

Cat Care and Control



A practical guide to the management of companion, stray, and feral cats

WSPA

World Society for the Protection of Animals



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Cat Care and Control

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE MANAGEMENT OF
COMPANION, STRAY AND FERAL CATS**



World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is an international organisation working in 91 countries with a network of more than 400 member societies. WSPA has representation at United Nations (UN), Council of Europe (CoE) and works in co-operation with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA).



WSPA's Pet Respect seeks to improve the status and treatment of companion animals in society.

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WSPA

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Introduction

This publication is a companion volume to WSPA's Stray Dog Control guide, first published in 1993. It is intended to assist individuals, animal protection societies, municipalities and animal control professionals to understand and implement humane, effective methods of caring for cats and controlling their populations.

In many developed countries, the domestic cat population is now higher than the dog population. A cat is an ideal companion animal for a modern, small but busy household. It is elegant, clean and quiet, responsive to affection but not over-demanding. But it also needs care and attention, and if it is neglected or abused it may leave home and join the stray population. If a pregnant female leaves home to have her kittens, a new free-living or feral colony may be formed.

In six years, a pair of cats and their offspring can produce 420,000 cats.

In warmer countries, cats may spend most of their time outdoors and receive only a minimum of food and shelter from humans. If they are free-living, their rate of breeding will not be controlled by humans, and the kittens produced may be subject to starvation and disease, accidents, deliberate injury, and attacks by other animals.

It is free-living cats which cause most problems. But the remedies to those problems are in the hands of cat owners as well as animal protectors and local authorities.

WSPA's programme for cat care and control is part of WSPA's Pet Respect Programme.

Action is needed at three levels:

- 1 Cat owners should be encouraged to respect their animals, to care for them, and to take responsibility for their rate of reproduction.
- 2 Animal protectors should be encouraged to improve the welfare of stray cats by providing shelter and finding good homes for them, to organise sterilisation schemes, and to look with sympathy at the special problems of feral cats.
- 3 Ministries and Municipalities should be encouraged to promote education and legislation which gives better protection to cats and leads to owners becoming more responsible in their attitudes towards their cats.

This Guide provides the necessary information for this programme to be carried out.



Section 1

Cats As Companions

Cat ownership

The cat was one of the last of the animals to be domesticated. Some people would say that the domestication process is still not complete, and that is why cats can thrive with only a little help from humans. Nevertheless, cats are now established as popular companion animals, and in 2000 there were over 41 million in Europe.

What owners appreciate most about their cats is the companionship they give. Owners also gain health benefits, such as reduction in blood pressure: what could be more relaxing than stroking a contented, purring cat?

Thinking about and caring for another living being is an excellent exercise in empathy and understanding, particularly for young children. Older people also benefit, and cats can make a useful contribution in therapeutic programmes. (Waltham Book of Human-animal Interaction: Benefits and responsibilities of pet ownership. Ed. I. Robinson, 1995. Pergamon Press.)

In the United Kingdom, where there are more than 8 million cats, only about 8% are of a recognisable breed, and the majority are not purchased but are obtained from friends, or found as a stray, or, increasingly, are obtained from a rescue centre such as an animal protection society's shelter. The situation in other developed countries appears to be similar.



Cats which leave home

Domestic cats may explore and patrol quite large areas, particularly if they are not sterilised and looking for a mate, or if they are looking for a quiet place to give birth to kittens. They are less likely to return home if they do not associate it strongly with food and shelter, or if they have been badly treated by children or adults there.

If cats are not fed, or cannot get into their house, they will look for food and shelter somewhere else, and may become adopted by a kind-hearted neighbour.

Cats which are unwanted, or fall ill, or produce kittens, are sometimes rejected by their owners, and left to fend for themselves. Cats which are rejected in this way, or are left behind in the house

without food when the owners move out, are said to be abandoned. It is an offence in many countries to deliberately abandon a cat or dog.

If abandoned cats are not adopted by a new owner, they will join the population of un-owned cats and may cause a nuisance by stealing food, and continuing to produce unwanted kittens. Illnesses will be left untreated, and the animals may starve. It is often the sight of sick cats in the street which spurs people on to take action to protect cats.

A stray cat is a formerly-owned companion animal which has become lost, or has left its home, or has been abandoned. Sometimes, cats are abandoned unintentionally, if the owner dies or falls ill, and nobody comes forward to take responsibility for them.

Methods for dealing with stray cats are described in Section 2 – Managing Stray Cats.

Free-living cats

If the cat which has left home is not friendly, it may resist attempts to help it. If it has found some shelter and enough food, it may prefer a free-living life-style.

Cats in warm countries need little shelter and may be able to support themselves by hunting and by scavenging food from kitchens, waste bins and restaurant scraps. They may live in association with people without actually being owned by them.

The people who give them scraps may feel that the cats are not their responsibility, and will do nothing else for them. The cats will reproduce until the cat population exceeds the carrying capacity of the area. (Carrying, or holding capacity, is the maximum number of cats which can find adequate shelter and nourishment in that area.) Kittens born in this situation will tend to die of disease. So, in the absence of deliberate intervention by humans, cat populations will be limited by starvation, disease and accidents.



A method of population control is for kittens to be taken to a veterinary clinic or animal shelter, where they can be homed or euthanased.

In colder climates, free-living cats can rarely survive unless they are given food regularly by a cat-feeder. If a group of free-living cats is found to be thriving, there will almost certainly be a feeder coming regularly.

Cats are called feral if they behave as if they were wild. Some free-living cats are timid, difficult to approach and aggressive if handled. Kittens born into the free-living state are very shy of people unless handled when young, before weaning.

Cats which avoid human contact and live as ferals need careful handling and a different approach from friendly free-living cats. For methods of handling, see Section 3 – Dealing with Feral Cats.

Sterilisation

Homes may be found for some surplus cats, but control of reproduction through surgical sterilisation is the most effective way to overcome the problem of unwanted cats.

A sterilisation campaign should start with owned companion cats, because it is the well-fed, well cared-for cats which produce the most kittens. Once the cat-owning public and the veterinarians have accepted the necessity and value of sterilisation, it is easier to spread the idea to stray and free-living cats.



In addition to reducing the number of unwanted kittens, sterilisation has other benefits:

Females

Spayed (ovario-hysterectomised) females do not come into season and so do not call to attract male cats. They are no longer at risk of uterine or ovarian infections or tumours, and the risk of mammary tumours is greatly reduced.

Males

Neutered (castrated) males become more docile and affectionate; their urine loses its strong tomcat smell and they spray urine less; they roam less and are not so vulnerable to road accidents; they fight less and are therefore less likely to become infected with contagious diseases or develop abscesses through bite wounds. A cat can be sterilised at any age, and is best done when it is young. In Europe, it is usual for veterinarians to neuter cats just before or just as they reach sexual maturity. This is usually between 5-6 months of age.

Male cats castrated later in life will not lose all their habits, but the worst of the smell will be lost. Females spayed later in life will also retain most of their previous personality.

There is no scientific evidence to support the claim that female cats should have a litter before sterilisation. Indeed, if females have an oestrus season or litter before neutering, there is an increased risk of cancer of the mammary glands in later life.

Early Age Neutering

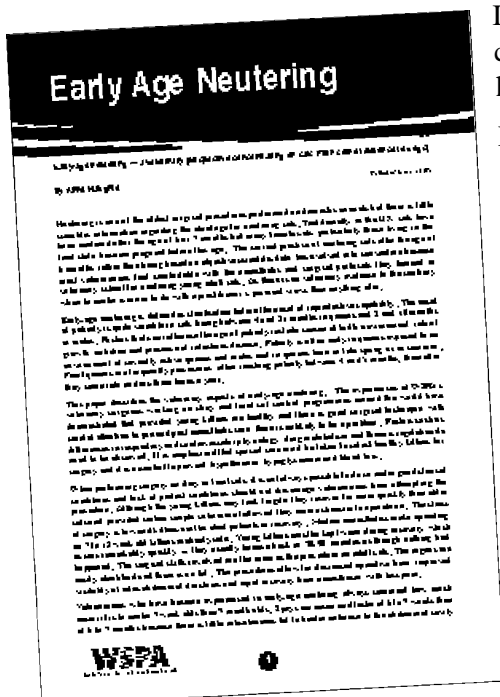
Early age neutering from eight weeks of age is now accepted as a positive action.

This has the advantage that kittens re-homed from animal shelters will already be neutered. The surgical techniques for sterilising 6 – 14 week-old kittens has been described by Aronsohn and Fragella in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc 1993, vol 202, pp 53-55 and by Theron, JAVMA 1993, vol 202, pp 914-917.

However, veterinarians have different views as to the optimum age that neutering operations should be performed. These are summarised in the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA) Policy Document on Neutering (November 1998) – see Appendix 1.



Stray neutered kittens: the tip of the left ear has been cut off to indicate that they have been neutered.



It is agreed that in situations where the overriding consideration is population control, early age neutering has obvious benefits.

For more information about the veterinary procedure and special considerations for the care of young cats being neutered, see the WSPA brochure “Early Age Neutering – a veterinary perspective.”

WSPA have a video training package for veterinary students, demonstrating in detail the surgical procedures involved in neutering cats and dogs. This includes demonstrations of early age neutering.

The questions people ask

The operation to sterilise female cats is known as spaying. In male cats, two procedures are available, vasectomy, which is rarely used, and castration. Here we refer to these operations generally as neutering.

Some people do not like the idea of neutering animals. These are the sort of questions they ask.

Is neutering unnatural?

The man-made environment in which domestic cats live is not natural. Their owners protect them from predators, disease and starvation, so extra kittens are no longer necessary for the survival of the species.

Animals have a strong urge to reproduce. Female cats in oestrus, and male cats who can smell a female in oestrus, become very frustrated if they are not permitted to find a mate. This frustration can be prevented by sterilisation.

Is neutering dangerous?

Anaesthetics have been perfected to such a degree that there is now very little risk involved in anaesthetising animals for surgery.

The surgical procedure in the male is very simple and complications are rare. The surgical procedure in the female is more invasive, and surgical skills are required to ensure rapid and pain-free recovery.

Will it make the cat change its behaviour or grow fat?

Neutered cats usually become calmer and more affectionate. Diet and exercise are the determining factors of body weight, so if the cat becomes less active after the operation, it should be given less to eat.

