

REPORT FROM THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON FERAL AND STRAY CATS

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED ON APRIL 2, 2012

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: JO FREEMAN, MICHAEL CHAPEL (BOARD OF
SELECTMEN), LISA SANCHEZ (CHAIR)



The Ad Hoc Committee on Feral and Stray Cats was formed by the Hampton Board of Selectmen at their meeting of January 2, 2012. The committee's charge reads:

Charge: With enhancing the quality of life for feral and stray cats and humans as the ultimate goal, this ad hoc committee will: define the scope of the feral and stray cat populations in Hampton; research the most humane solutions for helping these populations; research the costs and availability of potential solutions; research ways to educate the public, as effectively as possible, on the responsibilities of pet ownership as well as the availability of other resources, such as spay/neutering and vaccine clinics, the availability of stray cat adoption from area shelters and humane non-profit organizations, and whatever else the committee deems relevant based on their research findings.

The committee will include no less than 3 members, including one Selectman, and will meet at its discretion. Meetings will be announced via the town website and public participation will be encouraged. Before April 1, 2012 the committee will present its findings to the Board of Selectmen with recommendations.

The committee held three meetings (1-16-12, 2-13-12, and 3-3-12). The scope of the research was defined as follows: 1) identifying feral and stray cat populations in Hampton; 2) research on Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs and area non-profits that specialize in it; 3) research relevant Town ordinances and state statutes. The committee also discussed public educational strategies.



Photo (left) of a rescued feral kitten in Hampton, summer 2011, who was socialized and placed in a good home.

FINDINGS

The best practice for keeping feral cat populations in check is TNR, "Trap-Neuter-Return." (see page 6) Many residents in town have been doing this best practice on their own, at their own expense, usually with "Have-A-Heart" traps, in collaboration with local veterinarians. Sometimes, however, this "do-it-yourself" method fails because residents run out of resources and/or have trouble trapping all the cats before the next litters are born. The old axiom that not feeding them will eradicate a colony is a fallacy; feral cats choose habitats smartly and they know how to fend for

themselves among human populations, whether they are deliberately fed or not. Furthermore, feeding them keeps them healthier and discourages them from wandering in wider areas, which exposes them to more danger and makes it more difficult to TNR them. Removing feral cats just leaves a good habitat available for the next stray or feral cat that comes along. Since humans are irresponsible about spaying, neutering and maintaining their domesticated cats, feral and stray cats have existed and will always exist alongside human populations. That is, feral and stray cat populations are caused by humans and it is therefore a human responsibility to tend to them humanely.

Removing feral cats just leaves a good habitat available for the next stray or feral cat that comes along.

Kittens are not born feral; if tamed, they can be adopted. Feral cats, however, cannot be adopted, so they should never be taken to shelters. The other old axiom, “you feed it, you own it” is also problematic; people inadvertently provide food sources for feral cats (with bird feeders, for example, or by leaving food outside for their own pets) and open space – which Hampton has in abundance – also provides plentiful food sources. Cats are not the source of wild bird depletion; human degradation of the environment is. Cats improve our neighborhoods and open spaces by reducing dangerous rodent populations.

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Trapping and handling feral cats after trapping them is work that requires expertise and experience. Anyone who is trying to do this should consult with a veterinarian or specially trained professional who knows how to do TNR

safely, creating as little stress for the cats as possible, and respecting the breeding cycle by not removing nursing mothers from their kittens. TNR is not for amateurs; serious harm can come to the animals and the humans involved if done without proper protocols. We want to stress that residents who want to help feral cats should seek guidance from a properly trained professional.

The only highly reputable local non-profit that helps area residents with feral cat colony guidance is called C.A.T.S. Northeast, Inc. Phone: (860) 942-9676. This organization is very well-respected in the animal rights and advocacy community in Connecticut. TNR help, neutering for feral cats, and other medical services (including rabies vaccines) are free of charge (while their state vouchers last). They offer affordable medical care as well for those adopting stray cats and those on tight budgets. <http://www.catsnortheast.org/>

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One of the biggest challenges this organization faces is funding. Another big challenge is the humans who feed the feral cats (“feeders”) in the TNR equation. Too

often “feeders” who contact C.A.T.S. Northeast for help do not follow instructions and expect the volunteers to do all the work, causing disruptions in the organization’s already over-burdened schedule, problems scheduling TNR in the winter and early spring (before the spring mating season and before the vouchers expire), and unnecessary stress for all involved. Anyone referred to C.A.T.S. Northeast should be also reminded that the services the organization provides are not to be taken for granted, that instructions should be followed to the letter, and that as a non-profit the organization is providing an invaluable public service – their services are not a public entitlement, and should be respected as a volunteer effort dedicated to the humane treatment of cats and kittens.

