FERAL FREEDOM:
Keeping community cats out of shelters

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Free-roaming community cats

- **Stray cats**
  - Homeless pet cats
  - Socialized/friendly
    - Abandoned
    - Lost

- **Feral cats**
  - Untamed/evasive
    - Born in the wild
    - Stray cats turned wild
illions and millions of cats

- 82-88 million pet cats in the U.S. (Chu JAVMA 2009)
  - 80-85% are sterilized
- 10-90 million free-roaming unowned cats in the U.S. (Levy JAVMA 2003)
  - ~2% are sterilized
  - Number ~ human population ÷ 6 (Levy JAVMA 2004)

What is the source of overpopulation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pet Cats</th>
<th>Community cats</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85 million</td>
<td>85 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterilization rate</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litters/year</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live births/litter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kittens born/year</td>
<td>27 million</td>
<td>175 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitten survival</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live at 3 months</td>
<td>20 million</td>
<td>88 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Community cats = most important source of cat overpopulation
Animal control’s top concerns

- 2004 survey: 134 Ohio animal control agencies
  - 30% - feral and stray cats
  - 16% - overpopulation
  - 13% - cruelty and neglect
  - 13% - abandoned and stray dogs
  - 10% - lack of spay-neuter services
  - 18% - other

(Control of community cats)

- One of the most controversial issues in animal welfare
- Environmental concerns
- Public health concerns
- Cat welfare concerns
  - What is an acceptable quality of life for them?
  - Should their lives be judged any differently from other species living “in the wild”?
Historic cat control policies

- Ignore them
- Lethal control
  - Destruction, poison, infection, hunting, trapping effective on uninhabited islands, not mainland
  - Culling via animal shelters controls short-term nuisances but does not control population

Adoption option

- Ideal outcome for cats is adoption to indoor home
- Cat overpopulation
  - >50% of cats in shelters are euthanized
- Truly feral cats are not suitable pets
Sanctuary option

- Care for life
- Limited capacity
- Expensive
- Many sanctuaries also operate neuter-return programs to increase capacity
- Many sanctuaries are overcrowded and under-resourced, leading to poor welfare

Public opinion polls

- 2007 telephone survey
  (Chu 2007 ACA Law & Policy Brief)
  - What would you do about unowned cats in the street?
    - 81% would leave the cats alone
    - 14% would trap and kill the cats
  - What if you knew the cats only lived for 2 years?
    - 72% would still leave the cats alone
    - 21% would trap and kill the cats
- Public opinion survey in Ohio indicated that most people are compassionate toward “street cats”
  (Lord JAVMA 2008)
Public support of community cats

- Feeding unowned community cats is a common activity
  - Alachua County FL: 12% of households fed 3.6 cats they did not own (Centonze JAVMA 2002)
  - Santa Clara County CA: 10% of households fed 3.4 cats each (Johnson 1993 CFA)
  - San Diego County CA: 9% of households fed 2.6 cats each (Johnson 1995)
  - Massachusetts: 8% of households fed 3.7 cats each (Manning Anthrozoos 1992)
  - Ohio: 26% of households fed free-roaming cats (Lord JAVMA 2008)

- About 50% of community cat feeders do not own cats

Outcome at animal shelters

- Feral cats are often euthanized as unhealthy/un treatable using the “Asilomar Accords”
- Millions of healthy community cats are euthanized in shelters every year
  - Not enough adopters
  - Following shelter-acquired illness
  - To prevent potential suffering from living in the community
- How much does this prophylactic euthanasia cost taxpayers?
- Is this compatible with the values of a humane society?
Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) option

- **Goals**
  - Non-lethal population reduction
  - Healthier and safer cats
  - Lower adverse impacts
  - Reduced public complaints

- **Core methods**
  - Live-trapping
  - Neuter
  - Ear tipping
  - Rabies vaccination
  - Euthanasia of ill cats

*Maximize number of animals sterilized!*

2007: An experiment in life-saving

- **Duval County**
  - Largest land-mass county in Florida
  - 857,000 people
  - ~143,000 community cats

- **Jacksonville Animal Care and Control**
  - Impounded 13,365 cats
  - Average population of 200-300 cats in the shelter
  - Adopted out 521 cats
  - URI rate >80%
  - Live release rate <10%
Shelter crowd control

Saving lives

Impact on Feline Live Release Rate
Changing a traditional approach

- Establishing the program with Mayor’s Office
  - Discussion of pros & cons
  - Discussion of costs
  - Ordinance issues
- Presenting to animal care and control employees
  - Acceptance – Push back
  - Dedication to the mission
  - Give it a chance then re-evaluate

Animal control, TNR, feral cats

- How does an animal control agency make the change?
  - “TNR” and “Feral Cats” (and “Animal Control”) immediately trigger negative thoughts & close people’s desire to listen to new ideas
  - Solution:
    - “Community Cats” is used as a newer term that is more encompassing of the cats that are actually free roaming in the City of Jacksonville
    - “Animal Care & Protective Services” renaming designates a new era
  - Program launches as “experimental” – with no government money or subsidy (collection & holding are the main role of ACPS in Feral Freedom)
To publicize or not to publicize…
. . . that is the question

- Active promotion & officers as ambassadors:
  - Immediate backlash – both from public and officers (officers duality of cats, apocalypse predictions, where is the proof, poor use of ‘tax dollars’)
  - Numerous complaints to elected officials, ACPS, media
  - Lightening Rod program – attracting unnecessary attention

