

The No Kill Advocate

A No Kill nation is within our reach

Special Feral Cat Issue

Welcome to our special Feral Cat edition of *The No Kill Advocate*. In this issue you'll find:

The Wild Life of Feral Cats. The humane movement makes many assumptions about feral cats. Most of them are wrong. Putting "Release" into TNR. Some call it Trap-Neuter-Return; others Trap-Neuter-Release. It may be a difference between life and death.

TNR Works. The facts are in—feral cats have a good quality of life; while TNR saves lives and money.

Beyond the Indoor Dogma. Opponents of TNR have one major problem—10,000 years of history.

An ACO's Guide to Feral Cats. The policy benefits of TNR from the animal control perspective.

A Model Feral Cat Policy. An open door shelter does not have to mean an open door to the killing of feral cats.

Against Anti-Cat Laws and more.



What is a feral cat? If the question seems obvious, it is only because we have become so conditioned to the notion that it appears to be beyond controversy. Webster's dictionary defines "feral" as "having escaped domestication and become wild," but this definition does not cover all the cats we come to know as feral. Nor does it get us closer to devising a humane strategy—if necessary—to address their population. To do that, we need to know what kind of question we are asking.

Is it a biological question? In other words, we know that all cats—feral or pet—are genetically identical to the African wildcat, a wild animal by everyone's definition. So if the feral cat is biologically the same as a wild animal, isn't the unsocialized feral cat

The Wild Life of Feral Cats

The humane movement makes many assumptions about feral cats, the quality of their lives, and how they should be treated. These assumptions, however, do not hold up under scrutiny and result in treating feral cats in ways that are in direct conflict with principles that should guide policies of shelters and animal welfare groups—principles which we advocate on behalf of other animals.

This article analyzes those assumptions in order to distill what those fundamental principles should be as it relates to the "cousin" of the most popular pet in America—the feral cat.

born on a remote corner of a farm and never becomes accustomed to people a wild animal? Biologically the answer is yes.

Or perhaps the question is one of socio-behavior. If we determine that feral cats are capable of surviving and thriving in the wild by exhibiting behavior we attribute to wild animals like raccoons do we conclude that they are wild animals? By the same token, if we determine that cats in the wild are disproportionately suffering more than animals we all agree are wild animals, can we conclude that cats should no longer be considered wild animals? Does a caretaker change the calculus? Whether these are the right questions might be less important than their answers. The studies of feral cat colonies by British naturalist Roger Tabor prove that feral cats are truly hardy survivors. And the arguments by U.S. shelters reaffirm this.

Traditional shelters are fond of telling us that feral cats are the offspring of domestic cats who have run away and become lost or have been abandoned by people. In other words, feral cats are doing all right out there. All right to the point that if you believe traditional shelters, they are multiplying at the rate of 420,000 every seven years for every two unaltered pairs (a ridiculous exaggeration whose sole purpose is to underscore the point here).

Take the wildest cat and he can learn to live around humans and may even exhibit pet-like behavior to the person who feeds him. (This is a familiar site at cat colonies with feral cats who rub up against the legs of their feeders, and even perhaps purr, just like pet cats.)

Take the most pampered house pet and let her loose in the wild (something we would never advocate), and she can survive with the deftness of the most voracious raccoon, as Henry David Thoreau noted, writing in *Walden*:

Once I was surprised to see a cat walking along the stony shore of the pond, for they rarely wonder so far from home. The surprise was mutual. Nevertheless the most domestic cat, which has lain on a rug all her days, appears quite at home in the woods, and, by her sly and stealthy behavior, proves herself more native there than the regular inhabitants.

If that is the case, behaviorally speaking the answer again appears to be that feral cats are wild animals.

If the question is one of genealogy, then the answer must be linked to





parentage. So, if a pet cat is abandoned or runs off and gets lost in the woods, has kittens and the kittens grow up wild because they have no contact with people, are they wild or domestic?

If the answer is domestic because of domesticated parents, then let's take the logic to its conclusion. Let's go further back because to stop at initial parentage is arbitrary. Let's look at grandparents and great-grandparents and ultimately all the way back to their wild ancestors.

So if the basis for the claim is genealogy, the answer again seems to be a wild animal. But since this can be said of most, if not all, animals, perhaps the real issue is not one of domestication, but rather adaptability.

But are we even asking the right questions? In other words, when it comes to the cat, does the distinction of wild vs. domestic matter? Or, more importantly, even make sense? Every American student goes through the litany in high school biology. We are taught that all living things on this planet are categorized as follows: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, and Species. For Kingdom, we know the world is broken

down further, the two main groups of which we are familiar are plants and animals.

And we also know that the primary difference between the two is that plants can photosynthesize, and animals are terrestrial, in other words, can move from one location to another on their own volition (as opposed to a plant or seed which relies on birds or the wind for movement). That is how the world is broken down. Or is it?

In fact it is not. The biological categorization is a map humans have developed to make sense of the world. We run into problems when we confuse the map of reality with reality itself. What happens for example, if a creature can both photosynthesize and move from one place to another? Is it a plant? Or is it an animal? It may be neither, or it may be both.

In fact, creatures in this category occupy a gray zone (now its own kingdom Protocista which is neither plant, animal, fungus or bacteria), a glorious example of the complexity of the world or, poetically, the world trying to tell us that she is infinitely more complex than our zest for neat little categorizations can always comprehend.

"Science is a process, not an end," wrote the columnist Jeff Elliott. "We get into trouble when we think that it can provide us with simple, conclusive explanations to describe a complex world." Add the cat to that mix. It too is neither a wild animal nor a domestic one.

Desmond Morris, a curator for mammals at the London Zoo, who spent much of his youth watching cats



on the farm where he grew up, describes it best:

The cat leads a double life. This switch from tame pet to wild animal and then back again is fascinating to watch. Any cat owner who has accidentally come across the pet cat when it is deeply involved in some feline soap opera of sex and violence will know what I mean. One instant the animal is totally wrapped up in an intense drama of courtship or status. Then out of the corner of its eye, it spots its human owner watching the proceedings. There is a schizoid moment of double involvement, a hesitation, and the animal runs across, rubs against its owner's leg, and becomes the house kitten once more... It is like a child that grows up in a foreign country and as a consequence becomes bilingual. The cat becomes bi-mental.

