



From time to time the AAFP will respond to emerging new knowledge or issues that are of concern to veterinary professionals caring for cats. Our welfare position statements, which represent the views of the association, are available at: [www.catvets.com/professionals/guidelines/position/](http://www.catvets.com/professionals/guidelines/position/)

## AAFP position statement

### Free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats

#### Overview of the problem

The AAFP supports the welfare of all cats, and strongly supports public education and efforts to promote responsible care of unowned, abandoned and feral cats. The numbers of free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats in the United States are estimated to range from 70 to 100 million.<sup>1,2</sup> Ignoring this population has implications for the welfare of the cats themselves, public health, wildlife and ecosystems.

#### Welfare considerations

Compared with owned cats, the welfare of these cats is significantly diminished. The mortality rate of kittens born in an outdoor environment can approach 75% by 6 months of age.<sup>3</sup> Their life expectancy is often less than 5 years,<sup>3</sup> during which time they may have a poor quality of life. Death from trauma, disease, starvation and climatic challenges is common.<sup>3</sup>

#### Public health

Unowned free-roaming cats pose important threats to human health. Zoonotic concerns include the rabies virus, *Toxoplasma gondii*, *Bartonella* species, *Toxocara cati*, *Microsporium canis*, *Cryptosporidium* species, *Campylobacter* species, *Yersinia pestis*, *Cheyletiella* species and *Francisella tularensis*.<sup>1,2,4-6</sup> A comprehensive review can be found in the AAFP 2003 Feline Zoonoses Guidelines. Human injury can result in serious trauma and infection.<sup>2,4,5</sup> While not eliminated, the risks that unowned free-roaming cats pose to the public can be reduced with veterinary intervention such as vaccination programs.



iStock/ornitobog82

#### Wildlife ecology and ecosystem disruption

Free-roaming cats are responsible for considerable wildlife destruction and ecosystem disruption.<sup>1,4-9</sup> Free-roaming cats are efficient predators, resulting in significant mortality of small mammals, reptiles and birds in a wide variety of ecosystems.<sup>9</sup>

Thus it is clear that all of the above populations (ie, the public, wildlife and feline) stand to benefit from the reduction in population of free-roaming, feral and abandoned cats.

#### Positive efforts directed at population reduction

The AAFP strongly supports reducing the numbers of unowned, free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats through humane capture (with placement in homes where appropriate) by local health departments, humane societies and animal control agencies in accordance with local and state ordinances.

State and local agencies are encouraged to promote public policies that:

- ✦ Require rabies vaccination for all cats.
- ✦ Require sterilization of all cats adopted from humane organizations and animal control agencies, wholesale and retail pet suppliers.
- ✦ Require sterilization of privately owned cats prior to sale or adoption if they are not intended for breeding.
- ✦ Require microchip identification of all owned cats (2008 AAFP Position Statement on Identification of Cats).

- ✦ Require keeping owned cats indoors, in an outdoor enclosure, or on an attended leash (2007 AAFP Position Statement on Confinement of Owned Indoor Cats).
- ✦ Prevent the establishment of managed cat colonies in areas where cats pose a threat to protected wildlife.
- ✦ Prohibit the abandonment of cats.

#### Non-lethal strategies

The AAFP supports non-lethal strategies to promote population reduction of free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats. All public, private and non-profit humane organizations must make every effort to promote adoption of acceptable unowned cats.

Permanent, enduring solutions to the problem of free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats will be achievable when:

- ✦ State and local agencies provide significantly increased funding to animal control agencies.
- ✦ Concerted and sustained public educational campaigns aimed at highlighting the problems associated with unowned cats and the solutions to these problems are in place.
- ✦ An environmentally safe and effective non-surgical contraceptive is developed.

Until such permanent solutions are achieved, alternate humane solutions exist.

#### Managed cat colonies

The AAFP supports appropriately managed cat colonies. Humane alternatives to the destruction of healthy cats for animal control purposes should be actively pursued by veterinary, humane and wildlife organizations. The goal of colony management should be the eventual reduction of the colony through attrition.<sup>10-13</sup> The AAFP opposes placement of managed cat colonies on public lands (except by lawful permit), in areas where at-risk wildlife could be threatened, or in areas where they pose a significant disease risk to wildlife and the public.



iStock/Savushkin

The AAFF recognizes that managed colonies are controversial;<sup>1,2,6,8-10</sup> however, properly managed programs promote the quality of life of cats through nutrition, vaccination, decreasing the numbers of unwanted litters, euthanasia of sick and debilitated cats, and adoption of healthy kittens. Appropriately managed colonies also significantly decrease the risk to public health, wildlife and ecosystems.

*Cooperative efforts aimed at population reduction of free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats*

The AAFF recognizes a mutual goal between humane groups and wildlife conservation entities for reducing the number of free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats,<sup>1,2,6,14</sup> and therefore supports cooperative efforts by all stakeholders in developing solutions to the problem.

The AAFF strongly supports widespread education of the public about the negative implications of feeding of non-sterilized free-roaming cats, since this behavior is an important contributor to the problem.

Continued abandonment of cats perpetuates the problem, and the public should be educated about the adverse effects of this behavior on wildlife, ecosystems and feline welfare.

Since a 'do nothing' approach is non-productive, positive public involvement should be encouraged to help develop solutions and direct public behavior towards existing alternatives.