Can female cats be put on the pill?

Female cats can be prevented from coming into oestrus by the administration of progestational steroids, by injection or in pills. This is useful in the short term, but is not recommended for long term treatment, because it can lead to undesirable side-effects such as mammary tumours. It is difficult to administer medication in food supplies for feral cats and to ensure that the relevant individuals are reached.

At what age should the operation take place?

Always consult your vet.

Making neutering affordable

The cost of castrating a male cat is relatively low and can be afforded by the majority of owners. Spaying a female cat is more expensive because it takes longer. Owners may find it difficult to pay the veterinary fees.

However, the apparent different financial priorities of Animal Protection Societies and local veterinarians has sometimes made the introduction of such programmes difficult. The benefits should therefore be promoted.

Ways must be found to promote neutering, to provide incentives, and to encourage veterinarians to find ways of reducing their costs without compromising the welfare of the cats.

Some animal protection societies and municipalities run neutering assistance schemes. These can be operated in a number of ways. These are schemes which have been used successfully:

1 Vouchers

The organisation issues vouchers to owners such as the unemployed or pensioners who need assistance with neutering costs. The owner of the cat takes the voucher to one of the scheme's participating veterinarians. The veterinarian neuters the cat, and sends the voucher back to the issuing society or municipality in order to receive payment.

Sometimes vouchers only cover part of the cost of the operation, and the owner is expected to make a contribution towards the cost.

Societies and municipalities running such neutering support schemes have noticed that the number of stray animals in the area falls as the number of kittens produced by owned cats falls. The method is therefore more cost effective and humane than just catching and killing stray and unwanted cats.

Voucher schemes have the distinct advantage that they avoid financial outlay of funding purpose built spay centres, and have the added benefit that it involves the local veterinarians. Such schemes are more likely to result in long term success.

2 Spay/neuter clinics

Spay/neuter clinics can be special times set aside in the usual veterinary clinic, or other facilities specifically set up as neutering clinics. These can offer lower prices because of high throughput. They are very popular in the United States of America, and have significantly lowered the cost of sterilisation.

They are usually run commercially, but could be organised in co-operation with an animal protection society or a municipality. For example, in the USA, there are public spay/neuter clinics which communities have opened as part of their animal control programme. Although these clinics are opened with municipal funds (sometimes with private support), they become self-supporting if enough people bring their cats for neutering.

Veterinary clinics co-operating in such schemes find that it is good public relations, and brings prospective new clients into contact with them.

The introduction of spay clinics must be considered with care as there is a risk of alienating local veterinarians – so try to involve them.

3 Visiting Veterinarians

Teams of veterinarians, with skills in the surgical techniques of neutering, will sometimes offer a few weeks of their time to visit other countries in which the idea or practice of neutering is not yet widespread. Such people can be a great help to a local cat society, if the programme is well prepared. The most successful programmes aim to sterilise cats at hotels in holiday resorts, where cats are seen as pests by hoteliers. However, many hotel guests have sympathy for these cats, so a well-run neutering programme can please everybody.

Ideally if visiting teams of veterinarians are utilised, they should be used in a partially teaching role to educate local veterinarians in neutering techniques. It should be emphasised that non-national veterinarians may require permission from the national veterinary chamber or competent authority to practice in a particular country.

To be successful, the programme must incorporate a long-term plan, to carry on the sterilisation operations after the departure of the visitors. This is because cats can breed very fast; a population of cats apparently stabilised after a one-month programme can soon begin to rise again when a few unsprayed females move into the area. The long-term plan may include regular visits by the veterinary team, but should ideally involve local veterinarians who will be prepared to carry on the work.

Preparation for the programme should cover these points:

- The people owning or responsible for the cats to be neutered must understand the purpose of the programme, and be in agreement with its aims. This will probably be an educational and promotional campaign by the organisers.
- Local veterinarians must be invited to co-operate, and encouraged to become closely involved with the programme. The National Veterinary Association should also be informed and invited to give their support.
- The visiting veterinarians should try to understand local conditions and traditions and should adapt their methods if necessary. Their most important task is to motivate the local veterinarians, and to pass on knowledge and skills so that the programme can be continued after the visit.



Section 2

Managing Stray Cats

The options

A cat which is sociable and suitable for re-homing may be adopted by a friend or neighbour before it is seen by an animal protection society or the municipal authorities.

A stray cat may be brought to the attention of the authorities because it is hungry, injured or ill, or because it looks lost and is not known in the vicinity.

The usual steps taken by animal protection societies are:

- attempt to re-unite the cat with its owner.
This is easier if the cat is wearing some form of identification.
(see Section 4 for methods of identification);
- place the cat with a foster carer in a private house or in a cat shelter;
- make the cat available to a new owner for adoption;
- in special cases, place the cat in a permanent shelter.

People who have lost a cat or are offering to adopt one should be given advice and offered educational materials such as information leaflets on animal care and the responsibilities of animal ownership. For ideas on these, see Section 4 – Legislation and Education.

Minimum retention periods

Cats put into the care of an Animal Protection Society must be kept for a minimum period before taking any final action (such as re-homing or euthanasia) to ensure that the original owners are given sufficient opportunity to find and reclaim their animals.

This minimum retention period is sometimes laid down in legislation. If there is no legal minimum period, it will need to be determined by the organisation responsible for sheltering or fostering.

In many countries, the government (usually the local authority) is responsible for the animals during this minimum retention period, and they may decide to pay an animal protection society to board the animals on their behalf during this period. After the period has expired, the animal protection society may be requested to take over responsibility for the animal and the costs of caring for it until it is adopted.





Fostering

Cat fosterers are people willing to care for cats on a temporary basis while a search is made for their owners, or a new permanent home is selected. An animal society may need to reimburse the costs of animal food and veterinary care to the foster carer.

Fostering is a good option for societies who want to give direct practical assistance to stray cats but do not have the capital or expertise to build a shelter. If it is well-organised and managed, it can be a more effective method of re-homing stray cats than sheltering, because the animals remain in a home environment and do not become institutionalised.

The main elements of a successful fostering scheme are:

- **Central Control and Organisation**

There must be a contact point for potential fosterers and adopters, and for the police and other authorities finding stray animals, so that the work can be co-ordinated.

- **Control of Fosterers**

Potential foster homes should be assessed for suitability, and an assessment made of the number of animals which can reasonably be cared for there.

The upper limit will usually be three or four. It will depend partly on the number of rooms available, because new cats, and those showing signs of disease, will have to be put in a room separate from the others. Only those cats which have completed their treatments for parasites and diseases can be mixed in the same room.

Unsterilised male cats must not be put in the same room as females. Arrangements could be made for sterilisation while the cat is with the foster carer.

Cats must not be allowed outside unless they are sterilised.

Cats will remain the property of the Society while they are with the foster carers. Contracts drawn up between the society and the foster carer should make this clear.

- **Good Record Keeping**

Each animal coming into the care of the Society should have its own record card with a photograph. If its past history can be ascertained, this should be included. The card should also carry details of the foster carer, the observations made by the foster carer, and the treatments given by the veterinarian.

- **Veterinary Input into Programme**

Ideally, the charity / organisation should seek veterinary advice on protocols for the selection of cats for fostering. Cats should not be passed to a foster home prior to a veterinary clinical examination.

Prophylactic measures such as vaccination, worming and ectoparasite control may also be given at this stage.



<h2 style="margin: 0;">Name of Society</h2> <h1 style="margin: 0;">Cat/Kitten Adoption Form</h1>
Date _____
Name of Cat(s) _____
Sex _____
Colour _____
Age _____
<p>I/We agree to keep the cat(s)/kitten(s), but if for any reason this is not possible, I/we will return it/them to the Society.</p>
<p>I/we will not dispose of the cat(s)/kitten(s) without written permission from a committee member. I/we agree to allow any authorised representative(s) of the Society to see the cat(s) at any reasonable time by appointment.</p>
<p>I/we agree to have the cat(s)/kitten(s) vaccinated against feline panleucopenia not later than _____ and spayed/neutered by _____ unless otherwise recommended by the veterinarian.</p>
My Veterinarian is/will be:
Name _____
Address _____
Telephone Number _____
My Name _____
Address _____
Telephone Number _____
<p>The representative of the Society who came to see you on _____ was _____ and can be contacted on _____</p>
Other members of the Homing Committee:
<p>We never charge for an animal but a donation would be gratefully received</p>

Adoption

Once a cat has been declared healthy and it is known that the previous owner does not want it back, the cat can be offered to a new home for permanent adoption. All cats offered for adoption must be neutered first.

Potential new owners should be encouraged to apply to the Society. Re-homing should be promoted and publicised, to ensure a wide interest in homing stray cats. For example, photographs of cats needing new homes could be published in local newspapers.

Potential adopters should be carefully screened to ensure that they are aware of the long-term responsibilities of caring for animals. Suitable people are those with enough space in their home to accommodate the cat(s) and the time and willingness to care for its needs. If possible, arrange to visit the new home. The assessor needs to ensure that the animal is wanted for the right reasons and that the potential adopter is not acting on impulse.

A way must be found to allow the potential adopter to select a cat which appeals to him or her. If the cats awaiting adoption are in a shelter, this is easy. If the cats are with foster carers, it may be necessary to start by showing the adopter photographs of the cats which are available. Meetings can then be arranged.

Alternatively, a special central location can be used for approved potential adopters to view the animals which are available for adoption. A central hall or, in the summer, a park could be used for this purpose on a set day of the week.

It is wise not to re-home a cat near the place where it was found, because if the cat recognises the surroundings it may try to return to its original home.

An agreement should be signed by the adopter which will enable the Society to take the animal back if it is not cared for properly. At least one follow-up visit should be made to the animal in its new home following adoption.

Shelters

A shelter, where animals can be taken if they are in need of rescue or treatment, is obviously a great asset to an animal protection society, if the society can afford to build one and employ staff to run it. An organisation needs to consider carefully whether it can raise the necessary funds, and exactly what the functions of the shelter would be.



Several different words are used for animal shelters. The following is offered as a guide.

Animal Refuge: a place where an animal can be taken if it is a victim of cruelty, abuse or abandonment. Such a place may be needed as part of the process of enforcing animal protection legislation.