If the answer to what exactly is a feral cat eludes simple definition, their hardiness as survivors does not. And therefore, neither does the question of how a shelter should respond to them.

Ignoring biology, sociology, genealogy, common experience and good sense, to shelters mired in traditional philosophies, a cat is a cat is a cat. Regardless of whether the cat is the most beloved and pampered pet or the wildest outcast, to these groups

cats are domestic animals who belong in a home. And in their view, the feral cat without a human home is better off taken to a shelter and killed. These groups argue that an unowned cat's life is a series of brutal experiences and shelters need to protect the cat from continued and future suffering.

The reality is that all animals living in the wild face hardship—and feral cats are no exception. But they also experience the joys of such a life, as well. Life, by its very definition, is a mixture of happy and sad. Since no animal groups support the trapping and killing of other wild animals—raccoons, mice, fox—why do we reserve this fate for feral cats? If feral cats are genetically identical to wild animals, and they survive in the wild like wild animals, and they are unsocial to humans like wild animals, and they share the same hardships as wild animals, and if they can and do live in the wild like wild animals, shouldn't we treat them as we do wild animals—by advocating on their behalf, pushing for their right to life, and respecting and protecting their habitats? And, more importantly, why should we condemn all of them to death because of the sloppy logic that some may face hardship?

That the answer by opponents of TNR to how we stop the cat from being





killed is to kill the cat ourselves is a contradiction that simply cannot be reconciled. But the contradiction goes deeper. Because while traditional shelters argue that all cats are the same, they themselves treat them very differently.

In the shelter, the feral cat meets a deadly double-standard. Once there, a friendly cat is capable of adoption. An “unfriendly” cat, by contrast, is killed outright. The distinction between the two is real and obvious, and is made daily by the very shelter professionals who make the claim that all cats are the same and require the same things in order to lead happy, healthy lives. That is why the traditional alternative to TNR, what they call “Trap-Remove-Evaluate” is nothing more than a deceptive euphemism for “Trap & Kill”

when it comes to feral cats.

From the No Kill position, feral cats have the right to live and the right to live in their habitats. And the right to have the animal welfare community fight to protect both. This position is no different than our views about habitat protection for raccoons and other animals. They are animals who share our communities and whose needs must be accommodated.

After all, it’s their world too.



Caught Between Two Worlds

Just like feral cats occupy a unique niche between wild and domestic, they also occupy a gray zone in the law. For many cats, their status as “domestic” animals means certain death in shelters. But wild animals tend to fare little better.

In those states where it is allowed, wildlife is subjected to trapping, poisoning and hunting, particularly if they are an unprotected species. Feral cats, in essence, are caught between two anachronistic world views. If they are legally domestic, they are subject to mass slaughter in shelters by the humane movement. If they are legally wild, they are subject to killing by hunting, trapping, and poisoning.

The feral cat, in this case, is a grim reminder of how far we have yet to go—as a humane movement and as a society.

Putting “Release” into TNR

Google the words “feral cats” and you’ll get a lot of information from many different groups about TNR. The program is a simple one. In its most generic and probably often practiced form, it looks something like this: Feral cats are trapped in humane cages, and then taken to veterinarians who sterilize them. The stray friendly cats are adopted into homes through local rescue groups. The feral ones are released back into their habitats, and then fed daily and watched over by dedicated cat lovers—all at the caretakers’ own expense.

In some cases, caretakers are not apparent and so the cats are simply released back into their habitats so that they are better able to survive without the biological imperatives of mating and raising litters, because sterilization reduces or eliminates mating, roaming, and marking behaviors which cause human conflicts, and because less cats means less chance encounters with humans, which can be a death sentence if the cats are taken to animal control. About 70% of cats are killed by animal control facilities nationally, and the number rises to virtually 100% if they are feral, with exceptions which are too far and too few between.

Other than leaving the cats alone, TNR is the humane alternative to trapping and killing. And often it is the difference between life and death for free roaming (stray or feral) cats. In a 2006 study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, researchers found that the number of cats being impounded and killed was generally increasing in



all Ohio shelters, with the feral cat most at risk of being killed. There was one exception: the animal control facility with a TNR program.

But what does TNR stand for? And does it make a difference? Roughly half of the groups say TNR is an acronym for Trap-Neuter-Return. The others use Trap-Neuter-Release. At first glance, the choice of words (*return* vs. *release*) seems to be mere semantics, since all the groups are essentially advocating the same thing: the trapping of the cats from a particular location, the sterilization of the cats, and then return of the cats to the location of trapping. But a deeper reading underscores something more significant.

Notwithstanding the need to relocate feral cats due to human intolerance and encroachments, the returning of



the cats to the original location of where they were trapped has become such a strong element of the belief systems of cat caregivers, that the idea that the cats can be released elsewhere when return to the original location is inadvisable (because of human threats to the cats in the area) is, in some circles, heresy.

In Louisiana, an animal control officer did not want to kill feral cats in his facility, so when they were brought into the shelter, he instead sterilized and then released them into a wooded area, with a fresh water stream, where he believed the cats could live out their lives. But the program came to halt because of complaints not from those opposed to TNR, but by feral cat activists who believed (wrongly) that if the cats were being released without a caretaker into another area, they were better off being killed at the shelter.

Since feral cats are the offspring of abandoned pets and are thriving, and since—as a general rule—feral cats are entering shelters relatively healthy and robust, then it is clear that they are doing well, *with or without a caretaker*. And while there are counterexamples, as there are with all animals, this is no reason to enact an unreasonable standard for feral cats

that we do not have for other wild animals.

