 1992 handout on the Feline Fix Bill)

"Requiring outdoor cats to be sterilized will reduce the feral cat population." (The Fund for Animals 1992 handout on the Feline Fix Bill)

"Of those [feral cat colony feeders surveyed nationwide] who say populations have increased, most attribute this to lost, abandoned or dropped off companion animals near the colony and the difficulty in trapping and spaying all the female cats. This statistic includes those who are not applying any sterilization practices to colonies. ... ¶While we must be careful of any conclusions drawn from this data, it is clear that many of our suppositions are supported by the survey results. The majority of those working with feral cats are individuals with no organizational affiliation, little formal training, and are covering expenses with their own money or very limited financial aid. Despite these obstacles, the trap, neuter and release method has proven to be a practical, humane alternative. In general, the health of feral cats and quality of their environment is such that trapping and killing is not justified on grounds that it is more humane." (Alley Cat Allies, *Alley Cat Action*, Summer 1992, p. 2)

"We know that trap-neuter-release is the single most effective method of stabilizing and maintaining healthy feral cat colonies with the least possible cost to local governments and residents, while providing the best life for the animals themselves. This is not speculation or hopeful theory - you and we have repeatedly proven that trap-neuter-release works just as we say it does. We are certain that with greater resources at our disposal, we can demonstrate to animal control agencies and other authorities nationally that the methods we prescribe are the best available from both economical and humane viewpoints. Bureaucratic intransigence aside, we believe that when animal control agencies are shown that their costs for repeatedly trapping and killing feral colonies are far higher than advocating stable, non-breeding colonies in the same location, then they will embrace trap-neuter-release as standard operating procedure. To date we have created sufficient controversy that humane control is at least known to, if not supported by animal control authorities. We have encouraging documentation from you, the people "in the trenches," that in almost every area where there are feral cats there are people willing to feed and work with the colonies, and often there are veterinarians ready to help with low cost spay/neuter programs. You have helped us collect the data we will use to change official attitudes toward ferals from "a public nuisance and health hazard which must be destroyed" to "a consequence of careless pet owners, which must be managed in the short term and reduced by educating those owners in the long term." (Louise Holton and Becky Robinson, Directors, Alley Cat Allies, in *Alley Cat Action*, Summer 1992, p. 3)

GOALS

"Recommended population control [of feral cats] is the trap, sterilize and release method. Other strategies such as total eradication have been proven ineffective and inhumane. Sterilization is a critical component to humane population control. Spaying/neutering colonies of cats:

- Stabilizes the population at manageable levels
- Eliminates annoying behaviors associated with mating (fighting, yowling, and "spraying toms")
- Helps make the animals more tame and adoptable
- Is more effective and less costly than killing
- Is humane"

- (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #3: Feral Cat Population Control, Implementing a Humane Sterilization Plan*)

"Newcomers to the colony, cats that are loosing fear of humans, and kittens should be removed from the colony. A size "cap" should be determined for the colony. While the colony will decrease in size due to attrition, it may be possible that at some point the colony will become too small to effectively protect the territory from newcomers. At this point it may be necessary to maintain the colony at a particular size, through the addition of a newcomer, or young neutered male. While, the maximum size of the colony will be unique to the environment, under no circumstance should the colony be allowed to grow for any other reason." (TTVAR Statement of Policy and Practice, Humane Society of Sonoma County)

"Our goals are to provide food and care for local colonies of feral cats, to humanely trap these cats, take them to a participating veterinarian for a health check and have them spayed or neutered. Healthy adults or unadoptable kittens are released back to their homesites. By doing this, we will have healthier and nonreproducing colonies of feral cats." (Forgotten Felines, *CAT TRACKS*, Winter 1993, p. 1)

"Dedicated to Humanely Preventing Cat Overpopulation and Providing Shelter, Food and Love to Homeless Cats ... and *Connecting* Other People and Organizations Who Share Our *Caring for Cats*. (Statement of policy of Cat Caring Connection)