Animal Treatment Centre: a place where an animal can be taken for veterinary treatment, first aid or nursing care, particularly if the owner cannot be traced, or is unable to pay veterinary fees. An alternative is to subsidise the treatments given to animals at a commercially-run clinic and to use the shelter for first aid and nursing care.

Animal Home: a place where an animal in need of care or rehabilitation can go for a short period of time, until it is fit enough to go somewhere else. A foster home could fit into this category.

Animal Sanctuary: a place offering long-term accommodation. Some societies raise money to pay for the high expense of long-term or even permanent accommodation for the animals they have rescued. Such animal sanctuaries need to take strict measures to limit numbers and to control disease, if they are to avoid the risk of becoming over-crowded and unhygienic, with an increasing proportion of old and chronically sick animals.

Re-homing Centre: a place specialising in finding new permanent homes for homeless animals.

Most animal shelters fulfil several of these functions.

WSPA recommends that cat shelters should be seen primarily as re-homing centres, with the cats staying there for limited periods, not as permanent residents.

Sometimes it is not possible to find new homes for all the cats which are brought to a shelter. In that situation, decisions must be made by the Society on the priority of their work. If money cannot be spared to provide high quality long-term care, then euthanasia must be considered for those cats least likely to be offered new homes through adoption. For advice on euthanasia, see Section 3, Euthanasia, page 22.

Shelter design

The basic requirements for cat accommodation are pens, cages or other enclosures which offer comfort and security to the cat, protection from the weather, adequate ventilation and temperature control, and are easy to keep clean.

Cats should be kept separately from dogs; weaned young separate from adults; unsterilised males separate from females. Cats not yet vaccinated or needing veterinary treatment should be kept in individual pens. Cats which have not yet gone through their minimum retention periods should be separate from cats available for adoption. Cats should be kept with their kittens until they are

weaned.

Cats may be moved from one set of accommodation to another as they progress through the shelter system.

Individual Housing has these advantages:

- Better disease control
- No fighting or bullying
- Easier identification of animal

Individual cages should be at least 16 square feet (1.5 square metres) in area, and furnished with a sleeping box lined with a blanket or newspaper, and a dirt tray containing sawdust, sand or other absorbent material, in which the cat can urinate and defecate.

As soon as possible, the cat should be moved to a pen which offers more space for exercise. The design favoured by many animal protection societies has an indoor sleeping area which is connected by a flap to an outside exercise area with a scratching post and an observation platform. The floor of the outside run is finished with a smooth waterproof cement, sloping to an outside drain.

To ensure that the cats cannot escape, outdoor areas of the pens should open into an enclosed safety run. Internal doors in the building should be self-closing.

Group Housing has these advantages:

- provides more space for exercise
- provides opportunity for play and socialising
- gives the public an opportunity to watch the cats play together

The available area can be put to greater use by providing shelves, climbing frames and observation platforms. Each cat must have its own sleeping box where it can rest privately. Cats in large groups do not thrive so well as those in small ones. Four or five may be an optimum, and even then, individuals may not socialise well and should be moved to individual pens.

Cats put into group housing must be neutered and have been declared fit by the veterinarian.

Accepting Cats into the Shelter

The Society must agree on the procedures for accepting animals, so that the information required for the records is obtained routinely by the staff and entered into the agreed forms and identity cards. WSPA can provide models of Record Forms.

The procedure should include an examination of the animal, with a check list provided by the shelter's veterinarian. Vaccination, parasite control, blood-testing and isolation should be carried out according to the policies laid down by the Society.



Animal Care Routines

It is necessary to establish daily animal care and feeding routines to ensure that all tasks at the shelter are carried out efficiently and regularly. These routines should be planned to ensure that the cat pens are clean and the animals settled before visitors are allowed to see them. Tasks likely to cause distress to visitors, such as veterinary procedures and euthanasia, should be done outside visiting hours as far as possible.

Further information on cattery design and management is available from WSPA and member societies.

Suppliers of Equipment

Animal Care & Equipment Services Inc.

PO Box 3275–340 Highway 138, Crestline,
California 92325, USA

Tel. +1 (909) 338 1791 Fax. +1 (909) 338 2799

e-mail. aces@gte.net web. <http://www.animal-care.com>

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Section 3

Managing Feral Cats

Problems caused by feral cats

Small numbers of free-living cats may be tolerated or even welcomed as rodent catchers. In areas such as parks, hospitals and hotel grounds, they may also be valued for the interest and companionship they provide. However, the situation can deteriorate if populations are allowed to increase uncontrolled.



The type of problems encountered include:

- large numbers of cats in some areas
- diseased and dying cats and kittens
- noise of cats fighting and wailing
- smell of male cat spray
- digging and defecating in gardens
- disturbance of rubbish bins
- killing of wildlife
- risk of injury to owned cats and humans
- flea infestations

Feral cat populations will tend to increase wherever there is a food supply and shelter unless steps are taken to control the cats and the environment. The population density of cats in urban areas depends largely on the amount of waste food which is thrown out by humans and is accessible to cats. In rural areas, feral cats which are dependent on hunting rodents and birds have much lower population densities.

If a group of feral cats is thriving and healthy, there is almost certainly one or more people feeding them regularly. If it is known that the owner of the land or premises, or the local authority, disapproves of the presence of the cats, the feeders may become secretive in the ways they feed the cats, and the only evidence of their activity may be the presence of food dishes. If the intention is to control a feral cat colony humanely, the co-operation of the feeders is a valuable asset.

Options for control

1 Spay / Neuter and Return to Site

It is now recognised by many animal protection societies and public organisations that a humane way of dealing with groups of feral cats is to trap, spay / neuter, ear-tip to indicate as neutered, return and release to a familiar site where they should be cared for.

This method of controlling feral cat populations was first developed in the 1970s in Denmark and the United Kingdom, and its value has been recognised in many countries. (For a review, see Feral cats in the United Kingdom, by Jenny Remfry, in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, pages 520-523, volume 208, number 4, 1996.)

When dealing with a large group of cats, it is important to work fast, in order to prevent the remaining fertile females producing kittens more rapidly than the other cats are being neutered.

Neutering eliminates many of the problems of fighting, calling and urine-spraying. In due course, most of the cats will die of old age. No kittens will be born. The cats become more friendly towards their feeders and therefore more rewarding to care for.

Marking of the cats, so that they can be seen to be sterilised, makes them more likely to be accepted by people and authorities. The internationally recognised mark is the removal of the tip of the left ear.



2 Re-homing

Most feral cats are too wild to become home-loving domestic pets. However, some become attached to their feeders and can be taken home. There are a few people who have a special affinity with feral cats and take a particular pleasure in taming them, but it can take many months for a feral cat to become relaxed and content indoors.

Kittens born into a feral colony can often be tamed successfully and become delightful companions. They must be captured and handled when young, preferably when 6 to 8 weeks old, and certainly not later than 12 weeks old.

If there are no new homes available for kittens, an alternative strategy is to trap them at 12 weeks of age, have them neutered and put them back on their site. In many cases it will be preferable to trap the pregnant female early and to abort the kittens.

Animal shelters which aim to find new homes for their cats as quickly as possible are unwilling to accept feral cats. This view should be respected.

3 Re-location

In some cases, feral cats can be neutered and placed into outdoor homes such as farmyards or riding stables, where they can continue to live a virtually free existence.

However, if there are already cats on the new site, they will usually not welcome the newcomers, and will probably fight. This will increase the risk of disease transmission through bite and scratch wounds.

Kittens separated from their mothers are likely to die of starvation and disease unless carefully monitored.

Cats taken to a new site should be confined for a few days in holding pens until they are familiar with the smells and sounds of the area, and with the feeding routine.

4 Shelters

Feral cats do not usually adapt well to life in confined spaces, and the accommodation provided by normal animal shelters is not suitable for them.

A society which wishes to provide a shelter where feral cats can go for the rest of their lives needs to consider the costs of buildings, maintenance and labour.

In addition to the accommodation and staffing levels considered already (see the section on Shelters, page 16), special accommodation will be needed for the first few weeks, and the costs of food and veterinary care over a long period will need to be calculated.

When the cat is brought to the shelter, it should be placed in a pen on its own, or with a cat from the same colony, for two weeks' observation. The pen should provide protection from the weather, a dry sleeping-place, an exercise area, and a hiding place where the cat will feel safe from curious onlookers. The pen should be in an enclosure with a double door system to prevent escapes. Catching equipment such as traps, nets and grabbers should be there ready for emergencies.

The sleeping place should be left undisturbed for several days after the cat's arrival, and cleaning and feeding routines adapted to respect the cat's privacy.

Preferably the cat should be neutered before coming to the holding facility. At the start of its stay, the cat should be given a veterinary clinical examination to assess its health status. Further blood and screening tests may be performed according to agreed protocol. Worm and flea treatment can be continued during the observation period.

Once the cat is considered healthy, prophylactic measures such as vaccination, worming, ectoparasite control and neutering can be performed.

If the cat is ultimately to be added to an existing group in a larger pen, selection of the group type may be dependent on the results of blood testing (eg a group of FeLV positive cats). The pen must be secure, with a double door entry system to prevent escapes.

5 Controlling the Environment

The rate of reproduction of the cats on an uncontrolled site will depend on the holding or carrying capacity of the area. This can be reduced by removing food and shelter. However, this is a long-term process, beginning with a survey of available food sources and sheltering places. In a few cases it may be enough to clean the street or put lids on waste bins; in others it will need changes in waste storage and disposal procedures. Buildings may need to be repaired to prevent access by cats.

Steps to make the area less hospitable to cats should be introduced gradually to prevent starvation and exposure of the feral cats, in parallel with other control measures such as selective euthanasia and neutering.



Feral cats cannot be handled safely, and special handling equipment should always be used if possible. The preferred equipment is a restraint cage, that is, a cage with a squeeze-back which can be used to physically immobilise the cat so that intra-peritoneal injections can be given from the outside.

Alternatively, the cat may be first immobilised by the intra-muscular injection of a non-curariform drug such as ketamine, to make the animal safe to handle, then injected with a barbiturate by the intra-peritoneal, intra-renal, intravenous or intra-cardiac route.