Therefore, if return to the location of trapping is not an option, the compassionate alternative is to spay/neuter and release in some other safe location even when there is no established feeder. If the feral cat is out there and appears healthy, we may intervene to spay/neuter to allow feral cats to be better able to thrive without the biological demands of mating or raising litters. Failing to do so puts them at risk for human conflicts which result in impoundment and shelter killing.

Some groups have cautiously supported TNR in some circumstances and so long as certain conditions have been met—if the landowner agrees, if there is shelter, if there is no wildlife predation, if the climate is temperate, if there is a feeder 365 days a year, if there is licensing, if all the cats are vaccinated regularly. Even some No Kill shelters have adopted some of these preconditions to the support of TNR. But the true No Kill position is that while some of these factors may or may not be important for other reasons, they are utterly irrelevant for purposes of supporting TNR.

The No Kill movement's break with traditional sheltering is less about saving "pet dogs and cats" and more about focusing on the individual animal. Regardless of whether a shelter takes in 30, 300, 3,000 or 30,000 dogs and cats each year, No Kill is premised on—in fact demands—fundamental fairness to individual animals. This commitment is echoed in the mission statement of virtually every humane society and SPCA in the country which claims to cherish animals, enforce their rights, and

teach compassion. Yet, these lofty goals can only be achieved if we judge, treat, and devise a plan for shelter animals individually with all the resources we can muster.

Implicit within the No Kill philosophy is the understanding that some animals, such as those who are irremediably suffering or hopelessly ill, will be killed for reasons of mercy. In its purest form, the No Kill gold standard is that we would never end life when that life is not suffering. And feral cats, as a general rule, are not suffering.

Unless they are hopelessly ill or irremediably suffering, feral cats should *never* be killed in shelters. Caveats about location, proximity to wildlife, landowner opinions, and local ordinances are not relevant to the life and death calculus. They may play a part in where the cat is released, but not whether he or she should die. A No Kill plan which does not thoroughly address the unique nature and needs of feral cats and preserve their lives cannot, by definition, be No Kill. A No Kill community must include a commitment to saving all healthy and treatable feral cats. But that is only the first step.

From the No Kill position, the rights of feral cats are self-evident. These may not be legal rights, but they are fundamental to the No Kill position. In the end, our goal is not “no more feral cats,” it is “no more killing of feral cats.”

And that is why our approach to TNR must include a platform which promotes the right of feral cats to their habitat, wherever that may be, and a right to their very existence, independent of their relationship to humans. They are animals who share

our communities and whose needs must be accommodated.

Therefore, unless we are going to define “Return” in the broadest possible terms to mean their entire habitats (i.e., outdoors) and even if we acknowledge that return to the original location of trapping is the ideal, when that alternative is not advisable or possible, the correct terminology is Trap-Neuter-Release. That is what we should be advocating for, and only that will do.



TNR Works

By Ellen Perry Berkeley

In the early 1980s, “neutering and returning to site” was already appearing in British newspapers. By 1990, the British organization Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) had evaluated eight TNR programs in and around London, rating TNR “better than any available alternative.”

When TNR arrived noticeably in the U.S. – and grew – so did valuable research on its efficacy. A 1992 study of a feral cat colony at a rural Louisiana hospital by two veterinarians concluded that neutering was effective in population control, modest in cost, and beneficial to patients (who considered these cats their “pets”).

In 2003, a ground-breaking 11-year evaluation of nearly a dozen feral cat colonies showed a 66% numerical reduction from a combined program of TNR and adoptions.

In 2002, three researchers analyzed six years of data both before and after Orange County (FL) began neutering feral cats. Deaths dropped 18%, complaints dropped 25%, and costs dropped \$655,949.

Cat-lovers see an even greater benefit from TNR. *Animal People* considers TNR to be one of the "major influences" in lowering shelter killing, by mid-2007, to a level unseen "in at least the past 37 years."

The San Francisco SPCA began its Feral Fix Program in 1993. By 2006, Animal Care and Control's field impoundments were down 65%, adult cat deaths down 82%, kitten deaths down 93%.

Valley Veterinary Clinic in Simi Valley (CA) reports that ten years ago the city of 120,000 people was "just another 'What shall we do?' community" – [with] 800 felines [killed] annually. Today, the number killed stands at 124. How was this achieved? Largely, in part, by TNR

Feral cats are close to our hearts. A 2003 study showed that roughly 12% of households feed them. And a 2007 Harris Interactive poll shows that 81% believe that leaving a "stray" cat outside is more humane than having the cat "caught" and "put down." TNR is an obvious answer for these people. Reaching them with the facts about TNR is crucial.

Looking to the future, we can say with confidence that TNR works – for the cats in their feral colonies and for us in our human communities. Those who know it works are finding new ways to achieve even better results, and new ways to seek even better proof.

TNR and Cat Health – Some Numbers

In a ground-breaking study in 2002, feral cats admitted to TNR programs in Raleigh, NC, and Gainesville, Fla., showed a low FeLV prevalence, and a low FIV sero-prevalence – similar to the low rates found in owned cats.

In 2006, the characteristics of over 100,000 feral cats admitted to seven major TNR programs across the U.S. showed that less than one percent of the cats were killed for debilitating conditions.

A 2002 survey across 132 colonies in north central Florida showed that 96% of feral cats had a good or great quality of life.

Despite the fact that caregivers often don't keep records, Alley Cat Allies nevertheless notes that TNR is clearly successful on both objective and subjective levels, and perhaps never more so than when viewing the individual cats of a managed colony. These are not the "scrawny" or "sickly" cats imagined by those who oppose TNR. "All of us who have seen happy, healthy feral cats rolling in the grass, sunning themselves on fences, and trotting purposefully on some mysterious feral cat mission know that this is success of the highest order."

