



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.

"World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats"

CFA Guidance Statement on Freeroaming/Unowned/Feral Cats

Introduction

Awareness of the issues related to freeroaming/unowned/feral cats has increased in recent years. The "homeless" cat population in America fluctuates and is estimated to be between 6 million in the winter and 12 million in the summer (*Animal People, August 06*). These cats tend to form spontaneous groups whenever circumstances, including natural or provided food sources, are favorable to their survival. Their lifestyles, health and other conditions vary and they are found in urban, suburban and rural settings. Some cats are truly "feral" and untamed while others are abandoned domesticated cats fending for themselves.

Community problems attributed to this cat population include the burden on shelters caused by unchecked reproduction, predation of birds, nuisance and/or health risks to humans. On the other hand freeroaming cats are welcomed in areas where rodent control is desired and individuals often care for and respect cats who may be too "wild" to become indoor pets. Policies that advocate elimination of unowned/feral cats through trapping and euthanasia have proven to be futile. The existing food attraction and habitat can rarely be changed; therefore, as cats are removed, more arrive to fill the niche. Even more significant, this approach, similar to "pest control", projects to the general public an underlying adverse attitude toward cats. The Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) has actively promoted appreciation of *all* cats as special creatures deserving respect and lifetime care regardless of whether they are "owned" or not. The decision to alter a stray cat is very often an individual's first step toward acceptance and eventual responsible ownership of cats.

In order to stabilize or reduce unowned/feral cat populations primary emphasis must be given to reproduction intervention. Studies have indicated that 7% to as many as 22% of *all* households in America are feeding "stray" unowned cats. Several surveys indicate, however, that currently over 90% of these cats are not altered by those who feed them. Altering, taming and placing as many kittens and cats as possible in homes and preventing further abandonment requires broad based community efforts as well as cooperation among veterinarians, shelters and animal organizations.

CFA participants take an active interest in feral cat projects in many parts of the country and CFA with the American Humane Association co-sponsored the National Scientific Workshop to Evaluate Freeroaming/Unowned/Feral Cats (August, 1996). The following provides CFA's guidance regarding the care and treatment of unowned/feral cats.

CFA Unowned/Feral Cat Guidance Statement

Unanimously endorsed by the CFA Board of Directors on February 8, 1998

CFA advocates the humane treatment of all cats including those who are unowned and considered to be feral. We support the concept of managed colonies of unowned/feral cats on public or private property as a viable means to protect these cats and stabilize their populations. CFA favors trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs

involving trapping, euthanasia of unhealthy/suffering cats, vaccination, sterilization, placement for adoption if possible, ear identification and return to existing locations where ongoing caregiver management and protection will be provided. In general the transfer of feral cats to new locations is not encouraged by CFA; however, we recognize that in certain circumstances relocation may be the only satisfactory or safe solution for the cats.

Furthermore, CFA encourages programs to provide information and resources for individuals willing to alter and care for small numbers of back yard feral cats (“doorstep” colonies) in commercial or residential settings. We support increased community awareness and education, affordable altering and assistance with trapping, taming and adopting when possible. CFA believes that regulations requiring permit fees, caregiver registration, cat licensing, fines or other punitive measures tend to discourage otherwise caring individuals from coming to the aid of unowned/feral cats. Acknowledging the valuable service provided to the community by those individuals who care for unowned/feral cats will help to reinforce a public attitude of compassion for all cats.

February 1998 (Revised November 2004, February 2006)

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To correspond with the CFA Legislative Committee, please email Legislation@CFA.org