Thiopentone (eg Intraval) can be given as an alternative to pentobarbitone sodium. Thiopentone is a short-acting anaesthetic and is more expensive, but may be more easily available. In the conscious animal, thiopentone should be given only by the intravenous or intra-peritoneal route because it is an irritant. Care must be taken using thiopentone because animals can recover consciousness after an apparently lethal dose.

Disposal of Carcasses

Animals must not be regarded as dead until rigor mortis has set in. Care should be taken in the disposal of carcasses killed by injection of chemical substances to make sure they are not eaten by scavenging animals.

In some countries there are specific legal requirements as to the method of disposal of animal carcasses.

If pest control companies are employed to trap and kill cats, care must be taken to select reputable companies. It is not unknown for cats to be trapped then dumped a few miles away, thus transferring the problem to another authority. The price quoted by the company should include veterinary fees, and evidence that the cats were taken to the veterinary clinic for euthanasia should be seen before the company receives payment.

An information sheet *Humane Euthanasia for Dogs and Cats* is available from WSPA.

Neuter and Release Schemes

A wide body of experience has now been built up in the practical aspects of trapping, handling and caring for feral cats. For details, see:

Cat Care and Control, WSPA video that accompanies this manual.

Neuter and release schemes are usually carried out by cat protection societies which specialise in dealing with feral cats and whose members develop expertise in trapping. The larger animal protection societies may also have individuals who take an interest in feral cats and become trappers.

Neuter and release programmes for large groups of feral cats need to be well-organised, well-funded and well-monitored.

Other videos and fact sheets from WSPA member societies are also available.



For individual cats or small groups, the method is straightforward and may be carried out by the cats' feeders, so long as they are prepared to be trained and advised by an experienced person.

The steps are:

- Obtain suitable equipment
- Trapping the Cat
- Transporting the Cat
- Veterinary Procedures
- Ear-tipping
- Long-term Management

Handling and trapping

Catching cats by hand, even when wearing gloves, is not recommended. The scratch and bite wounds inflicted by frightened feral cats can be severe.

Cats are most easily captured by live-trapping. Special cage traps are available into which it is possible to lure cats, without causing them any harm. They can then be transferred into carrying cages or restraint cages.

Loop-poles are not recommended for catching feral or stray cats in open spaces, and they must be used with care in an enclosed space, otherwise the cat will be strangled.

A net could be used for scooping up a cat already in an enclosed space. The net should have a sturdy frame, with a net that is twice the diameter of the hoop end.

The mesh must be small enough to prevent the legs pushing through the holes. The problem with nets is that they can cause panic if the animal becomes entangled.

In a smaller enclosed space, a cat grabber is useful. The method is to approach the cat calmly from behind, and place the jaws of the grabber firmly but gently around its neck. The cat should then be placed immediately, and gently, into a squeeze cage or carrying cage. If the cat resists capture at first, it is worth persevering, because cats tire easily, and if they are kept on the move for a few minutes they will usually give in.

Other useful equipment is a blanket or large towel, for throwing over a cat which is not likely to fight, or is already tired. It is also useful for covering the trap or carrying cage, to give the cat a sense of security.

In situations where it is necessary to handle a cat, the operators should wear gloves. They should be made of leather thick enough to prevent the cat's teeth penetrating the skin of the operator.

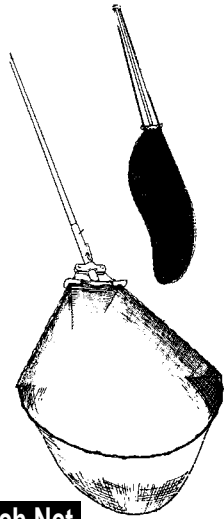
Tranquillisers are not recommended. When given by mouth they are slow to act, and cats often try to hide in inaccessible places before they can be caught.

The basic equipment a trapper needs is

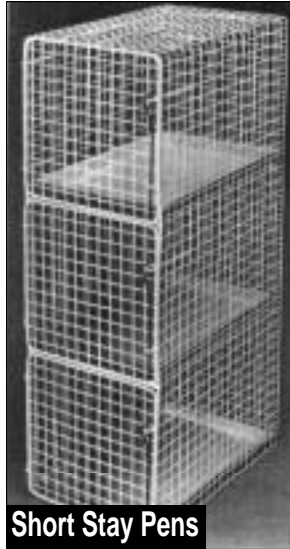
- a manual trap
- an automatic trap
- restraint (squeeze) cages with transfer door
- hospitalisation cages.

Manual Traps

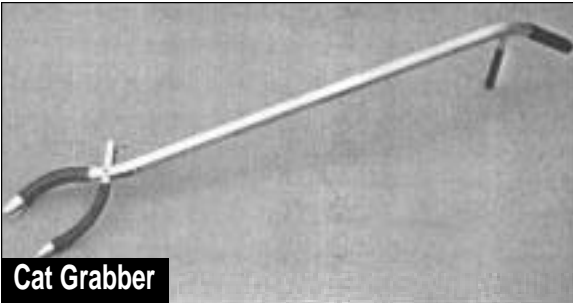
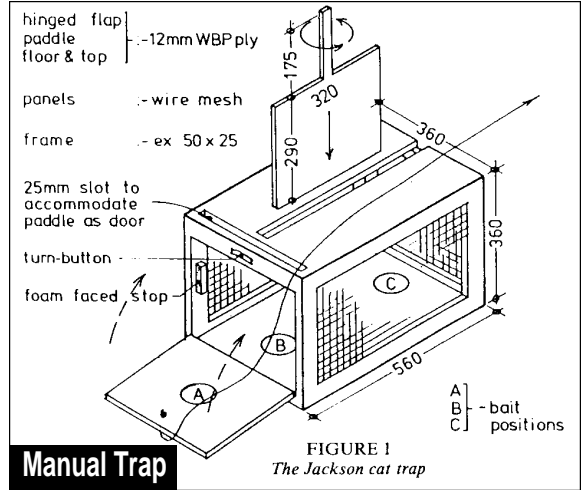
Manual traps are usually constructed of wood and wire mesh, and so may be made locally. The length of it should be greater than the length of a cat from nose to the tip of the tail. The floor may be either solid wood (which is preferred by cats) or wire mesh (which makes the trap lighter to carry). The door must open fully to allow the cat to enter, and be closed easily so that it shuts firmly. The mechanism for closing the door will be a long cord or string which must be pulled firmly by the trapper.



Catch Net



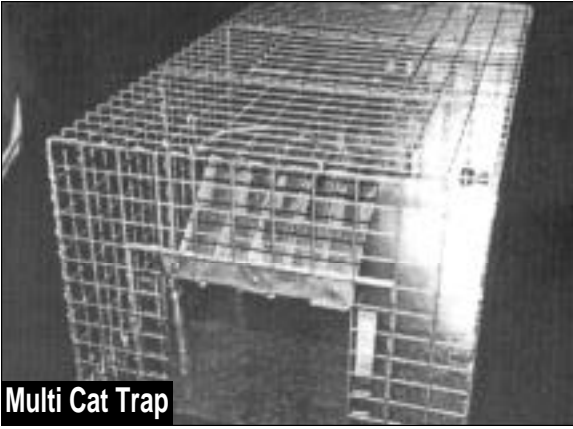
Short Stay Pens



Cat Grabber



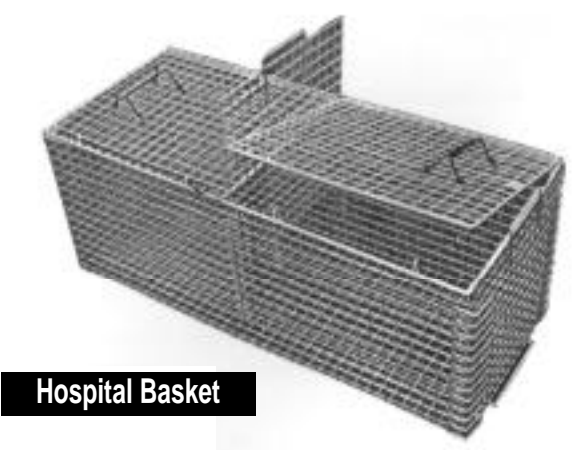
Automatic Trap



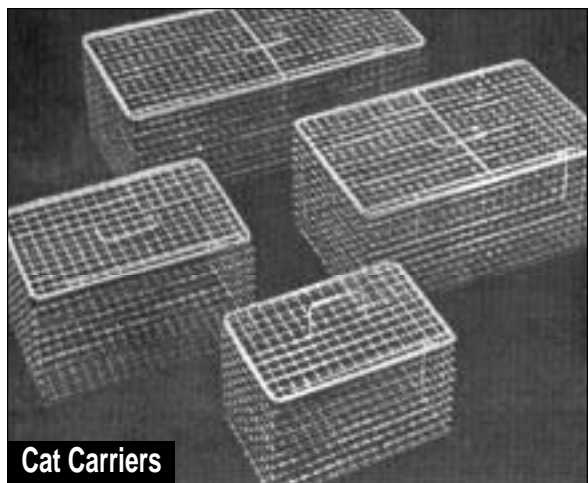
Multi Cat Trap



Cat Trap



Hospital Basket



Cat Carriers



Using a Manual Trap

Manual traps are recommended for cats which can be approached at feeding time. They are also useful in situations where selectivity is required – that is, a particular cat needs to be captured – so that any other cat walking into the trap can be allowed to walk out again. The trapper should be familiar with the feel and the action of the trap before going to trap the cat.



The trapper should find out from the site owner or the feeder where the cat is fed and at what time. The feeder should be asked not to feed the cat on the day of trapping to ensure that the cat will be hungry. The feeder should be encouraged to be present at the trapping, so that she may see that no harm is being done to the cat, and to give it confidence.

The trap should be baited and placed near the usual feeding place. The trapper can stand some distance away, perhaps partly hidden behind a door or tree. A second person could observe the cat and give the instruction to the trapper, but that person needs to be experienced. The feeder can be useful in calling the cat and making the noises which the cat associates with feeding-time. A little food may be put outside the trap to interest the cat; most of it must be in the trap.

The feeder will know what sort of food is most likely to entice the cat. It may be something strong-smelling like pilchards in tomato sauce, but the most familiar food is often best. Cats will usually enter traps without fear, unless they have been trapped before.



