

California Humane Coalition

(California Against AB 302)

POSITION PAPER

THE CONTROL OF HOMELESS CAT POPULATIONS TTVAR-M: A COST-EFFECTIVE, ENVIRONMENTALLY-SENSITIVE, AND HUMANE METHOD OF STABILIZING AND REDUCING POPULATIONS

Until there is universal sterilization of household pet cats, homeless and feral cats will exist in our neighborhoods and public places, including urban, man-made, local and regional parks and recreation areas. Homeless and feral cat populations themselves are best controlled and ultimately reduced through sterilization and maintenance for the duration of their lifetimes. The TTVAR-M (trap, test, vaccinate, alter, release, and maintain) method is used increasingly throughout California and other enlightened States to address the homeless cat population issue. The TTVAR-M method has arisen in response to the inhumaneness, cost, and ineffectiveness of the eradication method of controlling cat numbers. The TTVAR-M method is a complement to state and local mandates for owner and animal shelter pet cat sterilization. The TTVAR-M also recognizes the important role that cats play in the ecosystem.

Sterilizing and maintaining homeless cats is cost effective

The costs of impoundment and euthanasia of a cat in a public animal control facility are considerable. In the County of Santa Clara, they are estimated at \$74 per animal of taxpayers' money -- \$46 for impoundment, \$28 for euthanasia (Coalition for Humane Legislation and Office of Council member James Beall). In the City of Berkeley, they are even higher (Berkeley Humane Commission). In contrast, the sterilization and maintenance of homeless cat colonies is uniformly accomplished by private individuals and organizations at no cost to local government.

As the recession in the State of California continues to reduce available discretionary monies for cities and counties and to place greater economic burdens on local governments for the provision of human services, there is persuasive argument for the TTVAR-M method carried out at non-public expense. And, TTVAR-M does work to reduce the size of cat colonies.

Sterilizing and maintaining homeless cats is humane

California is always on the cutting edge of innovation, and the United States sets a standard of animal protection for the world. The humane treatment of animals (for example, the Endangered Species Act and the Humane Slaughter Act) has been sought by millions of Americans. The California humane community is in the fore of the animal protection movement. The eradication of cats through starving, poisoning, shooting, or

impoundment and killing at animal control facilities is inhumane and particularly so in the face of the proven alternative of sterilizing and feeding them in groups. Because those who love cats can also love and wish to protect birds and environment, the maintaining of homeless cats and reducing their proclivity to hunt is humane. Mandates forbidding the care of homeless animals are politically tenuous. Mandatory eradication could be political suicide.

Sterilizing and maintaining homeless cats is the most effective means of population control

Until the total pet cat population is sterilized, the attempted eradication of homeless and feral cats will be doomed to failure, as the ecological vacuum created by their destruction is merely filled by irresponsible pet owners and therefore more stray cats. On the other hand, stabilized (sterilized) colonies maintained by a caretaker can be monitored for the appearance of unsterilized newcomers. In addition, sterilized and maintained cats are usually healthy and present less of a “public nuisance” issue than poisoning and other means of eradication.

Sterilizing and maintaining homeless cats is environmentally sound

Reducing the numbers of homeless cats through sterilization is the least harmful method environmentally. Poison and similar pest control methods wreak irreversible damage to the ecosystem and human populations. Cats, on the other hand, provide natural control of the rodent population and are self-regulating (see discussion below).

The bird predation argument is scientifically unsound

The hypothesis that cat predation of birds is responsible for the disappearance of species is refuted by the scientific literature (see, for example, National Geographic, “Silence of the Songbirds,” June, 1993, which lays the blame on a complex of factors relating to habitat and continental land management).

Cats, rather, by evolution are rodent specialists; and feral cats usually become scavengers, most frequently on human garbage (see, inter alia, reports by Paul Leyhausen, ethologist, Great Britain; Robert Berg, San Francisco; Ellen Perry Berkeley, Maverick Cats). “A deliberate strategy of scavenging has enabled many feral cats almost to give up hunting altogether” (Peter Neville, Great Britain). Cats, in fact, have a significant place in ecological system. “Cats suppress populations of other more damaging predators such as rats and thus allow denser populations of birds than would exist without them” (Fitzgerald and Karl).

Summary

The overpopulation of domesticated companion animals should be addressed by sterilization, an approach more humane, more time effective, and more cost effective than impoundment and euthanasia. Legislation and local ordinances mandating the sterilization of cats should focus on household (indoor or outdoor-going) pet cats and should complement the sterilization and maintenance of homeless or feral cats. This is the future face of animal control in the State of California.