"In the last 12 months alone, hundreds of volunteers throughout Sonoma County gave over 47,000 hours of their time to make this phenomenal change happen! Our region is at a turning point in our mission to prevent cruelty, protect life, promote love and establish a truly humane society!" (Humane Society of Sonoma County, *North Bay Pets*, Oct./Nov. 1993)

"No responsible animal protection group supports the concept of feral cats. The Fund for Animals recognizes these feral cats are unnatural predators who do not fill a natural niche, and should be eliminated by attrition, facilitated by trap, sterilize and release programs." (Fund for Animals letter to California Department of Fish and Game, Dec. 9, 1992)

"If the feral cat population is not reproducing, it will presumably diminish; if it doesn't, we may be able to establish definitively the rates of pet cat abandonment and feral cat migration to fill vacant niches." (E. Clifton. 1992. "Until there are none, spay/neuter one", *The Animals' Agenda*, May 1992, p. 18)

MANAGEMENT

"As a first step in controlling the growth of feral colonies, habitat should be humanely modified to prevent habitation by cats. In the instance where a significant public health risk exists, (e.g., plague endemic area) and in areas of endangered species habitat, all feral colonies should be removed. ¶In areas where a population problem is inevitable, habitat can not be modified, and there does not exist a significant risk to the public health, or to an endangered species, it is suggested that colonies of inoculated and sterilized cats be allowed in order to assure a reduced risk of rabies, control the population, and stabilize the impact of non-native mammals in the immediate eco-system. Of course, no colonies should be allowed in unsafe areas." (TTVAR Statement of Policy and Practice, Humane Society of Sonoma County)

"Trapping. This is the most important work, and the most difficult to find volunteers to do. It's very hard work, requires patience, time and the ability to see cats distressed and reinforce in your mind the fact that it is for their best interest. It's stressful, and takes its toll, but it is the only answer to stop the suffering of so many unwanted kittens. ¶Feeding. You'll be assigned one day per week to feed a colony of cats at a location most convenient to you." (Excerpts from a Cat Caring Connection donation form, 1992)

"Make arrangements in advance to take the animal directly to a veterinarian after trapping...Bites, scratches and the difficulty of recatching an escaped cat are possible for those who think they'll be dealing with a 'pet'." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #2: Relocating Feral Cats*, by J. Zulkolski)

"Decide which cats are to be retained on site. Food, shelter and a minimum of 6 cats are necessary to maintain a cohesive group. If the number is too small a vacuum effect may be produced and other cats will join the colony." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #3: Feral Cat Population Control, Implementing a Humane Sterilization Plan*)

"The long term management of the colony should include arrangements for regular feeding and provision of built shelters as sleeping places with waterproof covers and lined with newspaper. Dust bedding with flea powder to prevent infestation. It may take several months to bring a large colony under control and achieve stable groups of contented and healthy cats. Any new cats attaching themselves permanently to the colony should be trapped and neutered; ill or injured cats should be re-trapped for treatment or euthanasia." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #3: Feral Cat Population Control, Implementing a Humane Sterilization Plan*)

"A care-giver and alternate care-giver must agree to take responsibility for the colonies. Ideally the landowner should take responsibility for their colony." (TTVAR Statement of Policy and Practice, Humane Society of Sonoma County)

"If someone is caring for a feral cat colony, they would, by definition of the [proposed] law, be considered the "owner" of the cats. They, therefore, would be required to spay/neuter all the cats for whom they provide care. It should be noted that responsible feral cat colony caretakers insure that all their cats are sterilized." (The Fund for Animals 1992 handout on the Feline Fix Bill, AB302)

"In order to discourage abandonment, information regarding locations of colonies should not be released to the public." (TTVAR Statement of Policy and Practice, Humane Society of Sonoma County)