If there is more than one cat to be caught, the trapper may decide to wait for the most important one, eg a pregnant female, to enter before closing the door. Other cats which enter, eat and then leave again will usually enter a second time and can be caught later. Some cats become wary at the sight of another cat being trapped, but if the procedure is carried out calmly and quietly, it is amazing how little concern they show at the discomfort of other cats.

Sometimes two cats, or a female with her kittens, will enter the trap at the same time. In this case it is best to close the door and then transfer all of them to restraint cages. Any cat which is already neutered can be released.

It is important that the door of the trap should not be closed until the cat or cats have fully entered the trap and are eating at the far end, so that they are well clear of the door. It is vital that the door is closed with a swift, sure action. Feral cats are amazingly agile and will seize any opportunity to escape which is created by the trapper's indecision. A cat which has succeeded in escaping will not be easy to trap a second time. The trapper must concentrate hard, watch intently and only move when he or she is confident of capture.

The trapped cat should be either transferred immediately to a restraint cage which should be covered with a cloth or old blanket to quieten it, or left in the trap, covered and put in a quiet place until it is time to transport it.

Automatic Traps

Automatic traps have a door which closes when the cat sets off a mechanism, for example by putting weight on a treadle. They are usually constructed of metal, and are obtained from a manufacturer or specialist dealer, see Appendix 5, Suppliers of Equipment.

They are useful for very shy cats, or ones which visit a site irregularly, or for cats in inaccessible places. They may be used on sites where there is no risk of the traps being found and opened by concerned animal lovers, for example inside a locked building. They are useful if no selectivity is required. Several can be placed at the same time on sites where there are a lot of cats and as many as possible must be trapped in one session.

Traps are expensive, and may be stolen. It is sometimes prudent to secure them with a chain and padlock to a heavy object.

Using an Automatic Trap

Trappers must test the door-closing mechanism, ensure that it is working correctly and smoothly, and lubricate it if necessary. The traps should be placed at known feeding places, baited and set. They can be covered with plastic sheeting to protect them from rain.

Automatic traps should be visited regularly, or observed through binoculars, so that trapped cats can be removed as quickly as possible. Care is needed to try and identify the cat caught. Fat cats, or ones wearing a collar or making friendly noises, will most likely be owned cats which are straying away from home. They should not be sterilised without the owners' consent. Ferals already sterilised should be recognisable by their tipped left ears.

Transporting the Cat

The cat should be transported to the veterinary clinic in a special cage. Its two vital features are the guillotine-type transfer door at one end, for transferring the cat from the trap into the cage, and

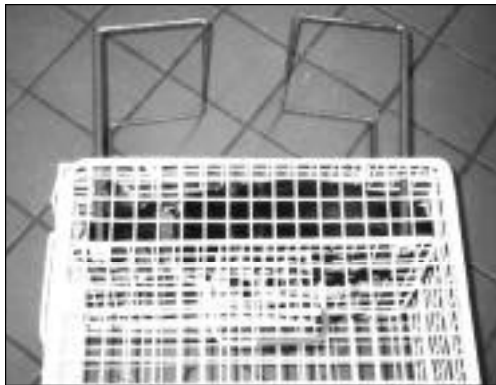
the squeeze panel, for the physical restraint of the cat which allows the veterinarian to inject the cat without handling it.

The importance of this piece of equipment cannot be over-emphasised. It allows the veterinarian and nurses to deal with feral cats without endangering their own safety, and has thus made it possible for them to willingly co-operate in feral cat control schemes.

Cages made to this design in plastic-covered metal are available from specialist suppliers and are usually listed in catalogues as Squeeze Cages or Trap-Transfer and Restraint Cages. (see Appendix 5, Suppliers of Equipment).



A squeeze cage being used to restrain a cat for an injection.



The transfer procedure should be practiced by the trapper with a domestic cat until it can be done safely, with no risk of the cat escaping. A large male cat bolting from the trap to the cage has a great momentum, and an assistant, or a wall, may be necessary to hold the cage in place. Once the cat is in, a cloth or blanket over the cage will help to calm it.

The cat should then be transported to the veterinary clinic at a time agreed. The veterinarian should have been warned that the cat is feral, and that there may be some food in the stomach.

It is traumatic for a feral cat to be kept in a cage, so the periods of captivity, whether before or after surgery, should be as short as possible.

Veterinary procedures

The veterinary procedures to be undertaken should be agreed beforehand. In most cases, they will be the following:

Examination: the cat should be examined in the cage while still conscious. If it is obviously very old, very ill or badly injured, it should be euthanased. If the animal is considered suitable for surgery, it should be examined under anaesthesia for sex, approximate age, bodily condition and signs of injury and disease.

Criteria for Euthanasia: Cats will survive many minor illnesses and accidents, and the feeder may be willing to give medicines mixed in the food if that is what is recommended by the veterinarian. If only healthy cats are to be admitted back on site, the actual criteria of health need to be discussed and agreed. It must also be clear whether it is the feeder or some other person whose opinion is considered most important.

The factors that are important when considering the criteria for euthanasia or treatment are:

1. Is the cat suffering from an injury or disease that is causing undue distress and suffering, and for which there is no cure?
2. Is the cat suffering from a disease that is a significant health risk to the other cats in the colony or the human helpers?

3. Is the cat suffering from a disease or illness that can be treated, but only at considerable expense or practical difficulties?
4. Is the cat suffering from only minor signs of injury and disease that require simple and cheap medication?
5. Is the cat free from apparent signs of injury and disease?

The actual position where the dividing line falls is dependent on many factors including the availability of adequate facilities and medication as well as financial constraints. It is important, however, that each group consider these options in advance.

Vaccination: In some countries, the veterinary authorities may require the vaccination of cats against rabies.

Young cats should be vaccinated against the viral diseases of cats which are common locally. The most serious of these is usually feline panleucopenia. Older cats will almost certainly be immune already, in which case vaccination is not necessary.

Parasites: It may be assumed that all feral cats carry roundworms and tapeworms, and that in young cats roundworms are a serious risk to health. The veterinarian should be asked to recommend suitable tablets which can be crushed and added to the food.

Some feral cats carry fleas and suffer from ear mites. If these infestations are seen in the anaesthetised cat, treatment should be given in the clinic.

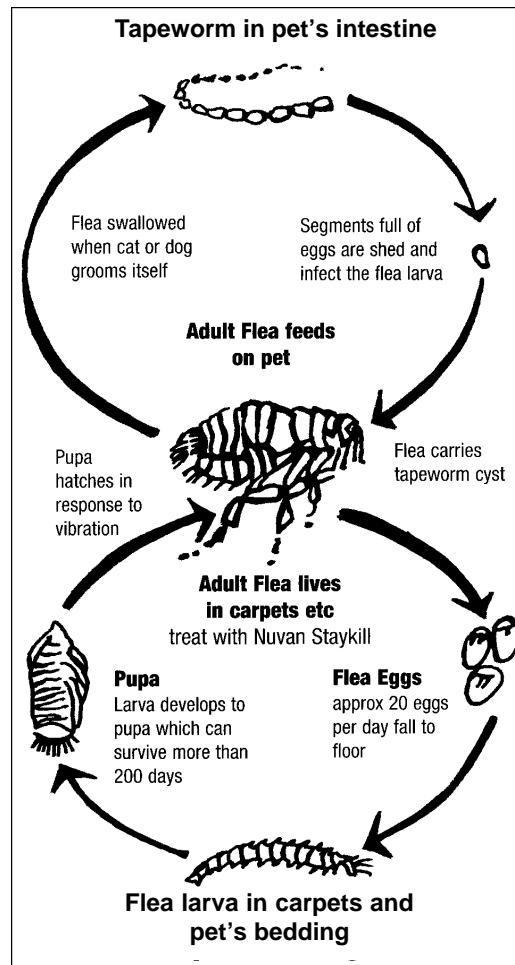
Sterilisation: The veterinarian should be asked to select the surgical approach and materials which will allow the most rapid return of the cat to liberty, and which will not require a return visit to the clinic. For female cats, many surgeons prefer the flank approach, because the consequences of wound breakdown are less serious. Details of this approach are given in Remfry, *Feral Cats in the United Kingdom*, JAVMA, vol 208, No. 4, pages 520-523, 1996.

However, as mentioned previously, veterinarians have different views as to the optimum age that neutering operations should be performed, and the best techniques applied.



Gestation in the cat is 8-9 weeks. After about the 7th week, it is better not to trap the cat, but to wait until the kittens are born, then try to find them, or wait until the female and the kittens can be trapped together. An alternative is to foster the female until they have their kittens and the kittens are weaned. The kittens then can be rehomed and domesticated.

Post-operative care: After surgery, the cat should be put back into a clean carrying cage and allowed to recover consciousness. Male cats are usually fully alert and ready to be returned to their site within 12 hours. Females usually need to be kept in a quiet, warm place overnight, and perhaps longer. They must be offered water and a little food. If a convalescence of more than 2 days is needed, they should be moved



from their carrying cage to one which is larger, to allow them greater freedom of movement. Never release a feral cat into a pen or hospitalisation cage unless it is small enough to be transported back to the release site, or it is quite clear how the cat is to be put back into its carrying cage.

Ear-tipping

The Importance of Ear-tipping: Ear-tipping has been accepted in many countries as the simplest way of recognising which cats in a colony have been neutered. This is necessary to monitor progress, to avoid subjecting cats to surgery twice over, and to identify unsterilised new-comers to the group.

If the cat is thought to be an ownerless stray rather than feral, but the intention is to return it to the site because no home can be found for it, the cat should be ear-tipped. If a home is found for it later on, the new owner is not likely to object to this distinctive mark.

The Procedure

The method which has been accepted in Great Britain and many other countries is to remove the tip of the left ear so that it gives a clear silhouette which can be seen at a distance of 20 metres.

Ear-tipping should be performed by the veterinarian while the cat is anaesthetised. To ensure minimum bleeding and good healing, the following procedures are recommended:

- 1 Clean both ear canals to remove any source of irritation which could lead to rubbing or scratching.
- 2 Clean the left pinna then dry it completely to remove cleaning agents such as surgical spirit which could delay blood clotting.
- 3 Mark a straight line on the inner aspect of the pinna with a ball-point pen, 10mm (1cm) below the tip.
- 4 Cut along this line with slightly blunt scissors or by electro-cautery.
- 5 Apply digital pressure, a styptic or a drying antiseptic powder to the cut edge; even flour is effective if there is nothing else to hand. Check for bleeding when the cat recovers consciousness and blood pressure rises.