The scope of the feral cat population in Hampton was gathered, mostly by word of mouth (as well as a strategically placed article in the CHRONICLE). Each of those who contacted the committee were either neighbors of people tending to feral colonies or those who themselves were tending a colony. The committee referred all those who contacted it for help to C.A.T.S. Northeast, Inc. The TNR for the largest Hampton feral colony, which caused public safety concerns in summer 2011, is almost complete. Though we are not 100% certain that we identified every feral colony in town, the numbers of feral cat colonies we identified is consistent with the numbers identified in a comparable neighboring town, Scotland, by their Animal Control Officer, Nancy Bard.

There is also a non-profit organization in Connecticut that has a mobile unit that provides low-cost spaying and neutering (including feral cats) and other medical services for cats. The organization is called T.E.A.M. The contact number for this organization is: 1-888-FOR TEAM (367-8326). Other contact information is listed on its website. <http://www.everyanimalmatters.org/contact.html>

For residents seeking advice on placing or adopting cats and kittens, the committee recommends contacting the non-profit Helping Paws, which can provide guidance tailored to the situation. <http://www.helpingpawsinc.org/>

The contact we have for the organization is Hercy Lord. Her e-mail is: hlord@snet.net

This fiscal year C.A.T.S. Northeast, a regional non-profit, used nearly a third of its state vouchers helping Hampton residents and also TNR'd 30 cats in the Chaplin/Hampton area without state voucher offset.

At the moment, Hampton does not have any ordinances related to cats, and the committee’s consensus is that none are needed. State statute mandates rabies vaccines for cats (whether they are domestic or feral). The state provides vouchers to offset the price of taking an adopted shelter cat to the vet for basic medical care. The state also provides vouchers to non-profits for feral cats. C.A.T.S. Northeast, Inc. is the only reputable local non-profit that serves Hampton residents and receives those vouchers. According to the organization, C.A.T.S. Northeast, Inc. received 50% more state vouchers this year than in prior years

and in Northeast Connecticut (its entire service area) there were many requests for assistance long before the vouchers were issued and long after the 2011-12 voucher allocation had been exhausted. It is a year-by-year allocation and the time between when the vouchers are issued and when they expire (at the end of March) creates a limited time frame for the organization's state reimbursement for these services. This fiscal year the organization used nearly a third of its vouchers helping Hampton residents and also TNR'd 30 cats in the Chaplin/Hampton area without state voucher offset, so our Town has a responsibility to support them.

Hampton does not currently have a contract with any area shelters or non-profits that take in stray (tame) cats and unwanted kittens. There seems to be some movement in other area towns and regional councils to bid for construction funding for shelters. It is the committee's opinion that this competition for funding is just that – competition for construction funding (i.e. developing humane principles for shelter animals are nowhere in the discussion thus far; the primary political issue seems to be construction dollars, not humane treatment of unwanted dogs, puppies, cats, and kittens).

The Town of Hampton currently does not provide residents with adequate information and

Any act of animal cruelty is a crime and should be reported to the police. Call 911

educational materials on: spay and neuter clinics, help for low-income pet owners, guidance on feral cat colonies, placement for unwanted cats and kittens, opportunities for cat or kitten adoption, and other non-profit services related to cats. Whether they are "barn cats," domesticated cats, or stray and feral cats that roam an area, the Town of Hampton should emphasize the responsibilities of cat ownership and the importance of stray and feral cat husbandry in its educational outreach; that is, the responsibility to spay/neuter cats, to have them vaccinated, and to provide them with whatever other medical services they may require. There are also animal cruelty laws in our state. Any act of animal cruelty is a crime and should be reported to the police.

Get Informed: Discover the Truth about Feral Cats

Outdoor cats have existed alongside humans for 10,000 years.

They are not a new phenomenon. Feral and stray cats live and thrive in every landscape, from the inner city to rural farmland.

Feral cats are not socialized to people.

And therefore, they are not adoptable. Feral cats don't belong indoors and are typically wary of us. However, as members of the domestic cat species (just like pet cats), they are protected under state anti-cruelty laws.