*This article is a small excerpt from a larger article by Ellen Perry Berkeley, which will be made available in 2009. Berkeley is the author of the classic book, *Maverick Cats: Encounters with Feral Cats* (recently expanded and updated). Her newest book on feral cats is *TNR: Past, Present and Future*.*

Beyond the Indoor Dogma



Shelters must have adoption standards that help ensure animals will end up in quality homes. But blanket policies that deny adoptions to anyone who would allow a cat outdoors can harm more animals than they help. While we seek to reduce the risks our companion animals face, killing them in shelters rather than adopting them to indoor/outdoor homes where they might face increased dangers is a contradiction that simply cannot be reconciled. That is not to suggest that shelters should “lower” adoption standards, only that those standards should be more thoughtful.

Many shelters are quick to say that indoor-only cats live much longer than outdoor cats. Yet every day, shelters take in feral cats, many of them old

tom cats, who have lived their lives outside. Most of these cats are healthy despite the absence of a known caretaker. In fact, an 11-year study of feral cats found that the vast majority of the cats were in good physical condition, with only four percent killed for health reasons. Cats in the study by the end of the observation period had been present for an average of 6.5 years, which compares favorably to an average 7.1 year lifespan reported for pet cats, particularly since almost half of the cats were first observed as adults of unknown age.

Is life nasty, brutish and short for the outdoor cat? Perhaps if the potential adopter lives on a major thoroughfare. But for most cat lovers who do not live along the interstate, have nice neighbors, and see the same cats day in and day out, the answer is absolutely not. To say that a cat allowed outdoors faces these risks irrespective of location defies common sense and common experience.

But what about the life of the indoor-only cat? While pet owners who confine their cats indoors can provide their pets with needed exercise and socialization, as a general rule, a cat who is allowed to play outdoors is a more socialized, friendlier, healthier, and happier cat. This is because an indoor cat is more likely to be bored and obese than an outdoor cat, and fat cats are a recipe for a host of health and behavior problems. In addition, chronic boredom can lead to unsocial behavior like biting, scratching and inappropriate elimination.

Roger Tabor, perhaps the world’s foremost cat biologist, relates the rise in obesity and behavior problems in cats to the move by the humane

community to indoor-only cat practices. That doesn't mean that confining a cat indoors is bad for the cat, so long as the cat isn't going crazy from boredom or eating more than he should. What it does mean is that confined cats, as a general rule, are at higher risk for these problems than outdoor cats.

Holding onto a hard and fast rule that all cats should be indoor-only is unwise and unfair. Feral cats, for one, obviously belong outdoors. But pet cats can enjoy the out-of-doors too—if the area is reasonably safe. Allowing a cat outdoors in downtown Manhattan may not be a good idea. But how about the suburbs, quiet neighborhoods, or the countryside?

Shelters can differentiate between these situations in their adoption policies. Instead of a blanket "no outdoors" rule in the adoption questionnaire, shelters can instead evaluate potential adopters' responses to questions such as what happened to their previous pets (hit by car? died

of old age?) and how much time the new pet would spend outdoors. This method allows common sense to rule the day rather than unfounded dogma.

Life includes risks. We temper risk by using common sense in our own lives—should we fly on an airplane? Should we drive? Should we let the kids play soccer? Rather than simply turn away potentially excellent adopters who would allow their cat to spend some time outdoors, shelters would save more lives by applying the same kind of common sense risk/benefit analysis to their adoption policies.

But the bottom line remains this: How much sense does it make to kill cats in a shelter today, after denying otherwise good adoptions because of a concern that if the adopter allows the cat outdoors, the cat might be killed. Such a contradiction (killing cats today because some of them might be killed later) simply cannot be logically reconciled, or ethically defended.



10,000 Years of History

Many shelters and national groups like the Humane Society of the United States have long argued that cats should be "indoors only." Although they have recently made limited exceptions for feral cats, they still generally argue that indoor only is the best policy. There is just one problem with this point of view: It ignores 10,000 years of history.

By Karyen Chu and Wendy Anderson.

The animal control and sheltering system erroneously paints cats as a species that belongs only indoors and in human households; it then cites the lack of such homes as another reason that [killing] stray cats promotes the animals' best interests. Implicit in this assertion is another unexamined and erroneous assumption: namely, that all domestic species are totally dependent on humans for their well-being. This notion of dependency may be true for some species, but it is not true for the domestic cat... In fact, "nearly all domestic cats can survive and even flourish on their own..."

This ability to adapt and re-adapt is a central characteristic of this species... The notion that cats belong only indoors as an "owned" pet is contrary to the natural history of the species, a species that has flourished outdoors for 8,000 to 10,000 years...

This article is a small excerpt from a larger article by Karyen Chu and Wendy Anderson, U.S. Public Opinion on Humane Treatment of Stray Cats, 2007 (Alley Cat Allies).



An Animal Control Officer's Guide to TNR

Many animal control agencies in communities throughout the United States are embracing TNR programs to improve animal welfare, reduce the death rate, and meet obligations to public welfare and neighborhood tranquility demanded by local governments.

A San Francisco shelter survey, for example, found that 75% of all kittens turned into the City's animal control facility came from feral moms. In response, a pilot program between the City's Animal Care & Control agency ("ACC") and the San Francisco SPCA required ACC to forward all feral cat complaints to the private SPCA to allow feral cat advocates up to two weeks to reach a consensus with the parties for adoption of a non-lethal TNR alternative. The program was immediately successful, resulting in less impounds, less killing and reduced public complaints.

From 1993 to 2000, feral cat deaths in San Francisco's animal control shelter declined 73%, and neonatal kitten deaths declined 81% citywide. Put simply, it would not have been possible to reduce the death rate appreciably, reduce field impounds, and reduce cat complaint calls without a TNR program.

In Tompkins County (NY), an agreement with county officials and the health department's rabies control division provided for TNR as an acceptable complaint, nuisance and rabies abatement procedure. In specific cases, the health department paid the SPCA to perform TNR.



TNR "is a full management plan in which stray and feral cats already living outdoors in cities, towns, and rural areas are humanely trapped, then rabies vaccinated, and sterilized by veterinarians. Kittens and tame cats are adopted into good homes. Adult cats too wild to be adopted are returned to their habitats. If possible, volunteers provide long-term care, including food, shelter, and health monitoring."