Left: Still unconscious following a neutering operation, the tip of the cat's left ear is cut off.

Below: Two feral cats. The cat on the left has been neutered, the other has not.



Long-term management

Future Obligations

Cats should not be returned to their site unless somebody is going to take responsibility for them. Returning a cat after sterilisation and then not providing food for it would constitute abandonment under the animal protection legislation of many countries. The feeder should observe the cat and report to the cat society if there are any problems. If there are several cats, a register should be kept of them, to keep track of their progress and to record the arrival of newcomers.

If the newcomers stay with the group, they should be trapped, sterilised and marked as well.

Hygiene

Cats may carry infectious agents transmissible to man, such as ringworm and toxoplasmosis. Risk of infection can be considerably reduced by taking simple precautions, such as:

- Keep clothes, gloves, shoes, etc. specifically for trapping and handling cats, and keep these away from places where human food is prepared or eaten. Wash hands thoroughly after handling cats, their bedding, food bowls, traps, cages, etc., especially before preparing or eating food.
- People handling feral cats should be vaccinated against tetanus.
- The recommended cat trapping system reduces the need to handle cats and therefore the risk of bites and scratches should be slight. However, any wounds should be washed well with antiseptic, and broad-spectrum antibiotics should be taken if wounds are serious.
- Feral cats may transmit diseases such as respiratory infections, feline panleucopenia and ringworm to other cats through direct contact or via human hands and clothing. People caring for feral cats should therefore always keep them in a room apart from their own cats, with separate food dishes, etc. Hands should always be washed after leaving the feral cats and it is a good idea to have special overalls, which are kept in the room with the feral cats.



Cat Cafés

Neutering programmes at hotels often excite the interest of the hotel guests. It is a good idea to provide a feeding area where the guests can take food for the cats, away from the dining areas where begging by cats is discouraged. Special shelters, or cat cafés, could be constructed, with notices in several languages explaining their purpose.



Setting up a programme

The programme should be organised by a group which includes at least one representative of the Animal Society or local authority sponsoring the scheme, and at least one of the feeders. The scheme should have the support or at least the tacit approval of the owner or occupier of the site. The Group must know how the scheme will be funded. They should also

consider their legal responsibilities to the animals, the owners or occupiers of the site, and for the prevention of accidents to the helpers.

There are Six Steps to take:

1 Assess the Problem

- Identify all the people feeding the cats and all the feeding sites.
- With the help of the feeders, draw up a list of the cats with their distinguishing features, state of health, and whether pregnant or feeding kittens.
- Identify the cats which are only occasional visitors or who are friendly, because these may be locally-owned animals whose owners should be warned before trapping starts. In some countries it is an offence to neuter a cat without the owner's consent. If it is thought that companion cats are being trapped and sterilised, some cat owners may wish to obstruct the programme.

It is important that feeders collaborate on this initial survey, because it is often found that cats take advantage of more than one feeding site, and may be counted more than once, without the feeders being aware of the existence of the other feeders.

2 Feeding

- Establish a regular feeding plan with a rota to include week-ends and holidays. Cats soon become used to being fed at a particular time and place, and this makes trapping easier. Casual feeding should be discouraged.
- The feeding areas must be kept clean, with uneaten food removed and dishes washed, to prevent nuisance from flies, smell, etc, and to prevent straying cats being attracted to the site. Fresh water must be provided.



3. Planning

- Decide which cats are to be kept on site. Friendly cats and kittens could be homed. The very old, sick or injured should be removed for euthanasia. This will leave the cats which can be returned to the site after sterilisation.
- Calculate the cost of trapping, transportation, veterinary fees and feeding. If traps are not available for loan, these must be purchased.

4 Veterinary Arrangements

- Select a veterinarian who is sympathetic to feral cats, who is prepared to advise on their health problems, and who is prepared to offer favourable rates. It must be remembered that veterinarians in private practice also work within financial constraints – the long term success of a project requires that it be financially viable for all concerned.
- Discuss the equipment available for handling the cats; ferals should be taken to the surgery only in traps or restraint cages (see page 25).

- Discuss the treatments which may be necessary, in addition to sterilisation (see Veterinary Procedures, page 21.)
- Agree on the criteria for euthanasia: whether the policy is to return only healthy cats to the site, or whether treatment is to be given for some conditions.



- Agree on what is to be done with non-feral cats which are trapped and presented for surgery.
- Ensure that the veterinarian is prepared to mark each cat as sterilised by removing the tip of the left ear (see Ear-tipping, page 30.)
- Discuss post-operative care: how long will the cats stay at the clinic after surgery? Is there a suitable place available where they can recover? How long will they need before they can be taken back to their site? (See page 28.)



5. Trapping

- Obtain enough traps and cages to do the job fairly quickly, to avoid the situation where kittens are produced faster than cats are neutered. The trappers should familiarise themselves with the equipment so that they can use it with confidence once trapping begins.
- Make arrangements for transport: the equipment must be taken to the site; the trapped cats must be transported to the veterinary clinic, then to a suitable place for convalescence, then back to the site.

6 Long-term Care and Management of the Cats

- Sleeping places should be provided. These may be just cardboard boxes lined with newspapers, but on some sites it is necessary to construct insulated wooden shelters with rainproof roofs. (See the leaflet by Alley Cat Allies)
- The Register started in Step 1 should be used to record homings, treatments, births and deaths, and any newcomers which are accepted into the group.
- Cats becoming ill or injured should be re-trapped, if possible, for treatment or euthanasia.

It may take some months to bring a large colony under control and achieve a stable group of contented cats, but the rewards and satisfactions will be great.





A check list for mobile veterinary teams

While the ideal situation is to utilise existing veterinary clinics in a particular area location, it may sometimes be necessary for teams to work in a poorly developed area where no such facilities exist. In some countries mobile veterinary clinics are available or tents may be utilised. In such a case, an ideal team might be 2 veterinarians and 2 nurses / auxiliaries with experience of trapping cats.

They would need:

- 2 cat traps
- 4 squeeze cages
- 12 recovery baskets
- Masking tape and ballpoint pen for identifying the cats, for attachment to each basket and animal.

Surgical equipment:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Cat spay sets of surgical instruments | • Scalpel blades |
| • Surgical swabs | • Clippers with spare blades |
| • Sterile drapes and suture materials | • Needles and syringes |
| • Cotton wool and gauze bandages | • Hand scrubbing brushes |
| • Surgical scrub and chemicals for skin preparation | |
| • Surgical gloves (if possible) | • Facility for the re-sterilisation of instruments |
| • A selection of clean blankets and towels | |

They will probably be called on to perform other operations, so may need some general surgical and dental equipment.

Drugs:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| • Anaesthetics | • Antibiotics |
| • Vaccines | • Eye and ear drops |
| • Worming tablets | • Euthanasia solutions |

Section 4

Legislation and Education



The key to control

To control the number of cats living in urban areas, the key is to prevent unwanted cats joining the free-living cat population. This requires cat owners to take responsibility for animals, to care for them, and to ensure that no surplus kittens are produced.

To achieve this happy state of affairs, there are no quick fix solutions. The owners will often need help from an animal protection society, and the societies will need the support of enforceable legislation and well-informed local authorities. For on-going improvement, children and adults need to be educated in the principles of responsible animal ownership, and in particular the importance of sterilisation as the principal method of controlling the production of kittens.

In brief, the four vital elements of any control programme are:

- Legislation
- Identification
- Sterilisation
- Education

Legislation

It is WSPA's belief that every humane and caring nation should have comprehensive animal protection legislation. Animals are sentient creatures, and therefore entitled to respect, care and protection from avoidable suffering.

National legislation for the protection of domestic animals must include the protection of cats. In particular it should make it an offence to neglect, abuse or deliberately injure, or abandon cats.

Most national laws do, however, distinguish between cats and dogs, in recognising that owners of cats cannot always control them in the same way as dogs. For example, owners may be held responsible for damage to livestock inflicted by their dogs, but are not necessarily responsible for damage inflicted by their cats. Similarly, car drivers killing a dog may be held responsible for damage to property, but not necessarily if it is a cat. In other words, the law recognises that cats are not "owned" in the same way as other domestic animals.

See the WSPA document "Animal Protection Legislation – Guidance Notes and Suggested Provisions" 1995.

In many countries, Animal Protection Laws are enforced by the police, often in co-operation with animal protection societies.

In most countries, problems caused by stray and free-living dogs and cats are dealt with by local government authorities, often in co-operation with animal protection societies. Local legislation is often provided to deal with rabies and other animal diseases of public health significance, and this usually makes provision for dealing with stray animals.

In some developed countries, animal control has moved on from the simple “dog-catcher” to the more sophisticated Animal Control Officer. Animal Control Officers are employed by the local authority not only to take into custody animals found straying, but also to encourage the owners of straying animals to behave in a more responsible fashion. Dogs remain the prime concern of these animal wardens, but their duties also include cats and other domestic animals.

A practical guide to the work of the Animal Control Officer is given in WSPA’s Animal Control Officer (Dog Control Techniques to assist government departments and municipalities). Although concentrating primarily on dogs, techniques for the control of cats are also covered.

Education

Legislation may only be effective if the citizens can understand its value and importance. For this, education may be necessary.

Information aimed at children about the care of cats and kittens is widely available in books, magazines and the publications of the major cat welfare organisations.

Children can be taught about caring for animals at school as part of a humane education programme. Animal protection societies are often willing to co-operate with Education Authorities to put together such programmes.



Some societies have produced literature specifically for education programmes, and examples of this can be provided by WSPA.

Societies dealing with conservation of the environment and wildlife often produce material which is attractive to children which could be incorporated into an Education Programme.

Adults can be informed about animal care and animal protection issues through books, magazines, radio and television. Publications produced by animal welfare societies could be sent to their members, and also be made available to members of cat breed societies, and to the public through libraries, veterinary clinics, animal shelters and police stations.

Animal protection publications should stress the responsibilities of animal ownership and urge people not to acquire animals on impulse without considering the long-term consequences.