FUNDING/HELP

"Of course, all these efforts require financial and other resources that we do not now have. ...we are...a part time, shoestring operation dealing with a crisis that grows larger every day. ¶There are myriad deserving animal causes, all needing support, yet of all these, feral cat management is one of the most neglected issues in the U.S." (Louise Holton and Becky Robinson, Directors, Alley Cat Allies, in *Alley Cat Action*, Summer 1992, p. 3)

"FFSC is always looking for volunteers to help feed feral cat colonies. Days as well as locations are varied. FFSC will provide food. Please drop us a card with your name and phone if you would like to volunteer some time. Who knows, you may have a happy FFSC colony near where you live or work - how about getting to know them! ¶Trapping in order to spay and neuter feral cats is the essence of our organization. This is what really makes the difference in the cat colonies. If you can help, please contact us ASAP! Whatever amount of time and energy will be greatly appreciated!" (Forgotten Felines of Sonoma County, *CAT TRACKS*, Winter 1993, p. 3)

"During 1992, Forgotten Felines fed countless colonies of feral cats. Without supplementary food from our donors they would have gone hungry. We don't want pets to skip meals - especially in this cold weather, but, as the economy worsens, the drain on our resources has increased. Our cupboard isn't bare, but we can't help as many colonies as we wish. Your donation of pet food can be put to good use. Donations may be dropped off at ... Santa Rosa. Thank you for caring." (Forgotten Felines, *CAT TRACKS*, Winter 1993, p. 4)

DISEASE

"Before beginning feral cat care, a person should be aware of the health concerns of the cats and the potential hazards to humans. While these hazards are few, precaution should be taken when handling feral cats. Wear padded gloves and long, thick sleeves, and get a pre-exposure rabies vaccination." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #1: Health Care for Feral Cats and Potential Health Hazards for Humans*, by S. Cliver, DVM)

"...even a single bite can transmit a deadly disease -- most often, Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) -- from one cat to another. FIV, for which no vaccine or cure currently exist, causes fatal failure of the immune system." (The Fund for Animals handout on the Feline Fix Bill - 1992)

"The three major viral diseases are Feline Leukemia (FELV) Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), and Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP). They appear to exist more in domestic cats than in feral cat populations. However, since they can be fatal to cats, it is logical that should one or more of these diseases enter a colony, mortality would be high and subsequently the life of the colony in danger of extinction. ¶It has been recommended that only the first few cats of a feral cat colony be tested for FELV/FIV and if found negative not to pursue further testing. However, if time and money allow, both FELV and FIV can be easily tested with a combined "in-house" test kit, thus assuring a negative status for every cat neutered and released. Such a reliable test for FIP is not available." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #1: Health Care for Feral Cats and Potential Health Hazards for Humans*, by S. Cliver, DVM)

"An approved three-year vaccine should be given to all feral cats intramuscularly. Even though cats less than one year old may not receive the full three-year protection of this vaccine, it still provides the greatest protection for both future human contact and for cat to cat contact." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #1: Health Care for Feral Cats and Potential Health Hazards for Humans*, by S. Cliver, DVM)

"Test the first 3 or 4 cats for feline leukemia. If negative, the plan may continue. If positive, the cats should be humanely euthanized and the test administered for the remaining cats. ... All female cats to be released must be identified, thus, a suggested method is to clip 1 centimeter off top of ear. ... All cats should be treated for worms and must be inoculated for rabies and distemper. A shot for long-term antibiotics is recommended." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #3: Feral Cat Population Control, Implementing a Humane Sterilization Plan*)

"Distemper (Feline Panleukopenia) can also cause high morbidity and mortality in a group of feral cats. For this reason, one vaccination of Feline Panleukopenia is recommended for all cats who are to be neutered. This may provide one year and possibly up to three years protection for this virus which is primarily fatal to kittens. The respiratory component of the vaccine will not provide protection unless it is repeated at a recommended three week interval." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #1: Health Care for Feral Cats and Potential Health Hazards for Humans*, by S. Cliver, DVM)

