



Feral Cat Altering or Trap, Neuter, Release Programs: Why You Should Be Concerned

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Feral Cats: How did we get here ?

- Increasing human population, rural development, urbanization, brings more & more cats
- Reduced willingness to euthanize
- Ineffectiveness of adoption/euthanasia only
- Social changes toward animal rights
- Promotion of feral cat colonies
- Abandoning animals (cats) still tolerated
- Low social/legal status of cats



Characteristics of cats:

- Domestic species semi-dependent on human assistance and affection
- Early sexual maturity
- High reproductive rates
- Introduced and nonnative, predatory, invasive species
- Larger free-living populations in suburban and rural areas



Myths About Feral Cats:



- If well fed they won't kill (well fed cat killing yellow rumped warbler, above)
- They are territorial and exclude others
- They are just like native predators (have a niche)
- Their numbers will decline quickly under TNR

Feral Cat Reproductive Potential

6 year study Santa Clara Co.

- Females start cycling at 4-7 months
- Average 2.1 litters/yr with 4.25 kittens per litter
- 42% of kittens die by 2 months
- Survivors are prolific breeders and live about 3 years.
- Average female will have 5.25 litters of 22.3 kittens with 12.9 surviving at 2 month

AVMA policy on abandoned and feral cats

- Colony to be restricted to defined safe areas NOT managed for wildlife, with written permission
- Caregiver to register with animal control and identify individual colony members
- Records kept to ensure care, food, water, shelter, health monitor and census
- Health care program of vaccination, med./surg. care and parasite control

AVMA policy on abandoned and feral cats (cont.)

- Humane capture for ID, adoption of all socializable, health exam, sero. screen, neuter and/or return or euthanasia (with the goal of eventual elimination).
- Educational program for caregivers (including safety, health, environmental)
- Signage indicating abandonment is illegal
- Develop resource network for solution

AVMA policy (cont.)

- AVMA encourages and supports actions to eliminate abandoned and feral cats.
- Colonies O.K. only IF Local and State laws allow and until they can be reduced or eliminated.
- Feral cats not in managed colonies to be removed and treated the same as other abandon and stray animals (adoption, sanctuary placement, euthanasia or other).

The sad reality of many FCAP/TNR programs

- Not in compliance with AVMA guidelines
- No requirement that cats not go back to wildlife lands, that records are kept or care given
- No signage or formal education program
- Any feral and abandon cat (not just established colonies) and reabandonment of lost pets
- No follow-up to determine fate of colony or individuals, no adoption requirements
- No firm commitment to elimination

Is FCAP/TNR legal ?

- Does veterinary-client-patient relationship exist ?
- It is illegal to abandon animals CPC 597.1(a) or fail to provide shelter, water, food, protection from weather CPC 597 (b). Happens in colony ?
- Does this apply to “reabandonment” ? which is a basic premise (oral contract) of FCAP/TNR
- Most public lands are managed for wildlife
- Known impacts on sensitive species violate Federal (ESA, MBTA) and State (CESA) laws, and local statutes (misdemeanor and felony).

Are feral cats ecologically damaging ?