While feral cats may be the subject of complaint calls from the public, most callers do not want the cats killed. In communities throughout the United States, public health departments, together with animal control agencies, are seeking effective long-term solutions that respond to the public's increasing desire to see feral cats treated with humane, non-lethal

methods. TNR has proved to be the most effective solution to reducing complaints, improving public health and safety, lowering costs, and increasing lifesaving:

Reduced complaint calls:

- Orange County, Florida: Before implementing TNR, Orange County Animal Services received 175 nuisance complaints a week. After implementing a TNR program, as a result of fewer cats and fewer "nuisance" behaviors associated with the cats that have been resolved by neutering, complaints have dropped dramatically.
- Cape May, New Jersey: Since implementing community-wide TNR procedures in 2001, Animal Control has achieved an 80 percent drop in feral cat complaints.

Cost-effectiveness:

- San Diego, California: In 1992, San Diego Department of Animal Control killed 15,525 cats at a cost of \$121 per cat. That year, the Feral Cat Coalition, a private, volunteer organization, began aggressive spay/neuter programs. By 1998, the number of animals killed each year dropped more than 45 percent, with a potential tax savings of \$859,221.
- Orange County, Florida: Reported savings of \$655,949 over a six year period by neutering rather than killing feral cats.

Public Health Concerns:

- In an 11-year study of feral cats, researchers at the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Florida, Gainesville, found that the vast majority of cats were in good physical condition, with only four percent killed for health reasons.
- The Atlantic City (NJ) Health Department approved a TNR program

for the Atlantic City Boardwalk, which accommodates 39 million visitors annually. The Health Department credited TNR with helping to “prevent injuries to humans, protect humans from public health and safety risks, and promote a healthy human population.”

- In 1989, the Stanford University Department of Comparative Medicine in conjunction with the Santa Clara Department of Public Health and the Department of Environmental Health & Safety found virtually no health risk from feral cats living in close proximity to humans.

Lifesaving:

- San Francisco, California: Combined statistics from the San Francisco Department of Animal Care & Control and the San Francisco SPCA show a decline in feral cat deaths of 73% and a decline in neonatal kitten deaths of 81% from 1993-2000, as a result of a citywide TNR initiative. Officials also credited the TNR program with a decline in cat field service pick-ups, “DOAs,” and total cat impounds.
- San Diego, California: Statistics from the San Diego Department of Animal Control which show that while the number of cats adopted or claimed by owners has remained fairly constant over the years, there has been a decrease of almost 50% in the number of cats impounded and killed since the advent of a citywide TNR initiative.

So how can animal control agencies exploit the public health, lifesaving, and cost benefits of TNR?

- Develop a policy citing TNR as the preferred—if not only acceptable—response to feral cat service calls.
- Include saving feral cats in the community definition of No Kill.

- Train staff of the shelter to offer TNR as an alternative to trapping and killing.
- Provide TNR literature in the lobby of shelters, on websites, and in response to public calls or complaints.
- Allow feral cats to be transferred to feral cat and rescue groups.
- Shelters should transfer feral kittens to feral cat groups for socialization and placement.
- Shelters should place feral kittens into foster care for socializing, and subsequent adoption.
- Meet with feral cat groups to discuss ways to achieve reductions in, and ultimately an end to, the killing of feral cats. An initial program, for example, could require the shelter to contact groups if notched or ear-tipped cats enter the shelter in order to reunite them with their caretakers. A more comprehensive program would include referral of “nuisance” complaints to feral cat groups so that a non-lethal solution can be attempted before animal control intervenes, or the animal control shelter provides non-lethal intervention itself.
- Provide official recognition, and thus advocacy support, to groups encountering neighbor disputes or problems relating to their TNR effort.
- Establish training workshops for individuals on humane trapping, feral cat medical issues, post-surgery recovery care, and other issues to increase the number of feral cat caretakers.
- Do not lend out traps for indiscriminate trapping or for the purpose of removing feral cats to be killed.
- Unless legally obligated to do so, shelters should not accept feral cats except for the purposes of TNR.
- Utilize alternative release sites for feral cats who can no longer safely remain in their habitats.

- As low- and no-cost spay/neuter programs are put into place, include feral cat TNR in the effort.
- Seek donated food for caretakers.
- Establish a more positive image of feral cats in the community.
- Offer no cost spay/neuter services for feral cats. (It is not only humane, but it is far cheaper to neuter a feral cat than to impound, house, feed, kill and then dispose of the feral cat's body.)

By establishing a policy preference for TNR, providing training on humane trapping and other aspects of feral cat care, establishing a relationship with community feral cat groups, spaying and neutering rather than killing feral cats, and offering TNR to individuals calling about feral cats, an animal control agency can meet its obligation to public health and safety, and help maintain neighborhood tranquility in a humane, non-lethal and cost-effective manner.



Against Anti-Cat Laws

The No Kill Advocacy Center has long called for the abolition of cat leash laws, bans on feeding stray animals, pet limit laws, and cat licensing laws, as these are the primary tools animal control agencies use to impound and kill feral and free roaming cats.

As cats are picked up for perceived violations of these laws, they are ultimately killed en masse in shelters. That is why the No Kill Advocacy Center model shelter reform legislation, *The Companion Animal*

Protection Act, repeals these laws or, where applicable, states that caretakers of feral cats are specifically exempted from such laws.

(www.nokilladvocacycenter.org/capa.html)

Not surprisingly, the U.S. No Kill Declaration also calls for:

The repeal of unenforceable and counter-productive animal control ordinances such as cat licensing and leash laws, pet limit laws, [and] bans on feeding stray animals...

(www.nokilldeclaration.org)

Unfortunately, as jurisdictions are looking to generate user fees to offset general fund expenditures, they are increasingly looking at cat licensing laws as the answer, promising that licensing cats will not only help them fund services, but it will help save the lives of more cats. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Cat Licensing: An Analysis of Claims

By Richard Avanzino and Pam Rockwell.