Possible titles would be:

- Caring for Cats and Kittens
- Moving Home with your Cat
- Cats and Babies
- Treating Your Cat for Parasites
- What to do if Your Cat is Missing
- Introducing a Cat to a New Home
- Vaccinating your Cat
- The Advantages of Sterilising Your Cat

Government, and particularly local authorities, can influence public attitudes by promoting schemes for the welfare of companion animals, such as vaccination and anti-parasite treatments, and sterilisation. Ways in which local authorities could encourage sterilisation campaigns are discussed in Section 2, Managing Stray Cats.

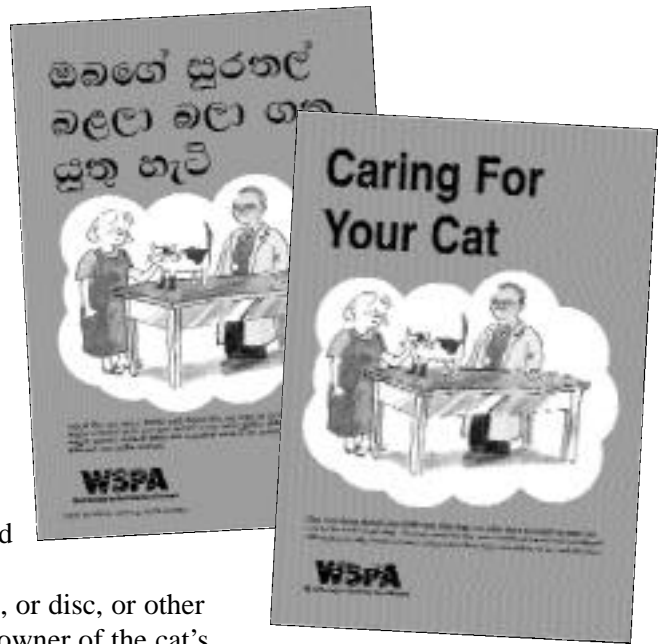
Wherever possible, such schemes should be accompanied by publicity campaigns and highlighted in the media.

Useful information about cats

Basic information concerning the care of cats is available in the WSPA leaflet “Caring for Your Cat” which is available in several different languages.

Identification

A cat should wear a collar with a means of identifying the owner, whether the cat is to be kept out of doors or indoors, because it is so easy for a cat to escape, get lost, or be involved in an accident. The owner’s name, address and telephone number should be written on the tag, or disc, or other name-holder to enable the finder to notify the owner of the cat’s whereabouts.



Cat collars are usually made with an elasticated section so that if the collar gets caught on a branch or spike the cat will be able to free itself.

It is a good idea to join an official registration scheme if one exists. This may require the cat to have a microchip inserted below the skin with a registration number which can be read with a special scanner. This method has the advantage that the identification cannot be lost or removed in the same way as a collar.

For the most recent information about microchip identification, contact WSPA.

Water

Cats use a lot of water in grooming themselves, and so need to drink frequently. A cat obtains some of the moisture it requires from its food. However, fresh water for drinking should always be available to meet additional needs. A cat fed a dry or semi-dry diet, and cats which are lactating, need quite a lot of water.

Cats are very sensitive to the taste of water and will often reject clean, chlorinated water in favour of muddy puddles. Cooled boiled water may be more acceptable than tap water.

Cow’s milk can lead to stomach upsets in some cats. It is not a necessary part of the diet and should be omitted if the cat does not take it readily.

Cats wash themselves to keep their skin and coat clean and to remove dead hairs. At the same time they remove fleas and ticks. The owner should aid this process by brushing them regularly, especially at moulting time, and also check the skin for lumps and wounds. Long-haired cats risk swallowing so much hair that hairballs form in the stomach, and their owners should brush them daily to prevent this.

Failure of a cat to groom itself is often a sign of illness. Bathing a cat is difficult because they hate being immersed in water. If the coat must be washed, it should be done with a damp cloth.

Handling

A cat needs to feel comfortable and secure when picked up. The cat's body must always be supported. Cats can be picked up with one hand around the chest, behind the front legs, and the other underneath the hind-quarters. Once picked up, it can be supported in the crook of an arm.

Grasping a cat by the scruff of its neck can have an immobilising effect, and is therefore a very useful method of handling a troublesome animal. This reaction is thought to relate to the maternal control exerted when mother cats carry their kittens by the scruff of the neck when very young.

Outdoor versus Indoor Cats

Cats are independent creatures, with a great sense of curiosity, and will enjoy playing and roaming outside, if there is a safe environment to permit this without harm. They particularly enjoy climbing. Some people like to put a bell on the cat's collar, to warn wildlife of the cat's approach.

It is important that outdoor cats have access to their home at all times, and a cat door (cat flap) is recommended. Some cat flaps are opened by a magnet on the cat's collar, and these are effective at preventing the entry of stray cats and other neighbourhood cats to the house.

The choice of whether to allow a cat outside is a personal one. However, cats which have been declawed, or which have not been neutered, should not be allowed out of doors, unless in a confined run (it should be noted that de-clawing cats is a mutilation and should not be done).

Many cats which have been reared indoors and never let out seem to be content with this restricted life. Cats which have been accustomed to going out may find it difficult to adapt to being kept indoors.

Some cat owners living on busy streets may not feel that it is safe to let their cats roam out of doors, and prefer to keep them safely inside. In such cases, it is important that the cat has enough space and a sufficiently stimulating environment to encourage exercise. If cats are to be left for long periods, it is preferable to keep two or more for companionship. Cat toys and furniture, such as scratching posts, are useful, both to stimulate the cat and to protect home furnishings. Outdoor runs can be constructed for cats which cannot safely be left to roam beyond the yard or garden.

Travelling

In most countries it is a legal offence to leave dogs or cats alone in a house without food and water. If the owner is going away it is necessary to make arrangements for the care of a cat.

The ideal solution is for the cat to stay at home and be cared for by a reliable neighbour or by a pet-sitting service. Alternatively, the cat could be taken to a boarding cattery which can offer secure accommodation. It is not wise to take the cat to a friend's house, because the cat will usually try to escape and return home.

Whenever a cat is transported, it should be carried in a container such as a basket which has been designed for the purpose, with a firmly-fitting lid. The cat may be less nervous if it has been accustomed to the carrier beforehand.

Territory

The social organisation of cats is loose, and is based on the defence of territories. Free-living cats live in small groups centred around the oldest breeding female. Male kittens will tend to disperse

as they reach maturity. Male cats attached to the group will help to defend the area, but may also have interests in other groups nearby.

The area where the group spends most of its time is its territory, but the cats will also explore and patrol wider areas, which are their home ranges. A home range may include the territories of several cats or groups of cats; for example, several groups may use the same food source and mix amicably enough to be regarded as a colony. If access to this food source is vital to their survival, the colony will defend it against intruders.

Fighting

In groups of cats which are not family groups, a loose social hierarchy will develop based on dominance and determined by fighting. Once the hierarchy is established, the cats settle into it and fighting is rare. However, if the population is dense, such as in many catteries where the cats are group-housed, fighting may continue, with a tyrant cat bullying the others, or some lower-ranking cats being persistently persecuted.

Companion cats regard their owners as part of their family group, and may depend on them to help in the defence of their territory.

Spraying

The spraying of urine is part of the repertoire used by the cat to mark its territory. A companion cat may do this inside the house if it is nervous about the intrusion of other cats into its territory.

Reproduction

Kittens are charming and cats make wonderful mothers. Children and kittens have a natural affinity. But the fact is left to their own devices, cats produce far more kittens than human society can cope with. Male cats reach sexual maturity soon after the testicles have descended, at usually 6–10 months. Female cats reach maturity at about 6–15 months, and then become sexually active for part of the year, the breeding season depending on the climatic conditions. In northern Europe, for example, the breeding season extends from about March to October.

Female cats are seasonally polyoestrous: that is, during the season they become receptive to the male for several days every 2 to 3 weeks until they are successfully mated. The loud calling of the females attracts male cats from the neighbourhood, and the fighting amongst the males for access to the female adds to the noise. The act of mating causes pain to the female, who emits a loud scream. Her sexual receptivity may continue for 5 days, and she may be mated by several males. During this time, people living nearby will have suffered a great deal of disturbance.

The gestation period is 59–68 days. Average litter size is 4.5 kittens. The female comes back into oestrus 4–6 weeks after parturition. A well-fed house cat may give birth to 3 litters a year. Amongst free-living cats it is usual to find only 1 or 2 litters a year. Nevertheless, 10 kittens born in the first year may be expected at that rate to produce 50 kittens in the second year, in addition to the subsequent litters of the original female, if none of them are caught and sterilised.

In theory, one female cat can give rise to many thousands of kittens in just a few years. This is unlikely to happen in the free-living state, because cats do not thrive under crowded conditions, and many of the kittens die of disease. The sight of dying kittens is distressing to cat lovers and it is often that which spurs them to take action to improve conditions for the cats, and to see the benefits of sterilisation.

Behaviour

The cat expresses its moods and intentions through its voice, eyes, ears and whiskers, and through its bodily postures. These illustrations are from Michael W. Fox's "Guide to Cat Behaviour and Psychology."



A cat raises its tail as a greeting. It is also a response to stroking, possibly based on the kitten's response to being licked by its mother.



Nose-touching is a friendly gesture, used after a nose-check has revealed that the odour is familiar.



Rolling is an invitation to play.



Marking objects by rubbing the scent glands onto them is a way of marking territory.



Scratching is a way of marking the post, as well as sharpening the claws.



Grooming by washing the coat is a daily activity which may be increased at times of anxiety.



Rotation of the ears is often a sign of anxiety.



Grooming is also a social activity between cats who are friends.



Offensive gestures with teeth and claws are a sign of a dominant cat exerting its authority.



Submissive gestures acknowledge dominance of another: In this case the dominant cat in previous photo is submitting to its owner.



Fear is indicated by the arched back, and the erection of the hairs of the back and tail. The effect of these is to make the cat look as large and fierce as possible.



A cat may be immobilised by grasping the scruff of the neck. This is how the mother carries her kitten, and is effective even for a full-grown, difficult cat.