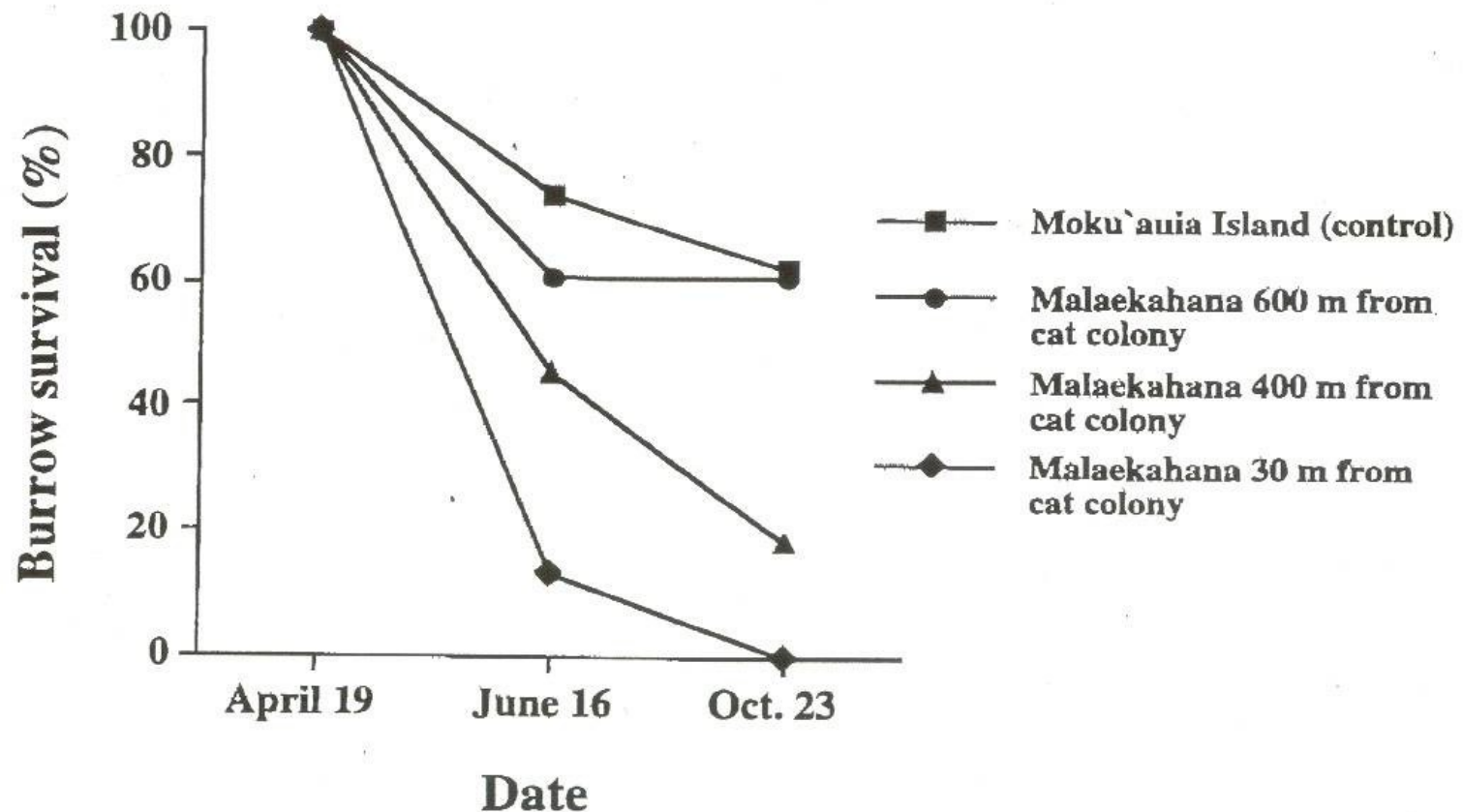
- Second only to habitat loss as a negative impact on many wildlife species
- Impacts most severe (extinction) in island habitats, endemic, ground dwelling, and threatened or endangered species
- Prey opportunistically on native birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians
- Subsidized predators can reach very high densities



Feral Cat Impacts on Wildlife as per Coleman, Temple and Craven

- Feral cats average at least 14 kills/yr some may kill as many as 1000
- Est. 39 million birds/yr (8-217), Wisconsin
- Subsidized, so prey density independent
- Outnumber all other mesopredators combined in Wisconsin, out compete
- Kill approximately 1 billion mammals, birds, herps, etc per year in USA

Effects of feral cat colonies on nesting success of Hawaiian birds



FCAP/TNR Disease and Health Issues

- Intraspecific aggression and transmission of disease to cats within colonies
- Disease, parasites, injury from native species
- Bites and injuries to owned animals and native species in the vicinity of colonies ?
- Adequate vaccination, rabies ?
- Fecal borne organisms in the environment eg. toxoplasmosis (impacts on sea otters and Hawaiian crows)



Cat poop builds up locally and may
drain into water courses



What is the fate of feral cats ?

- Go observe a feral cat colony for a few weeks or months and see (especially in winter)
- Clear evidence they live shorter lives and have more health problems than owned cats
- Depending on conditions may have mortality rates as high as 80% per year
- Common causes of death are predation (dogs and natives), vehicle trauma, malnutrition, weather, infection/disease



Many feral cats lead short, brutal lives



Can FCAP/TNR reduce or eliminate feral cats ?