Can licensing wipe out homelessness, raise the status of the underprivileged, eliminate the budget crisis, and make people more caring and responsible? Few would believe these claims, if made about a program to license people. Yet, when it comes to cats, we are asked to believe all these claims are true: according to proponents, mandatory cat licensing will put an end to the problem of stray and abandoned cats, raise the status of felines, increase funding for budget-strapped animal control agencies, and make cat owners more responsible. Unfortunately, licensing cats, like

licensing people, won't do any of these things...

In our view, the primary effects of mandatory cat licensing would be to:

- Put the lives and well-being of cats at risk, and rationalize round-up-and-kill campaigns;
- Penalize responsible cat owners, and force many compassionate caretakers to stop providing for homeless cats;
- Cost taxpayers money; and
- Inappropriately expand the power of government.

Indeed the most vocal proponents of cat licensing have been animal control agencies and humane organizations that hold contracts to do animal control—the very agencies and organizations that stand to gain the most in terms of more staff, larger budgets, and expanded enforcement power. Since none of this expanded power will help either cats, their caretakers, or taxpayers, we cannot escape the conclusion that the call for cat licensing has more to do with entrenching bureaucracy than with compassion, saving lives, and providing a helping hand to those who care.

CLAIM: Cat Licensing will make cat owners more responsible.

Caring can't be mandated, and a licensing mandate will only end up punishing those who care. There are millions of compassionate people who provide abandoned cats with food, love, and shelter in their own homes. Others put aside their own needs in order to care for a beloved pet or make sure a shy and reclusive neighborhood cat has daily sustenance and medical attention. Still others work tirelessly to feed foster and

rehabilitate feral cats and kittens, all at their own personal expense. For every one of these caregivers, mandatory cat licensing will exact a heavy toll. These people will either have to pay the license fees - or face citations, fines, penalties, and possible confiscation of the animals they love. These new burdens, inflicted on the very people who are doing the most to help cats in their communities, will force many to stop caring for these animals, or at least force them to care for fewer cats, with the net result being more cats left to fend for themselves and fewer people able to provide them with any kind of safety net at all.

In response to these concerns, some cat licensing proponents have said that enforcement won't be stressed, or will only be "complaint driven." In our view, passing laws that aren't enforced or are enforced sporadically is just as unfair and counter-productive: Few people are likely to comply with a cat licensing mandate that isn't enforced. (In Los Angeles, for instance, compliance rates of less than 1% were reported, in spite of a canvassing program.) And people who "voluntarily" comply can probably be counted among the most responsible (and affluent) pet owners in the community. We see little equity or sense in enacting a law that only ends up penalizing through a licensing tax the very people whose behavior is already exemplary.

Needless to say, truly irresponsible cat owners won't be affected. If the law isn't enforced, they are free to ignore it. If it is enforced against them, they are likely to surrender or abandon their animals, which will only add to the number of cats killed.

CLAIM: Cat Licensing will help raise the status of cats.

In our view this claim is on a par with the suggesting that licensing poor people or the homeless will help raise their "status." Of course, cat licensing proponents aren't making a comparison to people, but to dogs: if cats are licensed like dogs they will apparently enjoy the same "status" as dogs. Unfortunately, dog licensing didn't confer any beneficial "status" on canines: it was and is a tool for protecting livestock, enforcing rabies laws, and ridding the public streets of the perceived threat posed by unowned, free-roaming dogs. Indeed, since 1933 California dog licensing laws have explicitly authorized the impoundment of unlicensed dogs, and millions of dogs have been impounded and killed by animal control agencies throughout the state as a result of these mandatory licensing laws.

This is the precedent to which proponents of cat licensing appeal when they claim that licensing will raise the "status" of cats. We doubt, however, whether cats would choose such a status for themselves. They might well prefer to retain the unlicensed status they now share with humans. And the dogs may want to join them.

CLAIM: Cat licensing will result in more cats being redeemed at shelters.

Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that cat redemptions are just as likely, if not more likely, to decline once voluntary cat identification efforts are replaced with a coercive licensing mandate. In Los Angeles County, for instance, the number of stray cats redeemed by their owners was

reported to be down 32% following implementation of mandatory laws.

Proponents have tended to ignore evidence like this, and instead point to the fact that dogs, who have been subject to licensing laws for years, enjoy higher redemption rates than cats. But dogs differ from cats in many ways, and there is no reason to think licensing is the factor that results in the higher redemption rate for dogs. Indeed, San Francisco 63% of the stray dogs at the City's Animal Care and Control Department were redeemed by their owners in the 1993-94 fiscal year. Yet less than 4% of the dogs impounded during that time were licensed. It seems clear, then, that factors other than licensing are responsible for the high redemption rate for dogs.

The most obvious reason for the difference between dog and cat redemption rates is the fact that a much higher proportion of the dogs who are impounded are "owned" in the first place. Few dogs are found, for instance, in the type of feral or doorstep colonies that thousands of cats call home, nor are there many unowned neighborhood dogs. Since most dogs impounded are likely to be "owned" by someone, it makes sense that many more would be redeemed. And since a much smaller proportion of impounded cats are "owned" - a Santa Clara study estimated that less than 9% of all stray cats handled by that county's animal control agency were owned - it makes sense that far fewer cats are redeemed. A licensing program obviously can't change that, unless, of course, it is accomplished by concentrated efforts to round up and kill all unowned cats in a community.

CLAIM: Cat licensing will help reduce the number of stray and abandoned cats.

The only way cat licensing will reduce the number of stray and abandoned cats is if it is enforced by rounding up unlicensed cats and taking them to the local animal control agency where the vast majority will be killed. And this, we fear, is exactly what will happen. Many individuals and groups openly advocate for cat control measures like licensing as a vehicle for round-up-and-kill measures. And even animal control agencies that disclaim any intention of initiating round-up-and-kill programs will have to respond to complaints about cats from these individuals and groups, which will inevitably result in cats being rounded up and killed.

