Sheltering as a response to outdoor cats

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Two sides of one coin?

The welfare of feral cats and wildlife

David A. Jensen, DVM, MSc, DACVIM

There are an estimated 60 to 100 million feral and abandoned cats in the United States. By any measure, this is an important welfare issue, and the many bodies of free-roaming cats visible along roadsides across the country are mute testimony to the tragedy of their unhappy lives. Many people of goodwill want to maintain cats in colonies only compounds the problem by causing massive killing and crippling of native wildlife, jeopardizing biodiversity, undermining traditional animal control, enabling irresponsible people to abandon cats, and sending mixed messages about the veterinary profession’s commitment to serve the welfare of all species, including cats and wildlife.
Where I’m coming from

Humane Officer Kate Hurley's passenger draws some interest from one of the dogs at the shelter.
Which of these things is not like the others?
Which of these things is not like the others?
Some common assumptions on which sheltering programs are based

- Spay/neuter and educational efforts targeted at owners and pets will reduce shelter intake
- Animals admitted to the shelter have owners who might come looking for them
- Animals admitted to the shelter could be adopted if not reclaimed
- Extent of application to cats will vary by community
Sheltering as a response to dogs versus cats

- **Colorado 2000-2007**
  - Cat intake ↑ 20%/1000 capita, euthanasia increased 38%
  - Dog intake ↓ 11%/1000 capita, euthanasia unchanged per capita

- **Ohio 1996-2004**
  - Cat intake ↑ 20%, euthanasia ↑ 11,249 (69%)
  - Dog intake ↓ 17%, euthanasia ↓ 50,167 (46%)

- **California 2000-2010**
  - Cat intake ↑ 28%/1000 capita, euthanasia ↑ 74,115 (66%)
  - Dog intake ↓ 1%/1000 capita, euthanasia ↓ 61,982 (41%)

*Animal People, 2010*
Graphic picture ahead
Major public investment

“Severity, duration and number affected?”

California animal control shelters:
2000-2010: 2,510,741 cats euthanized
276,052 in 2010
756 per day
Cost?
Why?
What is the purpose of a sheltering program for cats?

1. Abide by all state and local regulations regarding control and care of companion animals
2. Resolve citizen complaints and concerns
3. Reunite lost pets with their owners
4. Provide adequate care to maintain health and welfare of cats in the shelter
5. Find new homes for cats
6. Euthanize only suffering or dangerous cats
7. Reduce suffering and harm associated with abandoned and homeless cats (to cats, wildlife, communities)
8. Mitigate feline overpopulation
Abide by state laws?

- F and A 31105. The board of supervisors shall provide for both of the following: (a) The taking up and impounding of all dogs which are found running at large in violation of any provision of this division. (b) The killing in some humane manner or other disposition of any dog which is impounded.
2007 telephone survey:
What would you do about un-owned 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
Reunite cats with owners?

- Only ~ 2% of cats reclaimed by owners nationally\(^1\)\(^2\)
  - Versus > 15-25% or more of dogs
  - 19% versus 2% CA 2010
- Study: Cats > 13 x more likely to return home by non-shelter than by shelter means\(^1\)\(^3\)
- 66% of lost cats found because they return home. Only 7% found via call or visit to shelter
  - Median time to recovery = 5 days

### Simple reclaim cost calculator

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily cost of care</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intake cost</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average processing/outcome cost</td>
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<td>Percent reclaimed during stray hold</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stray hold</td>
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<td>Hold to reclaim ratio</td>
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<td>Cost per reclaim</td>
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Provide adequate care?
Find new homes?

- Less disparity with dogs than for reclaim and euthanasia
- National 1994-1997\textsuperscript{12}:
  - Cats: 22-24%
  - Dogs: 23-25%
- Ohio 1996-2004\textsuperscript{2}:
  - Cats: 26-30%
  - Dogs: 24-38%
- California 2000-2010\textsuperscript{1}:
  - Cats: 21-20%
  - Dogs: 23-32%
- Flatter trend, increasing intake result in increasing euthanasia in many regions despite adoption efforts

![Feline adoption, CA 2000-2010](chart1.png)

![Feline intake, adoption and euthanasia, CA 2000-2010](chart2.png)
Not the only game in town\textsuperscript{14}

Source of cats, American Pet Products Association, 2012
Not the only game in town $^3, 25$

**Feline outcomes California 2000-2010 (n= 3,798,220)**

- Cats Euthanized: 71%
- Cats Adopted: 22%
- Cats Reclaimed: 2%
- Cats Transferred: 5%

**Feline outcomes Erie SPCA stray wait list (n=419)**

- Hit by car: 44.87%
- Vanished: 22.91%
- Unreachable: 13.84%
- Rehomed: 5.73%
- Keeping: 2.15%
- Found owner: 0.72%
- Took to rescue: 9.79%
• < 1% of > 100,000 cats at TNR clinics were euthanized for humane reasons\textsuperscript{8}
  • Median BCS 4-5 on 1-9 scale\textsuperscript{16}
• < 10% of cats entering shelters are sick/injured\textsuperscript{15}
  • Median BCS 5 on 1-9 scale\textsuperscript{17}
• Annual survival of semi-owned cats up to 90% (un-owned ~50%)\textsuperscript{18}
  • Median survival in managed colony 6.8 years; death/euthanasia on average ~ 5 years\textsuperscript{19}
  • Kitten mortality up to 75%; similar to other wild carnivores\textsuperscript{19}
Euthanize only suffering or dangerous cats?

