



Spring/Summer 2007

# Mews & Views

## Feral Cat Caregivers Deserve Our Support and Recognition



Each winter — when temperatures nosedive — well-meaning animal welfare advocates present the media with educational tips to keep cats and dogs protected from the elements. In February, the Ann Arbor News ran two pieces from the Humane Society of Huron Valley:

A feature article quoted HSHV's Cruelty Investigator Julie Curtis that *"Cats*

*are 50% more likely to die than dogs if left in the cold."* and in a follow-on Letter to the Editor HSHV's Executive Director Tanya Hilgendorf added: *"Dogs are pack animals and are happiest, healthiest and pose the least danger to the community when living indoors with their families. The same holds true for cats."* Well-intended as these statements may be, they are in denial of the thousands of cats who live outdoors year-round (with no other options), are needlessly discouraging to the many caregivers in our community who care for them — **and are simply not true.**

### Dog Behavior Is *Not* Cat Behavior

Unlike feral dogs, outdoor cats pose no danger to the community. They are timid and fearful of people and maintain a very low profile. Most people have never seen a feral cat, despite the thousands living among us. They handle winter weather as well as other Michigan wildlife — growing thick winter coats and huddling together to share body warmth. Terms like *barn cats*, *yard cats*, *alley cats* depict their long-standing outdoor life styles.

### A *One Size Fits All* Approach Won't Work With Cats

Yes, companion cats are safest and happiest living indoors with their families — because they were socialized to people when they were kittens — but they represent only half of our cat population. For the other half — those who have lived all or most of their lives outdoors — this is not the case. They view people as scary and prefer to keep their distance.

Yet many of these outdoor cats have committed caregivers too. They provide these homeless outdoor cats with food, water and shelter — and see that they are sterilized — some-

times with our or others' financial assistance, sometimes on their own — to ensure that the cats in their area are no longer reproducing.

### Feral Cat Care Key To Eliminating Homeless Cats

Sweeping statements about how cats "should" live ignore the reality of how so many "do" live — do nothing toward improving the situation — and denigrate the efforts of the many committed caregivers in our community who are actually working toward a solution.

We all wish that every cat could live indoors with a caring family. But that cannot happen while unsterilized cats keep flooding our adoption pool with many more kittens than there are homes for. Since over 80% of these kittens are the offspring of these homeless outdoor cats, it's clear where the problem lies.

What is apparently not so clear is that the *only* way this can happen is through the grass-root efforts of these caregivers. Only they — using the routine feeding schedule of managed TNR — can find, identify, trap and sterilize the homeless outdoor cats around them. We should be praising their efforts — not demeaning them.

*All of the major animal welfare organizations — including the Humane Society of the U.S. and the ASPCA — endorse outdoor feral cat management as the most humane — and effective — means of feline population control.*

## Cat News You Can Use

### To Increase Pet Spay/Neuter Rates ... What works Best? A Carrot or a Stick?

About 75% of pet dogs and 85% of pet cats are now sterilized. This success was achieved voluntarily by convincing pet guardians that spay/neuter is advantageous to themselves, their animals, their community and the environment. Some believe that mandatory pet licensing is the best way to get the remaining cats and dogs sterilized — but since in areas where licensing is already in place, less than 25% of the community complies — that's very unlikely to increase the number of spay/neuters.

The least likely groups to sterilize their pets are the very old, the very young, and those with the least income. What has worked to increase compliance with these groups are free or subsidized spay/neuter programs. In our opinion, this would be a better investment of community funds than the costs of developing and administering mandatory license programs.

— Summarized from *Animal People*, December 2006



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## Tips on helping found kittens



If you find baby kittens outdoors and want a rewarding summer project, consider bringing them indoors to socialize them to people — and then finding them permanent indoor homes.

If you can't do this yourself, please don't rescue them until you locate someone who can. Those who can are typically overwhelmed by the numbers and so you may find that there is no one but *you* to find them homes. For an overview, visit our web site and click on Cat Handouts — *Kitten Care & Socialization*.

Finding kittens is a clue that feral adults are living in the same vicinity — and their outdoor care and sterilization are important too. Our Handbook, *Feral Colony Management* is also on our website. If you care for the adult cats, contact us for spay/neuter vouchers. And — if you place kittens in lower-income families — they can call for spay/neuter help too.



## The importance of feral cat ear-tipping



Many people new to feral cat management question why feral cats must be ear-tipped. The practice started in Europe in the 1970's as an easy and permanent way to identify sterilized and vaccinated feral cats. Years later it was popularized in this country by Alley Cat Allies. Our program — as most others — follow their model.

Ear-tipping is simply the removal of the top 1/4" of the cat's left ear and is done under anesthesia while a cat is being sterilized. It not only aids colony caregivers in distinguishing cats already fixed from those that still need to be done, but it also can save

outdoor-living cats from being confused with lost pet cats.

If this simple procedure saves a cat from being trapped twice for sterilization — or worse from being taken to a shelter where they are often euthanized on arrival — it's well worth it. No other form of identification has been shown as safe and effective as ear-tipping.

Our **Veterinary Scholarship Program** is seeking applications from cat-focused veterinary students for our 2007 award. Deadline for applications is May 31st. Visit our web site for details.

### Dear Friends,

We appreciate those of you who have put our spay/neuter posters on public bulletin boards — next to vet clinic referrals this is our most effective way to reach feral cat caregivers and lower-income families with unsterilized pet cats.

In 2006 we paid for the sterilization of 1,724 cats for 631 different caregivers in our service area. This was up 60% over 2005 — and for 2007, our goal is to help with the sterilization of 3,000 more. And this is being done with no paid staff — no brick-and-mortar building — but literally through the grassroots efforts of you — the caring members of our community.

Partnering with 45 different vet clinics — most of whom generously discount their prices — we're able to put spay/neuter into the neighborhoods to make it more accessible for all the cats who live below the traditional spay/neuter radar. We — and the cats in our community — very much appreciate your efforts.

Thank you!

*Kitty Zimmer*

*P.S. We've enclosed a copy of our spay/neuter poster — if you pass a bulletin board, would you kindly post it?*