APPENDIX 1

FECAVA Policy on Neutering (November 1998)

- 1.** An effective neutering programme is considered an essential element of any stray animal control scheme; however the other important elements of education, Registration and Identification should also be considered.
- 2.** The normal surgical technique involves removal of the testicles in the male and the ovaries and uterus in the female. Some veterinarians advocate the removal of the ovaries alone. The surgical approach (mid-line or flank) for neutering the female is a matter for the individual veterinarian to decide based on his /her own clinical judgement and preference.
- 3.** There is no consensus view within the members of FECAVA as to whether neutering is best performed prior to or after puberty. It is felt this is a matter for the individual veterinarian to decide with the owner of the pet having taken account of the published data relating to the advantages and disadvantages.
- 4.** In situations where the overwhelming primary consideration is population control, pre-pubertal neutering is an attractive option.
- 5.** If pre-pubertal neutering is preferred, performing the surgery as early as 7 weeks of age may be considered appropriate as long as specific precautions relating to the anaesthesia, surgical technique and recovery are addressed.
- 6.** Neutering is a surgical procedure which requires an acceptable standard of anaesthetic and surgical technique; if these basic requirements cannot be met, the surgery should not be considered.
- 7.** Wherever possible neutering programmes should involve local veterinarians and their staff.

Source: Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA)

APPENDIX 2

Health Care for Cats & Potential Health Hazards for humans

Although there are potential hazards for acquiring some diseases from feral cats, the incidence is rare, and if common sense and good hygiene are combined when working with colonies, transmission of infectious diseases from colonies to humans can be minimised.

Rabies

Although there is a low incidence of humans contracting rabies, it still causes great panic. The primary carriers of rabies are raccoons, bats, foxes and skunks, although any unvaccinated mammal can be a source of rabies. Any stray cat who bites a human should be quarantined. Cats should be vaccinated against rabies in countries where the disease is a potential threat.

Bacterial Diseases, Bites

Bacteria in the mouths of cats can cause infection, including swelling, inflammation and pain. Wash wounds immediately and consult your doctor for advice.

Cat Scratch Fever

This pathogen can cause lymph node enlargement, fever, fatigue, sore throat and headaches. If you are scratched immediately wash the wound and contact your doctor if concerned.

Chlamydiosis

Felines who have this upper respiratory infection can pass it along to humans in the form of conjunctivitis. Wash hands after treating an infected animal.

Lyme Disease

Caused by the deer tick, this disease is not fatal, but can cause severe problems if not diagnosed and treated in its early stages.

Fungal Diseases, Ringworm

Ringworm is most commonly transmitted by domestic cats. While examining anaesthetised feral cats for wounds, any suspicious lesions can be checked for this fungus. When handling a cat suspected of having this fungus, you should wear gloves.

Parasites: Toxoplasmosis, hookworm, tapeworms and roundworms

Toxoplasma gondii is an intestinal parasite, the main source of contamination is eating or handling undercooked or raw meat. An infected cat may pass the oocyst of *Toxoplasma* in faeces, therefore, pregnant women should avoid handling feral cats and cat faeces.

Prevention Tips

To minimise health hazards when dealing with feral cat colonies:

- Clean up left-over food
- Clean up cat faeces areas
- Vaccinate colony members against rabies
- Spray for flea infestations
- Sterilise colonies to reduce populations

Source: Alley Cat Allies

APPENDIX 3

Case History: Lamu

This is the case history of a WSPA Pet Respect project started in 1992 and still continuing.

It is one of WSPA's largest, most fully-documented projects on cats and was set up to control the cat population humanely and improve the health of the cats.



Place

Lamu is an island off the north-east coast of Kenya with 12,000 inhabitants, most of whom are Swahili speaking Muslims. The town was first built by Arab traders, five centuries ago. The streets are too narrow for cars. There is only one vehicle on the island and most goods are carried by donkeys. There is a donkey population of 200-300.

The Cats

In 1992 there were estimated to be about 4,000 free-living cats on the streets of Lamu town. WSPA investigated and found many of them to be diseased and emaciated because of overpopulation and lack of food.

The Problem

The authorities had attempted to reduce the cat population by poisoning and other means, but this led to a public outcry because of the special respect Muslims have for cats. In spite of this, the veterinary authorities were seriously considering an attempt to eradicate the cats by poisoning them with strychnine, as part of a rabies control programme.

WSPA's Proposal

During 1992, WSPA held meetings with the District Veterinary Officer, the local veterinarian and the leaders of the local community on Lamu to discuss ways of controlling the cat population humanely, by improving the health of the cats and sterilising them. WSPA obtained an agreement and the Government Veterinary Service was persuaded to co-operate by providing two veterinarians for the clinic and free rabies vaccines. WSPA, for its part, agreed to supply the trapping equipment, the veterinary medicines and anaesthetics, and to fund the project.

The Project

Phase One: Veterinary Treatments. On September 28th, 1992, the first mobile clinic was set up in the passageways of Lamu, with a team of six people, some simple equipment and a large cool box containing medicines and vaccines. On the first day they caught, vaccinated and treated 127 cats. The local Town Cryers were used to inform the inhabitants about the team's intention to sterilise the cats. This was part of the educational process necessary to encourage public support for the project. Within two weeks, 784 cats had been treated. Eventually, a building became available which could be renovated as a clinic, and on November 11th, 1992 the WSPA Lamu Hospital ya Puka (Hospital of Cats) was opened.

Phase Two: Sterilisation. At first, the public were suspicious and hostile, but positive media coverage helped to change people's minds. Eventually they started to bring cats to the clinic for treatment and surgical sterilisation. 559 cats were sterilised over a 10-week period, an average of 10 cats per working day. They were identified by removal of the tip of the left ear.



In addition to the sterilisations, 2,074 treatments were carried out in the first year, against worms, fleas and mange; for treatment of eye infections, respiratory and other infections and bone fractures.

By the second year, the clinic was well known and people continued to bring in cats. By the end of the third year, a significant change was apparent. It was now rare to find sick or starving cats and litters of kittens in the passageways of Lamu. The cats were mainly healthy and litters rare.

During the fourth year it became difficult to find unsterilised cats and by the end of that year, 1996, it was estimated that 92% of the cats in Lamu had been brought to the clinic. The objective had been achieved: the cat population of Lamu was healthy and stable.

Cats sterilised: Lamu			
	Female	Male	Total
1992/3	857	721	1578
1994	627	600	1272
1996	533	487	1020
1996	412	309	721
1997	137	110	241
1998	344	187	157
1999	304	284	588
2000	117	115	232
(2000 is January – May only)			
Cats sterilised: Faza			
1996	60	31	91
1997	386	307	693
1998	660	490	1150
1999	401	376	777
2000	138	122	260
(2000 is January – May only)			

Phase Three: Monitoring. The few unsterilised cats remaining would ensure that the cat population did not die out, but arrangements were made to monitor them and to bring in a surgical team from time to time.

Meanwhile, the Clinic Team was invited to the neighbouring island of Faza, where the village chiefs were keen to have the population of about 1,000 cats controlled. WSPA opened the Faza Cat Clinic in November 1996- just four years after the opening of the Lamu clinic.

Sources

WSPA Reports from Garry Richardson and Mike Pugh.

Statistics compiled by I.M. Ragwa, Director of Veterinary Services, Kenya.

APPENDIX 4

Pet Respect Resources

Pet Respect is a department of WSPA which seeks to improve the status and treatment of companion animals worldwide. The following resources offer advice on the humane control of stray animals, and how to provide veterinary care at the lowest possible cost. All are available free of charge to animal welfare organisations. The materials are available in a variety of languages.

Videos

- Animal Control Officer

Outlines the role of the Animal Control Officer in humane stray control programmes and demonstrates humane capture and animal handling techniques.

- Cat Care & Control

Looks at the stray and feral cat problem, the hidden costs of ineffective control and immense suffering. It illustrates a range of options for effective humane control with examples from around the world.

- Humane Euthanasia

Outlines humane euthanasia techniques being performed in different countries.

- Neutering Techniques for Cats & Dogs - 4 video set

- The Importance of Neutering

- Early Age Neutering

- Neutering Techniques for Cats

- Neutering Techniques for Dogs

A teaching aid for veterinary surgeons studying neutering techniques for cats and dogs, shows in detail all of the surgical procedures including early age neutering.

- Setting up a Cat Café

Cat cafés are designated areas, away from hotel restaurants and kitchens, where stray cats can be fed and cared for.

- Stray Dog Control

Looks at the stray dog problem, the immense suffering behind it and the hidden cost of ineffective control – in terms of traffic accidents, dog bites, wildlife and farm animal attacks, fouling and health risks. It then sets out how an effective control system can be introduced, using examples from around the world.

- This is Pet Respect

A brief introduction to Pet Respect a department of WSPA which seeks to improve the status and treatment of companion animals..

Brochures

- Animal Control Officer

Outlines the role of the Animal Control Officer in humane stray control programmes and demonstrates humane capture and animal handling techniques.

- Caring for your Cat

Basic information suitable for children or adults.

- Caring for your Dog

Basic information suitable for children or adults.

- Cat Café

Cat cafés are designated areas, away from hotel restaurants and kitchens, where stray cats can be fed and cared for.

- Cat Care and Control

To assist governments, municipalities, veterinarians, animal control officers and animal protection societies, in the understanding and practical implementation of modern, effective stray control programmes for cats.

- Concepts In Animal Welfare

A syllabus to assist with the teaching of animal welfare in veterinary faculties.

- Early Age Neutering

A veterinary information sheet covering the special considerations concerning neutering young cats and dogs.

- Humane Euthanasia for Cats and Dogs

Guidelines for veterinary professionals. Details the various methods of euthanasia, comparing those which are considered to be humane and those which are inhumane.

- Population Survey & Evaluation of Stray Control Programme

How to assess the success of a stray control programme, includes identification chart for conducting survey.

- Stray Dog Control

To assist governments, municipalities, veterinarians, animal control officers and animal protection societies, in the understanding and practical implementation of modern, effective stray control programmes for dogs.

- This is Pet Respect

A brief introduction to Pet Respect a department of WSPA which seeks to improve the status and treatment of companion animals..

- WHO/WSPA Guidelines For Dog Population Management (1990)

A theoretical publication for students of animal population management.

For regularly updated information on Pet Respect resources see:
www.wspa-international.org



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