Feral cats should not be taken to pounds and shelters.

Feral cats' needs are not met by the current animal control and shelter system, where animals who are not adoptable are killed. Feral cats live full, healthy lives outdoors—but are killed in shelters. Even no-kill shelters can't place feral cats in homes. [Learn more about the animal control system.](#)



Feral kittens can be adopted.

Feral kittens can often be adopted into homes, but they must be socialized at an early age. There is a crucial window, and if they aren't handled in time, they will remain feral and therefore unadoptable. [Learn more about kittens and socialization.](#)

Feral cats live healthy lives in their outdoor homes.

Feral cats are just as healthy as pet cats—with equally low rates of disease. They have the same lifespans, too. [Learn more about feral cat health.](#)

People are the cause of wildlife depletion.

Studies show that the overwhelming causes of wildlife and bird death are habitat loss, urbanization, pollution, and environmental degradation—all caused by humans, not feral cats. [Learn more about the human toll on birds.](#)

Catch and kill doesn't work.

Animal control's traditional approach for feral cats—catching and killing—is endless and cruel. Cats choose to reside in locations for two reasons: there is a food source (intended or not) and shelter. When cats are removed from a location, new cats move in or survivors breed to capacity. This vacuum-effect is well-documented. [Learn more about the vacuum effect.](#)

Trap-Neuter-Return does work.

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) benefits the cats and the community. Cats are spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and eartipped (the universal symbol of a neutered and vaccinated cat), and then returned to their outdoor home. The colony's population stabilizes—no more kittens! Trap-Neuter-Return improves their lives and improves their relations with the community—the behaviors and stresses associated with mating stop. Trap-Neuter-Return is the humane, effective approach for feral cats. [Learn more about the effectiveness of Trap-Neuter-Return.](#)

You can make a difference and save lives.

Together, we can educate people about feral cats and the fact that they don't belong in pounds and shelters, and spread the word that TNR is the humane approach for them.

SOURCE: Alley Cat Allies, <http://www.alleycat.org>; copyright 2012 (screen shot 3-31-12)



RECOMMENDATIONS

1) The Town of Hampton should pay heed to the needs of residents seeking guidance on feral cat colonies. In the past, residents have received little or no help, even when they seek it from Town Hall. This must be rectified. There is no reason why residents who seek it should receive no useful advice or information. It is in the best interests of the Town to provide guidance and information on this issue and to task someone with this responsibility.

2) The Town of Hampton should develop an online media strategy for educating the public on best practices for stray cats and feral colonies, spay/neuter clinics, help for low-income residents with pets who need medical attention, and animal cruelty law. Providing information about adopting cats and kittens, the responsibilities of pet ownership, and guidance on placing cats and kittens are equally important. This media strategy should include social media (Facebook and/or Twitter) as part of a comprehensive outreach plan. Cat-related media are currently the largest “draw,” globally, on the internet. It would not be difficult to devise a successful online media campaign on these issues, but the committee feels such an initiative should be part of a broader and more general Town media initiative. Links to relevant websites should be added to the Town’s website as well.

3) The Town of Hampton should consider funding C.A.T.S. Northeast, Inc. in light of the services the organization already provides to our residents. This should be done through an annual line-item contribution to the organization in the Town budget, which could be supplemented by fundraising events.

4) If the Town of Hampton decides to enter into a future agreement with any area organizations (such as WINCOG or NECCOG) or other towns for shelter accommodations for cats and kittens, humane treatment should be its primary and guiding principal in all negotiations. Humane, healthy, and well-managed “no-kill” shelters save lives and money.

5) The Town of Hampton should develop educational materials (a pamphlet or brochure) and events to educate the public on the need to spay/neuter, vaccinate, and otherwise properly care for their pets and other animals living on or adjacent to their property. These materials should be available in hard copy for residents at locations they are likely to visit (such as the Town Hall or the library) and also educate the public on animal cruelty laws.

The committee members researched the matter of feral and stray cats in Hampton and developed these recommendations by consensus, taking into account suggestions and points of view shared by other residents who attended committee meetings. Should the Town of Hampton decide these recommendations merit funding, the committee chair would be happy to collaborate on producing educational materials (in hard copy and online) for dissemination and evaluate costs of outreach. The committee has established contact with animal advocates in Windham, Chaplin, and Scotland, contacts who are willing to collaborate on any viable educational media campaigns Hampton should decide to undertake.