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Trap-Neuter-Return: Helping Chicago's Feral Cats

CHICAGO, IL: On the exterior, a feral cat is not much different from a domesticated cat. They don't merely roam around outside like some house cats do, they live outside. These cats have lived outdoors long enough to not only distrust humans, but also to fear them.

Because of their distrust of humans, feral cats are not good candidates for adoption, so shelters are not able to take care of them. Feral cats are perfectly happy and healthy outside.

According to the Anti Cruelty Society, there is an estimated 800,000 feral cats in Cook County alone and up to 60 million throughout the United States.

"It's an ongoing problem," states Dr. Johanna Krol of the Animal Care Center in the West Loop. "And until every last cat is spayed or neutered, it will continue to be a problem."

It is important to help curb Chicago's overpopulation of feral cats. The results of a sterilized and vaccinated colony of feral cats do not threaten rabies on humans. Neighborhoods with feral cats will also have fewer rodents and fewer behaviors associated with unsterilized cats such as fighting and breeding.

Luckily PAWS Chicago, a prominent No-Kill animal shelter in Chicago, has developed a program to help these animals in a humane way that doesn't involve euthanasia since they can't take care of the cats as part of an adoption process. The goal of the program is to decrease the feral cat overpopulation and it's called Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)

This program is beneficial because it helps curb the feral cat population and it prevents an overpopulation of these feral cats. It also keeps the feral cats healthy and safe from complications that arise from not being spayed or neutered.

The Trap-Neuter-Return process starts by removing the cats from their feral-neighborhood. After training, a volunteer can rent humane traps from the Lurie Spay/Neuter Clinic for a \$50 refundable deposit. But be warned, catching feral cats is difficult. "It's like trying to catch a little lion," said Dr. Krol.

Once the cat has been captured, it will be taken to the Lurie Spay/Neuter Clinic for surgery, where PAWS Chicago offers free surgery to feral cats.

When an animal is spayed or neutered, its sex organs are removed. While this may sound inhumane, it actually has many benefits to the animal and the surgery is less stressful for the animal than having litter after litter of puppies or kittens. In fact, many pets bounce back quickly after the procedure.

According to Dr. Krol, sterilizing animals is important because it reduces the number of unwanted pets. "If you go to shelters there are thousands of animals who die every year because they don't have homes," she says. Sterilizing pets helps to curb pet overpopulation and the cycle of breeding and killing. For feral cats, this is important because they are not even able to be taken to adoption centers due to their wild nature.

Another important note on spay and neutering for pet owners is that it reduces vet bills and reduces the risk of cancer for the animal. It also eliminates messy female heat cycles and reduces males' urine marking.

Once the feral cat has been spayed or neutered, its ear is tipped so that it can be identified to other rescuers as fixed. The cat also receives rabies and distemper vaccines. Its ears and any wounds are cleaned as well. It also receives flea, tick, and parasite treatment. This is an additional cost of \$20 for feral cats within the city of Chicago and \$25 for those outside the city.

After surgery, the cat should recover overnight in its trap. Female cats typically need 24 to 48 hours after surgery and males need 12 to 24 hours to recover. After that, if the cat is fully awake, it can be returned to the trapping site.

TNR requires dedicated and trained volunteers to keep an eye on feral cat colonies in their neighborhoods. With an increase of volunteers to help catch feral cats, the numbers will decrease and the others will live long, healthy lives.

"All vets are aware of it [feral cat overpopulation], if we get more interest in it we will have a better chance at lowering those numbers," said Dr. Krol.

SOURCE:

Dr. Johanna Krol

<http://www.anticruelty.org/p4p-feral>

www.pawschicago.org