Without round-up-and-kill measures it seems apparent that cat licensing will only work to increase, not decrease, the number of homeless cats. Faced with citations and penalties for not complying cat caretakers who can't afford the new license fees will be forced to surrender their animals to the local shelter or abandon them to fend for themselves. Neighborhood cats, cats in doorstep colonies or multi-cat households, cherished pets owned by seniors on restricted incomes, feral cats with caretakers on limited budgets. These are the kinds of cats who will be most at risk, and for whom a licensing mandate could well be fatal. Of course, for the stray and abandoned cats already in the community, licensing will do nothing.

CLAIM: Cat licensing will help decrease shelter euthanasia.

Since cat licensing will likely result in more cats being surrendered to

shelters and abandoned in the community, since it will not appreciably affect redemptions, and since it may very well become a vehicle for round-up-and-kill campaigns, it is difficult for us to see how it would result in a decrease in shelter euthanasia.

CLAIM: Cat licensing will raise money to help fund animal control agencies.

Cat licensing will cost local governments and taxpayers money, not raise it, resulting in a net loss to animal control and/or other vital government services. Indeed, we doubt whether revenues raised would even cover basic administrative expenses. For example, each license fee collected - and most proposals we've seen set the fee between \$5 and \$10 - will have to cover the costs of manufacturing, handling, storing and mailing the actual licenses (and/or implanting microchips), handling the checks and cash received, issuing receipts, recording and filing the necessary data on each cat and owner, updating the data as needed, responding to public questions and comments, mailing out renewal notices and reminders, preparing accounting statements and annual program reports, etc. This list doesn't include overhead or initial start-up expenses, like hiring and training staff to run the new program and developing new computer programs and databases.

And if the fees collected won't cover basic administrative expenses, they certainly won't cover the enormous costs of public awareness campaigns and enforcement. As noted above, "voluntary" compliance with cat licensing mandates is notoriously low.

To raise compliance rates, the community will have to be made aware of the new mandate: door-to-door canvassing, city and countywide mailings, advertisements in local print media - all bear significant costs. And these campaigns will have to be repeated on a regular basis to maintain public awareness. Of course, these efforts alone won't ensure compliance, and they will have to be backed by meaningful enforcement. New enforcement staff will have to be hired, or existing staff taken away from other essential duties, in order to patrol the community for unlicensed cats, respond to complaints, issue citations, prepare reports, etc. And all these costs will have to be paid by local taxpayers, either through higher taxes or through cuts in other vital government services.

CLAIM: Dog owners contribute to animal control costs through licensing fees; it's time cat owners pay their fair share.

Just as licensing fees aren't likely to cover the real costs of a cat licensing program, we strongly doubt whether the fees now paid by dog owners cover much more than the basic costs of administering dog licensing programs. From a fiscal standpoint, therefore, local governments and taxpayers, not to mention dog owners, may well be better off if mandatory dog licensing were simply abolished. In any event, enacting another costly government program that won't pay for itself isn't the way to give dog owners the equity they seek.

No doubt there will be animal control agencies and contracting humane organizations who dispute our analysis and offer projections to show that cat licensing will make money for animal

control services in their communities. we believe these agencies should be willing to stand behind these projections by having their taxpayer-financed budgets cut by the projected amount. Without this or a similar mechanism for accountability, we fear cat licensing will become yet another expensive government program that only works to inappropriately expand government bureaucracies at the expense of local taxpayers, responsible cat caretakers, and the animals themselves.

CLAIM: Regulating cat owners through licensing and other mandates is the only way to solve cat problems.

In our view, the way to teach people to be responsible pet owners and help the cats in a community is through voluntary, incentive-based measures which help people to do the right thing. Government mandates that seek to blame and punish pet owners are likely to be costly and counterproductive for all the reasons we have outlined above. Moreover, it seems to us to be grossly unfair to penalize the community at large through coercive mandates, when it is the local shelters who are the primary source of animals and whose policies and practices have the greatest impact, for better or worse, on local animal welfare issues.

We realize, however that in some cases local shelter policies may have failed and animal problems may be worsening in a community. In such cases, government intervention might be warranted, provided it is carefully focused to have the greatest impact. For instance, requiring shelters to alter animals before adoption and to devote a substantial proportion of their annual animal control and shelter

budgets (e.g., 10-20%) to offering free spay/neuter services would do far more to help cats and reduce [shelter killing] than cat licensing and other punitive mandates.

Learn more under “Reforming Animal Control” at nokilladvocacycenter.org:

- ✓ [The Dark Side of Mandatory Laws](#)
- ✓ [Against Pet Limit Laws](#)
- ✓ [Companion Animal Protection Act](#)
- ✓ [Do Feral Cats Have a Right to Live?](#)
- ✓ [U.S. No Kill Declaration](#)
- ✓ [Reforming Animal Control](#)
- ✓ [And more...](#)



A Model Feral Cat Policy for Shelters

Shelters must acknowledge that the killing of healthy feral cats is a profound failure at all levels—the public’s intolerance toward feral cats, the law’s failure to distinguish between feral cats and stray pet cats, and the view of some that animals are disposable. A municipal shelter which kills these cats may claim it has no choice, but this is rarely accurate. In addition, a shelter cannot and should not abdicate its responsibility altogether. If it is going to accept feral



cats, it should demand and implement alternatives to killing. We provide a model policy.

As a progressive animal advocacy organization, the No Kill Advocacy Center recognizes that feral cats are protected healthy wildlife and should not enter shelters in the first place. The No Kill Advocacy Center also recognizes that shelters should not lend traps or assistance to people who want to trap feral cats for purposes of removing them from their habitat and subsequent destruction.

This philosophy—while unassailable on its own—is part of a growing consensus in the humane community. For example, nearly 10,000 groups and individuals have signed the U.S. No Kill Declaration. In terms of feral cats, the Declaration calls for:

An end to the policy of accepting trapped feral cats to be destroyed as unadoptable, and implementation of TNR as the accepted method of feral cat control by educating the public about TNR and offering TNR program services.