- Population reduction is possible especially when: 1) initial colony size is small, 2) colony is closed (NO introductions), 3) effort is early, intense and prolonged, 4) high adult and kitten mortality rates are present (All these conditions seldom met)
- Commonly reduction is not sustainable
- Very little evidence FCAP/TNR can eliminate cat colonies once established

Is FCAP/TNR humane and professional ?

- Is it really effective ?
- Does it really reduce suffering ?
- Is it illegal and environmentally damaging?
- Why no compliance with AVMA policies in typical FCAP/TNR programs ?
- Would you tolerate a client with many cats and 40-80% mortality year after year ?

Does FCAP/TNR send the “wrong message” ?

- Is it “OK” to abandon a cat if others provide care ? (enabling abandonment)
- Whose land is it ? (disrespect for law)
- Will/can veterinarians and cat colony managers continue this forever ?
- Who takes responsibility (restoration costs, fines) for environmental impacts ?
- What about the rights of native species ?

Are FCAP/TNR programs politically a good idea ?

- Are they a windfall to State associations ?
Short term benefits vs. long term impacts
- The big question; “Are veterinarians paying themselves to aide and abet illegal activities that are environmentally damaging, inhumane, unsustainable, and ineffective in the long run ?”
- Public opinion can and does change

FCAP/TNR Programs: Common Ground

- Most responsible parties agree that feral cats need to be severely limited or eliminated
- It's not about loving or hating feral cats
- It's about whether FCAP/TNR programs are effective, sustainable, legal, humane, wise and/or environmentally damaging.
- It's also about whether there are other ways to limit feral feline populations

Bidwell Park, Chico Ca.: A Feral Cat and Wildlife Success Story

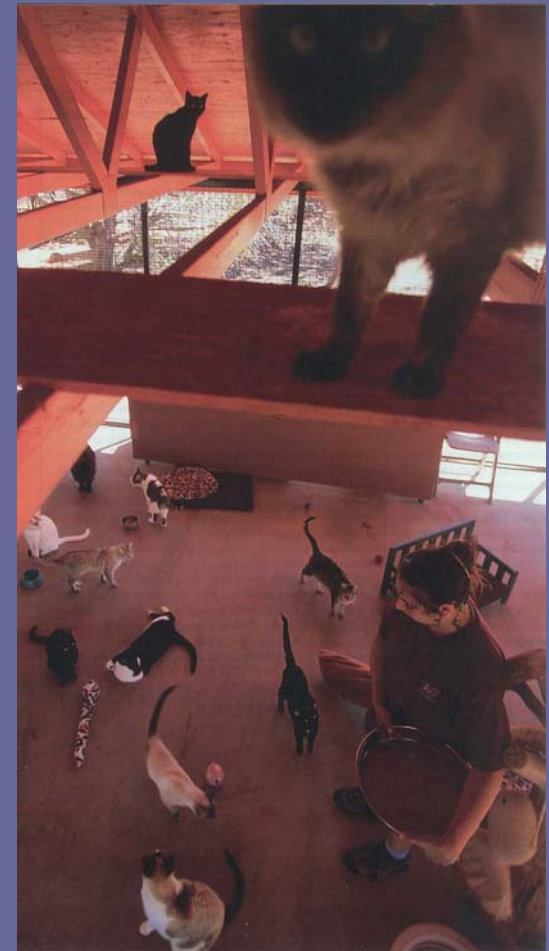
- Large historic riverine park with large California quail and diverse bird populations
- 1997, hundreds of feral cats, birds effected
- City enforces abandonment and litter laws
- Chico Cat Coalition formed, 440 cats trapped and removed, 340 placed, 50 moved to private barn (sanctuary)
- Today quail and other birds abound, no cats. TNR would have not achieved this !

Bidwell Park - A Real Success Story



Feral Cats and FCAP/TNR: What are the solutions ?

- Those who create a problem are responsible for its solution
- Much stronger public message on abandonment and enforcement
- Mandatory spay/neuter (Marin Co)
- Adoption (feral cats can be pets)
- Feral cat sanctuaries
- Don't stop FCAP/TNR where started until colony eliminated
- FCAP only as per AVMA policy



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