"None of the ... parasite control measures prevents the reinfestation of the feral cats upon release back to their colony. They do, however, allow the cat to be free of parasites during recovery from surgery. In addition, deworming individual cats should reduce the overall parasite population in the colony." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #1: Health Care for Feral Cats and Potential Health Hazards for Humans*, by S. Cliver, DVM)

RELOCATION

"FOSTER HOMES NEEDED - HELP FERALS FIND A BETTER LIFE. Alley Cat Allies is always in need of foster and permanent homes for feral kittens and cats. Barns and farms for possible relocation - permanent or temporary - are also often in demand..." (Alley Cat Allies, in *Alley Cat Action*, Summer 1992, p. 5)

"There are an estimated 26 million feral cats in the United States. Many live in areas with few threats to their lives and simply require population control. Others try to survive in areas not conducive to a safe and peaceful existence. Consequently, people who care about the welfare of these cats must explore other locations offering a better chance for healthy, happy lives." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #2: Relocating Feral Cats*, by J. Zulkolski)

"Adult [feral] cats should be considered as candidates for relocation to a more rural, outdoor environment where they are less prone to urban/suburban hazards." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #2: Relocating Feral Cats*, by J. Zulkolski)

"Find a suitable new home for the animals [feral cats] before trapping them. First, contact relatives and friends living in less populated areas. Placing animals with someone you know provides greater assurance that they will be well cared for. Next, ask for recommendations. Third, run an ad in a small city or county weekly that covers rural areas.... Many people want cats on their property for rodent control..." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #2: Relocating Feral Cats*, by J. Zulkolski)

"Where homing and returning to the original site is not possible, release on a different site such as a farm or riding stable is possible only if caretakers are willing to take responsibility for consistent food and shelter... While relocating may take several weeks or months, it is still considered a better alternative than euthanasia which should be considered as a last resort." (Alley Cat Allies, *Fact Sheet #3: Feral Cat Population Control, Implementing a Humane Sterilization Plan*)

"In no instance should cats be trapped and released to another location without the permission of both landowners. Relocation of non-socialized cats to other location is discouraged." (TTVAR Statement of Policy and Practice, Humane Society of Sonoma County)

"Feral Property: We need property where we can relocate neutered ferals with the understanding that we will provide food and vet care. Important: If you know of anyone who may be interested in letting us use their land, PLEASE let us know." (Excerpts from a Cat Caring Connection donation form, 1992)

WILDLIFE

"...the cats on the FAU [Florida Atlantic University] campus in Boca Raton have been saved. [The cats, blamed for the decline of burrowing owls on campus, were to be captured by the local animal shelter, which would have meant their certain death. The cats are feral and unadoptable... Although cats and owls have been coexisting for twenty years on the campus, it was they alone who were blamed for the dwindling owl population. More likely causes included lawn mowers and construction work...natural predation by racoons and foxes. One cat, observed with a single owl chick, set off hysteria about killer cats devouring every owl on campus. [We agree with the Cats magazine editorial that cats, owls, and all other living creatures should be allowed to survive in their own habitat." (Alley Cat Allies, in Alley Cat Action, Summer 1992, p. 4)

"Twelve people spoke on behalf of the cats protection, and, more importantly, gave facts to support the claims that it is not the cats that are the cause of the diminishing population of birds at the [San Francisco Golden Gate] park. If anyone was there to promote elimination of the cats for the sake of the birds, they did not speak. Following are some opinions:

"Mrs. [S] (... and several other wives of attorneys have been feeding the cats, birds, squirrels, etc. at the park for 25 years and neutering the cats as well as finding homes for them. She ... is an avid animal and nature lover.) The reason for the decrease of birds is due to 1) cutting the grass where birds feed 2) laying redwood chips which prohibits growth and 3) pesticides. She stated that the bees and flies are gone and even the worms are dying. Additionally the underbrush in some areas has been cut which further escalates the problem.

"Mrs. [S] (Friends of Ferals in Burlingame) told of a similar situation in Bakersfield ... In one year they organized a group to neuter over 200 cats who are now fed twice per day and live in harmony with the birds.

