

Population Management of Feral Cats

Position:

The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) supports the non-lethal control and prevention of feral cat populations using a multimodal approach. EHS practices Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) of feral cats, subsidized and accessible spay/neuter programs, and provides community education about animal care encouraging population management.

Definitions:

Feral: unsocialized, outdoor cats who exhibit high levels of fear and untamed behaviour due to lack of human contact during the critical socialization period as kittens, and continued lack of exposure to humans into adulthood. Feral cat populations result from uncontrolled breeding of free roaming cats. Because they lack socialization to humans, they are unsuitable for being kept indoors as pets as it will cause stress and compromise their welfare.

TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return): an approach for managing feral cats that is an alternative to shelter intake, which is likely to result in euthanasia since feral cats are not typically suitable for rehoming. In appropriately managed TNR programs, cats are humanely trapped and surgically sterilized, vaccinated, and ear-tipped to indicate that the cat is sterilized and prevent future trapping. The “R” may refer to Return, Release, or Relocate and can encompass several outcomes:

- return to a managed colony or place of origin,
- release to the place of capture,
- or relocation to a new site with or without management by a designated caretaker.

Summary

- TNR can be an effective strategy in reducing feral cat population numbers while allowing for the welfare of feral cats to be maintained.
- TNR is a component of an evidence-based multimodal approach to managing cat populations. Education, promotion of spaying and neutering, and keeping pets indoors are also required to reduce population numbers.

Rationale

- TNR is a strategy to limit a cat population’s reproduction, thereby reducing overpopulation. In TNR, feral cats are humanely trapped then spayed or neutered, vaccinated, microchipped, tattooed, and ear-tipped, before being returned to their outdoor home.
 - Ear-tipping is the universal symbol of a sterilized and vaccinated outdoor/feral cat to prevent future, unnecessary re-trapping. It involves removing approximately one quarter-inch off the tip of a cat's left ear in a straight line cut. This is done while the cat is anesthetized for spay/neutering and healing is rapid.

- Large scale TNR programs which target entire colonies are an effective component of a multimodal approach to reducing the number of cats. Because the cats cannot reproduce, the population will stabilize and eventually decline.
- Cats choose to reside in locations for two reasons: (1) there is a food source (intended or not) and (2) there is a form of shelter. When cats are removed from an area, new cats will move in or survivors will breed to capacity. Abandoned cats, offspring, and strays may also repopulate the area. The removal of cat(s) from a population is not enough to manage the population in the long term.
- TNR benefits both the cats and the community. In addition to controlling the population, undesirable behaviours related to mating such as fighting, roaming, and noise are reduced as more cats are neutered. Risk of disease transmission is also reduced with vaccinations conducted as part of TNR.
- Because TNR returns feral cats to their original area, they are not admitted to a shelter. This reduces the euthanasia of healthy cats who may be deemed unsuitable for rehoming due to their high risk of compromised welfare as a result of their feral nature.
- Public education surrounding the importance of spaying and neutering cats, the most effective management strategies of colonies, and the environmental and welfare implications of allowing cats to roam freely are crucial to reduce the number of free roaming cats.

References

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