**References**

- 1 Robertson SJ. A review of feral cat control. *J Feline Med Surg* 2008; 10: 366-375.
- 2 Levy JK and Crawford PC. Humane strategies for controlling feral cat populations. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2004; 225: 1354-1360.
- 3 Stoskopf MK and Nutter FB. Analyzing approaches to feral cat management – one size does not fit all. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2004; 225: 1361-1364.
- 4 Slater MR. Community approaches to feral cats. Washington, DC: Humane Society, pp 1-38, 85-86.
- 5 Slater MR. Understanding issues and solutions for unowned, free-roaming cat populations. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2004; 225: 1350-1353.
- 6 Longcore T, Rich C and Sullivan LM. Critical assessment of claims regarding management of feral cats by trap-neuter-return. *Conserv Biol* 2009; 22: 887-894.
- 7 The Humane Society of the United States. Wayne's blog: finding common ground – outdoor cats and wildlife. [www.humanesociety.org/news/news/2011/11/ferals\\_wildlife.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/news/2011/11/ferals_wildlife.html) (accessed June 27, 2012).

- 8 Winter L. Trap-neuter-release programs: the reality and the impacts. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2004; 225: 1369-1376.
- 9 Jessup DA. The welfare of feral cats and wildlife. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2004; 225: 1377-1383.
- 10 Anderson MC, Martin BJ and Roemer GW. Use of matrix population models to estimate the efficacy of euthanasia versus trap-neuter-return for management of free-roaming cats. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2004; 225: 1871-1876.
- 11 Foley P, Foley JE, Levy JK, et al. Analysis of the impact of trap-neuter-return programs on populations of feral cats. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2005; 227: 1775-1781.
- 12 Wallace JL and Levy JK. Population characteristics of feral cats admitted to seven trap-neuter-return programs in the United States. *J Feline Med Surg* 2006; 8: 279-284.
- 13 Mendes-de-Almeida F, Remy GL, Gershony LC, et al. Reduction of feral cat (*Felis catus* Linnaeus 1758) colony size following hysterectomy of adult female cats. *J Feline Med Surg* 2011; 13: 436-440.
- 14 Lepczyk CA, Dauphine N, Bird DM, et al. What conservation biologists can do to counter trap-neuter-return [Letter]. *Conserv Biol* 2009; 24: 627-629.

**Submitted by: William Ray Folger DVM, MS, ABVP (Feline), Karen Lovelace DVM, Sheila Robertson BVMS (Hons), PhD, DACVA, DECVA, CVA, MRCVS, Carlye Rose DVM, ABVP (Canine & Feline), CVA**

**AAFP announcements**

**New partnership with Bayer**

On September 21, Bayer HealthCare LLC Animal Health Division and the AAFF announced a new partnership designed to improve healthcare for America's cats. The partnership will work to uncover and remove the obstacles to routine veterinary care for cats.

'Like dogs, cats require regular veterinary healthcare and, without it, there is a significant risk to their health,' said Donna Stephens Manley, DVM, president of the AAFF. 'Through the combined efforts of AAFF and Bayer HealthCare, we want to improve the healthcare provided to cats and overcome the barriers that veterinarians have encountered regarding routine visits for cats. If cats are seen more regularly,

better care can be provided, especially relating to preventative care. This is an exciting partnership and we look forward to sharing the findings and solutions.'

**Largest conference to date!**

The 2012 conference, held in Seattle from September 20-23, was AAFF's largest meeting yet! There were 547 attendees who came to learn more about feline surgery, dermatology and complementary medicine. More details to follow in the January issue of *JFMS*.

**Attendee breakdown**

First-time attendees: 185  
 AAFF new members: 74  
 Paraprofessionals: 44  
 Students: 12

**Welcome to the 7th World Congress of Veterinary Dermatology**  
 July 24 - 28, 2012  
 Vancouver, BC

**EXHIBIT HALL HOURS**

- WEDNESDAY JULY 25, 2012  
 WELCOME RECEPTION  
 5:30PM - 7:00PM
- THURSDAY JULY 26, 2012  
 9:00AM - 6:00PM
- FRIDAY JULY 27, 2012  
 9:00AM - 6:00PM
- SATURDAY JULY 28, 2012  
 9:00AM - 4:00PM

**Cats were at the center of an overarching program of dermatology at WCVD7. More than 1600 delegates from 50 countries attended the congress, held in Vancouver, Canada, in July. Delegates had the choice of seven concurrent streams of lectures in the high-tech atmosphere of the Vancouver Convention Centre, including state-of-the-art presentations for the six major themes – allergy, immunology, skin biology, therapy, infectious disease and oncology. A well attended, two-day session focused on feline dermatology, covering pruritic and non-pruritic skin conditions, diagnostics and therapeutics, management strategies for atopic cats and feline otitis externa. Neoplasia specific to cats, as well as laser therapy and novel drug therapies and autoimmune disease, were special themes. Original scientific research in the form of 69 free communications and 122 poster presentations, many focusing on feline disease, was presented. Full proceedings will be published in *Veterinary Dermatology*. The 8th World Congress of Veterinary Dermatology will be held in Bordeaux, France, in 2016.**

**PRINCIPAL SPONSORS**

- Novartis Animal Health
- Virbac
- Elanco
- WAVD
- Dechra
- Sogeval