"Mr. [J] was pleased to report that of an original cat colony of 100, due to neutering, they are down to 2...The answer to the bird population is in the caring of the gardeners and their knowledge of what to do when and how to do it.

Mr. [B] ... has studied the research done in the U.K. which is where the problem is most efficiently and vigorously addressed. The facts show that feral cats get most of their caloric intake from insects which are relatively easy to catch and have the highest caloric value. Birds are only 15 calories each while it takes 100s of calories in energy to catch them. The cats without the intelligence to figure this out have not been sustained; therefore, bred out of existence."

-(excepted from *Special Good News Bulletin*, Cat Caring Connection, 1992)

"Sensibly managing the [San Francisco Golden Gate] park's feral cat colonies, with human feeders and a trap-neuter-release program, will further decrease the cats' reliance on wildlife for food. Removing all cats from the park is futile, because other cats will simply move in and begin their breeding cycles to fill the vacant ecological niche." (Alley Cat Allies, in *Alley Cat Action*, Summer 1992, p. 4)

"Discreet shelters should be provided for each colony. Diet should be arranged after consultation with a Veterinarian(s). Food should be removed before nightfall, in order to prevent attraction by wildlife. Water should be provided in areas lacking a natural and safe supply." (TTVAR Statement of Policy and Practice, Humane Society of Sonoma County)

"Having observed the activities of feral cats that I have worked with during the past eight years, I can testify to the fact that a well fed feral cat prefers lazing in the sun, waiting for me to deliver dinner than exerting energy in trying to capture food." (From article, "Golden Gate Feral Cat News")

"Like most of rural New England, our part of Connecticut is cat-friendly habitat, heavily wooded, with lots of space between developments, relatively few cat predators, and a human population more inclined to either feed or ignore the wandering feline than to torment or kill her. ... ¶Ferals who survive that first hard year, however, who find reliable food sources and adequate shelter, may enjoy almost normal feline lifespans. ... ¶Contrary to immediate, obvious, and near-universal assumption, however, the extremely high death rate among young feral cats does not necessarily mean that ferals suffer earlier deaths than cats with homes. ... ¶... if one can do just a single good deed for a homeless cat, spaying will help her even more than regular meals and a warm place to sleep. Ideally, she should receive all three. But when one can provide only one essential service, one must consider that feral felines can and do find their own food and shelter, many of them quite successfully." (E. Clifton. 1992. "Until there are none, spay/neuter one," *The Animals' Agenda*, May 1992, p. 16)

"We know already, as a general rule of ecology, that if good habitat is abruptly vacated, whether by cats, raccoons, coyotes, deer, or any other fairly common species, more of the missing species arrives in short order to reestablish the population. Transformation of niches and changes in resident species occur only if the habitat itself is modified, or if there aren't enough of an extirpated species left in surrounding territory to recolonize the vacant place. ¶But the habitat surrounding our feral cat colonies is not being abruptly vacated. Instead, we anticipate the number of feral cats declining rather gradually, over several years, enabling the population of rival species to proportionally expand. As cats eat fewer mice and small birds, more will be left to the owls, marsh hawks, skunks, foxes, and other native species whom the feral cats have somewhat displaced. The slow reduction in feral cat numbers could even help the survival of the few remaining bobcats hereabouts. ¶Alternatively, it's possible that we haven't fixed enough feral cats to have any effect on the overall population; that enough fertile ferals remain to breed up to the carrying capacity of the habitat this spring, regardless of our efforts." (E. Clifton. 1992. "Until there are none, spay/neuter one," *The Animals' Agenda*, May 1992, p. 18)

"Questions may remain about the ecological impact of neuter-and-release as well as the quality of life issue, but the evidence is clear that the benefit to individual cats is immense..." (E. Clifton. 1992. "Until there are none, spay/neuter one," *The Animals' Agenda*, May 1992, p. 19)