It further calls for:

Abolishment of trapping, lending traps to the public to capture animals, and support of trapping by shelters,

governments, and pest control companies for the purposes of removing animals to be killed.

Because they are unsocialized to people, feral cats are not generally considered adoption candidates. As such, unwanted feral cats are routinely killed in many shelters throughout the nation. All shelters, therefore, must create educational and non-lethal sterilization programs that utilize citizen support and volunteers. A Trap-Neuter-Release ("TNR") program is the solution to reaching the goal of greatly reducing citizen calls and complaints about outdoor cats, as well as reducing unnecessary feral cat intake and subsequent death rates in municipal shelters.

State laws, by contrast, often require that municipal shelters provide cat control, including a shelter for stray animals. Because these laws do not distinguish between "stray" and "feral" and because perceived feral cats may be frightened pets, animal control shelters often accept feral cats who reside within their jurisdiction.

(Although it is inevitable that the No Kill paradigm will eventually lead to laws that make it illegal for people to trap and shelters to kill healthy feral cats, the same way such laws in California currently protect healthy wildlife. The No Kill Advocacy Center encourages and supports such laws and calls upon shelters, especially those which kill feral cats, to promote them as well.)

Unfortunately, not everyone in the community is tolerant of feral cats. But that does not mean animal shelters are powerless to balance their animal "care" and "control" functions

when it comes to feral cats, or to put in place programs to change the life and death calculus for feral cats while maintaining the shelter's municipally mandated roles. For example, animal control's mandate to protect public health and safety is consistent with and, in fact, enhanced by a TNR program.

Many animal control agencies in communities throughout the United States are embracing TNR to improve animal welfare, reduce the death rate, and meet obligations to public welfare and neighborhood tranquility demanded by governments.

In community surveys throughout the United States, it was found that the majority of callers to animal control regarding feral cats did not want them killed. Those same studies also found that public health departments, together with animal control agencies, are seeking effective and cost-effective long-term solutions that respond to the public's increasing desire to see feral cats treated with humane, non-lethal methods. TNR proved to be the most effective solution to reducing complaints, improving public health and safety, lowering costs, and increasing lifesaving.

In order to reduce the number of feral cats who enter the shelter and—once there—who are killed, a shelter should make information about humane care of feral cats such as TNR available on its website, over the telephone, in the shelter, and as public relations opportunities dictate and allow. An important aspect of the program is to educate citizens to view feral cats in the same vein as protected wildlife.

In addition, staff who have contact with the public must do the following when someone calls about feral cats or when residents attempt to bring in feral cats:

1 Staff—including field officers—should be trained to respond to public calls about outdoor cats by informing people about the benefits of TNR including the shelter’s sterilization services.

2 Staff—including field officers—should explain that the cat will be killed if left at the shelter if the shelter is going to accept the cat. The public is not to be presented with anything less than an honest assessment of what is likely to happen or be provided a false hope or assurance that the cat will be relocated or rehomed unless the shelter has created such a program. (If the shelter is not required to accept feral cats, the shelter should not kill the cat.)

3 Staff—including field officers—should explain the shelter’s feral cat program, which includes spay/neuter assistance. Information on TNR is to be made available to the person at this time. Staff is then to encourage the person to use the TNR program as an alternative.

4 If the person agrees, an appointment is made to bring in the cat for surgery or alternatively a voucher is sent to the person. If the cat is already in the trap, the person should bring in the cat and an appointment for surgery should be made as soon as possible. The person should then be told when to return for the cat.

5 All feral cats entering the TNR program should be sterilized and given a rabies vaccination. They should also have their ear tipped for visual identification as having participated in the program.

6 If the person does not agree to the program, the call should be referred to a community programs coordinator. This immediate intervention prevents cats from entering the shelter where they do not belong and allows for TNR to be implemented for the colony after a visit to the field and information gathered.

7 The community programs coordinator should collect and process this data in order for areas of cats to be pinpointed and mapped.

8 Staff should utilize tools (e.g., door-hangers, how-to fact sheets and educational videos) to organize and educate citizens in order for TNR to be a proactive component of the shelter’s No Kill initiative.

9 If a citizen brings a feral cat into the shelter and the shelter accepts the cat for any other purpose than TNR, information should be recorded with the exact address where trapped, the person who relinquished, and why trapping was done. The community programs coordinator or field officers should initiate communication with the neighbors from this location to return the cat if the cat is a lost/stolen pet or feral cat being fed. The cat may also be held and evaluated. If the cat is not feral, adoption can occur after the stray impound period. If the cat exhibits behavior consistent with being feral, the cat may immediately

become a part of the feral cat program.

10 As an alternative, the animal handler should contact local feral cat groups, seek an alternative release site for the cat, and contact rescue groups if the cat does not enter the feral cat program and is not returned to the colony site.

11 As a final last resort, the cat should be sterilized and released in an alternative location.

Finally, to provide them a sense of security and therefore reduce their stress, all feral cats should be provided with hiding boxes in their kennels and should be handled only as necessary with a humane feral cat restraint system. The use of control poles should never be allowed.

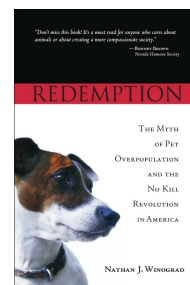
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A municipal shelter which kills these cats may claim it has no choice, but it cannot and should not abdicate its responsibility altogether. If it is going to accept feral cats, it should demand and implement No Kill solutions.

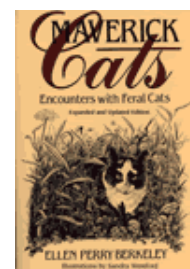


To learn about feral cats, pick up a copy of the following books:

- ✓ *Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America* by Nathan J. Winograd (Almaden Books: 2007).



- ✓ *Maverick Cats: Encounters with Feral Cats* by Ellen Perry Berkeley (New England Press: 2001).



- ✓ *The Wild Life of the Domestic Cat* by Roger Tabor (Arrow Books: 1983).