AP-Petside.com Poll: 7 in 10 pet owners: Shelters should kill only animals too sick or aggressive for adoption

By SUE MANNING, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Seven in 10 pet owners say they believe animal shelters should be allowed to euthanize animals only when they are too sick to be treated or too aggressive to be adopted.

Only a quarter of the people who took part in a recent AP-Petside.com poll said animal shelters should sometimes be allowed to put animals down as a population control measure.

If we had thumbs, we would be snapping.
Is there such a thing as humane euthanasia in a shelter for a feral or fearful cat?
Reduce harm to wildlife?

- Studies show mixed effect of cats\textsuperscript{22,23, 24}
- General agreement on micro-habitat specific effect in most areas
- Most shelter intake is concern/complaint driven rather than targeted in space or time
- Capture, transport, holding, lethal injection and disposal is time consuming and costly
- Scope is insufficient to reduce overall population
Risk for some diseases is higher in ferals than pets, and vice versa.
Many conditions also carried by other species.
Most shelter intake is concern/complaint driven rather than targeted in space or time.
Capture, transport, holding, lethal injection and disposal is time consuming and costly.
Scope is insufficient to reduce overall population.
Discontinuing ineffective strategies to control predators can ultimately protect prey

Suggestions in changing Wildlife Services range from new practices to outright bans

By Tom Knudson
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Last Modified: Sunday, May 20, 2012 - 1:11 pm

Last of three parts

Like many ranchers, Bill Jensen drives a pickup, shoots a high-powered rifle and loves to talk about sheep, cattle and the outdoors.

But unlike many ranchers, he no longer relies on the federal government for predator control.

"We've pretty much learned how to control coyotes on our own," said Jensen, whose losses to coyotes have declined 60 percent to 70 percent - from about 50 lambs a year when a federal trapper worked there to 15 to 20 today. "Anything that can help you 24 hours a day, like electric fencing, is a good thing."

http://www.sacbee.com/2012/05/06/4469067/suggestions-in-changing-wildlife.html
Mitigate feline overpopulation?

- 50% permanent removal or 75% sterilization/release required to reduce population\textsuperscript{9,10}
  - Less than 5% of outdoor cat population admitted to CA shelters annually\textsuperscript{3}
  - << 1% in shelters on any given day
- Controlling complaint/concern driven population ≠ controlling overall population

\textbf{Role of shelters in controlling outdoor cat population in CA, 2010}

- Rough estimate 1 un-owned cat per 6 people\textsuperscript{7}; 1 pet cat per 3.5 people (AVMA), 40% allowed out
The bottom line: traditional sheltering is not an effective tool to eliminate or protect community cat populations.

Using a tool that's mismatched to the job is hurting cats, shelters, and communities, and distracting us from finding real solutions.
What are our *actual options* with regard to outdoor cat management?

- Non-lethal control
- Lethal control
- Lethal non-control
- Non-lethal non-control
- Non-cat directed activities
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• Non-lethal control
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• Non-lethal non-control
• Non-cat directed activities
Non-lethal non-control

Feline euthanasia Sept-October 2011: 337
Feline euthanasia Sept-October 2012: 31
FIRST, stop bailing. Then see if you can build a dam, divert the flow, build a boat, and/or learn to swim.
Realistic shelter based management options

- Expand the options for live release as possible
- Limit intake to only those cats that can be humanely cared for, released alive, or for whom death is clearly the best alternative
- Invest resources not spent on untargeted capturing, sheltering, killing and disposing of cats on programs to benefit cats, wildlife and communities
Any questions?

News of success or fiascoes? Email me at kfhurley@ucdavis.edu
Note: cat population ≠ cats generating concern or complaints

• Truly “un-owned” versus “semi-owned”
  • TNR of semi-owned may stabilize artificially supported cats/groups
  • Natural mortality may stabilize most truly un-owned populations

• May explain apparent greater-than-expected return on investment for some shelter based TNR/community spay/neuter efforts

References: Schmidt et al\textsuperscript{18}, Cicirelli\textsuperscript{26}
References


References


25. Personal communication, 2012, Barbara Carr, Director, Erie SPCA, Tonawanda, NY

26. Personal communication, 2012, Jon Cicirelli, Director, San Jose Animal Care and Services, San Jose, CA