- Respond to questions with honest answers:
  - Shift to passive publicity through citizen-initiated questions – honest answers to questions and education on a case-by-case basis
  - Citizens allowed to request no release
  - Almost all complaints handled only by ACPS (emphasis no tax dollars)
  - ‘Experimental Program’ – we are constantly assessing problems/results
  - Building data, establishing history - quietly

How it works

- Citizens borrow traps from the municipal shelter
- Animal control officers pick up trapped cats from citizens or citizens bring them to the shelter
- FCNMHP picks up trapped cats twice daily for transfer to FCNMHP Spay/Neuter clinic for TNR
How it works

- Cats have surgery, ear tip, vaccinations, parasite treatment if needed
- Cats housed overnight for recovery

How it works

- Cats returned to trapping site the next day
- Educational material left at houses near trapping/release site
By the numbers

- 14,282 cats
- 887 sent to rescue
- 169 euthanized
- 936 trapped more than once

The facts speak for themselves

- Live release & euthanasia
  - FY06-07: LR % = 14% [Cat – 15% Kitten – 13%]
    EU % = 86% [Cat – 85% Kitten – 87%]
  - FY09-10: LR % = 59% [Cat – 76% Kitten – 42%]
    EU % = 41% [Cat – 24% Kitten – 58%]
- City saves estimated $175,000 (5,000 cats x $30 ea + EU)
- Verified feline nuisance complaints – no increase (decrease in feral cat call) responses
- Decrease in shelter admissions — Feral Freedom, sterilization, better enforcement
  - INTAKE FY06-07: Cats: 7,592 Kitten: 5,863 TTL: 13,455
  - INTAKE FY09-10: Cats: 5,408 Kittens: 4,894 TTL: 10,302
2010: Being A Copy Cat

- City of San Jose
  - San Francisco Bay Area
  - Serves ~1,200,000 people
  - Est. 150-200,000 community cats
- San Jose Animal Care and Serv
  - Impounded 10,903 cats/kittens
  - Average population of 300 cats in the shelter
  - Adopted out 1295 cats
  - Euthanized 736 for URI
  - Live release rate 32%

What was SJ doing prior to 2010?

- 11,000+ cats/kittens per year
- Low cost public s/n ($5m, $10f ~ 4,500/yr)
- Special friends/ animal rescue groups
- Supported TNR (City proclamation)
- Adoption promotions
- Foster
Why Feral Freedom?

- Large-scale TNR must occur in order to make a significant impact on the number of free-roaming, breeding cats in our community.
- Time and space at the shelter is limited. Reduced days of care from 12 to 4.
- California Rescue groups are entitled to cats – F&A 31752(b). Unfriendly/stressed cats in the shelter should not die simply because they can’t be a pet.
- Significant increases in adoptions was not a solution to help the majority of adult cats.
### What About the Cat’s Welfare?

- Cats in the program are, surprisingly, healthy and well-cared for.
- Estimated about 50% of feral cats would be “saved”.
- Only about 40 cats in the program have been euthanized at the time of surgery.
- Only about 10 cats have come in deceased.
- Over 3,000 cats through program since 2010

### What is Different in San Jose?

- Government Agency is a primary participant.
- City does intake, s/n, vaccination, chip, tip and recovery during hold period.
- Non-profit rescue group takes cats from shelter and releases cats.
- No releases to environmentally protected areas.
- Non-profit manages educational material, website, and phone line for questions/concerns.
  - [www.catcenter.org](http://www.catcenter.org)
By the numbers

- Intake down
  - 2009 = 10,903
  - 2010-11 = 9,558 (-1,345 = -12%)

- Euthanasia down
  - 2009 = 7,370
  - 2010-11 = 3,768 (-49%)

- Euthanasia due to URI – decreased 69%

- Save rate for adult cats:
  - 2009 = 28%
  - 2010-11 = 80%

Taking Feral Freedom to your Community

- Need to know the intake, source, outcome of cats in shelter – define the problem.

- Engage leadership (Shelter/elected officials)

- Build trust with organization – donations/volunteer
Taking Feral Freedom to your Community

- Show examples of success – details of program.
- Propose as a pilot project – don’t focus only on permanent change. Results will speak for themselves.
- Must identify who will provide medical services – s/n, vaccination etc. (Include rabies, chips)
- Identify grants/donors/funding source
- Measure results

Why rehome cats that already have a home?

Feral Cats, Community Cats, Outdoor Cats

- Call them what you like
- Cats are living outdoors and doing well, they have a home

Who doesn’t qualify?

- Owner surrenders
- Indoor cats
- Declawed cats
- Kittens
Effective public policy

- No single solution is likely to suffice for all situations
- Creative integrated programs of adoption, spay/neuter, and TNR should be applied for maximum effect

Role Call of Feral Freedom Cities

- Jacksonville, FL
- San Jose, CA
- DeKalb County, GA
- Marion County, FL
- Charleston, SC
- Austin, TX
- Salt Lake County, Utah
Feral Freedom from Coast to Coast: Saving Community Cats
– Jon Cicirelli & Rick DuCharme

No More Homeless Pets National Conference
October 21-23, 2011

Resources:

Best Friends Feral Freedom Guide
http://network.bestfriends.org/initiatives/cats/media/p/189614.aspx

Or google: Feral Freedom Guide Best Friends

Alley Cat Allies: www.ACA.org

First Coast No More Homeless Pets: www.FCNMHP.org

Questions/Discussion