



ALLEY CAT RESCUE

An Alliance for Cat Protection



THE STATUS OF CATS IN THE UNITED STATES

2022

**A report by
Alley Cat Rescue**

Alley Cat Rescue is committed to helping stray and outdoor community cats in the United States and around the world by promoting humane, nonlethal care that improves cats' lives.

Introduction

Did you know your friendly domestic cat who sits on your lap, purring, has a wild ancestor?



Photo credit: Margaret-Anne Robinson

Felis lybica, the African wildcat, is the ancestor of our domestic cat (*Felis catus*). *Felis lybica* is slightly larger than *F. catus*, but very similar to our modern tabby cat. The housecat's ancestors have been traced to the Fertile Crescent around 10,000 years ago. The Fertile Crescent is in the Middle East and spreads through the Persian Gulf, southern Iraq, Syria, and all of Western Asia, including the Nile Delta and Northern Egypt. Wildcats found the plentiful rodents around grain storage containers to be an easy source of food. Eventually, the wildcats hung around humans and befriended them, and the domestication process started. The cat became especially popular in Egypt and became a protected species there. Eventually however, they were smuggled out of Egypt and started their trek around the world.

Cats have become internet sensations. But their true modern legacy is as beloved companions to many millions of people. Conversely, they are also abandoned at alarming rates to animal shelters and, worse, to the streets to fend for themselves. Domestic cats are prolific breeders (unlike their wild counterparts) and decades ago they spread from the Middle East across the world to live on every continent except for Antarctica. There are an estimated 600 million in the world and possibly 400 million more living a feral existence; the domestic cat can revert easily to a wild state.

Pet Cat Demographics

Attitudes Towards Cats in Households

The household average of cats per home appears to have increased, from 1.8 in 2018 to 2.6 in 2022 (Pets by the numbers n.d.), based on a comparison of data from a 2018 AVMA survey compared with those of a more recent APPA survey. Best Friends reports that there are 4% more cats owned now than there were in 2018.

2016 AVMA data reveals people's attitudes toward their household cats have changed, and there has been an increase in overall veterinary care during the last two decades. The majority of respondents (76%) consider their cats to be family members and 54% of households report taking their cat(s) to a veterinarian. The survey found that 89.1% of cat owners reported having a regular veterinarian, a number that has steadily increased from 73.7% in 1996 (AVMA, 2018).

Sterilization

APPA data reports that 85% of household cats are sterilized (spayed or neutered) (Pets by the numbers n.d.). Despite this high overall percentage, the rate among low-income households (those with incomes 138% or less above of the federal poverty level or lower) is much lower at only 10% (Access to Veterinary Care Coalition, 2018). Nearly 69% of owned cats in underserved communities have never been to a veterinarian at all (Pets by the numbers n.d.).

The Humane Society of the U.S. found that when it makes veterinary services geographically and financially available in underserved communities, the number of animals in those communities who



are spayed/neutered rises to nearly 90%. Making sterilization procedures available to low-income communities is crucial to increasing the wellbeing of community cats.

Spay and neuter surgeries are less expensive when done at shelters versus private veterinary offices. As many as 32% of shelter-provided surgeries were provided at no cost last year. A smaller but significant portion of sterilization surgeries, 28%, were provided at no cost by private veterinary clinics.

Animal Shelter Demographics

Dr. Andrew Rowan looked at intake and disposition data reported by shelters. He extrapolated the data to represent 4,000* shelters and rescue organizations across the country. The resulting numbers show a promising trend over the past 11 years; while shelter intake numbers have decreased by about 27%, adoptions have increased by 17.4% and, even more significantly, euthanasia has decreased by a remarkable 82%.

Estimated USA Cat Shelter Intake & Outcome Numbers				
Year	2010	2015	2020	2021
Intake	3,799,872	2,909,060	2,555,264	2,785,544
Adopted	1,433,172 38%	1,607,880 55%	1,714,680 67%	1,682,784 60%
Died in shelter	96,688 2.5%	93,092 3.2%	69,024 2.7%	79,108 2.8%
Euthanized	1,776,868 47%	817,080 28%	399,885 13%	319,908 11.5%
Outcome Total	3,553,992	2,864,364	2,522,320	2,527,744

**Previous data calculations multiplied by a factor of five, but the most findings from Best Friends surveys reveal a factor of four gives a more accurate picture.*

The general trend over the past half century has been a decrease in euthanasia rates, for dogs as well as cats. In 1970, an estimated 15 million dogs and cats were euthanized in shelters across the U.S. (Kleinfeldt, 2017). Some of the reasons for this dramatic progress include much more public awareness about the importance of spaying/neutering pets and a shift in how people regard companion animals, increasingly viewing them as family members rather than property. In the case of cats specifically, the advocacy for and practice of TNR by cat rescue groups has had a great effect on sparing young kittens and community cats from being euthanized.

Despite this progress, the number of cats dying (without being euthanized) in shelters is an issue that requires serious attention. The percentage of cats dying while being held in shelters in 2021 was actually greater than it was in 2010. A portion of the increase may be attributable to reduced euthanasia rates, which particularly affects kittens, seniors, and special needs cats who would have been euthanized a decade ago. These cats are more vulnerable to infectious diseases that are spread in densely packed shelters. The solution is to decrease overpopulation, which will not only decrease the spread of diseases in shelters as there will be less crowding, but will also cause each individual cat to be adopted out more quickly.

Outdoor Community Cats

It is estimated that there are around 32 million community cats in the United States (Rowan, 2019). A feral cat is considered “wild” because she fears people, and this fear usually presents itself as defensive aggression. A stray cat is one who is acclimated to people but has escaped from her home.

Outdoor Cats and Wildlife

Some wildlife advocates believe that because some outdoor cats kill birds and small mammals, cats represent a threat to biodiversity and should be removed from ecosystems entirely. Research does not substantiate their claims.

A study released in 2018 by Bird Life International found that unsustainable agricultural practices, not cats, is the primary threat to birds, and the US North American Bird Conservation states that “Habitat loss is the leading driver of bird declines,” (“State of the Birds 2019”). Killing cats to protect wildlife has proven to be ineffective and the public is opposed to it.

Overpopulation & Welfare

TNR stands for trap-neuter-return, and this refers to the management of community cat populations through trapping, neutering or spaying, and releasing them to the same area from which they were trapped. Research shows TNR is the most effective and desirable method of managing free-roaming cat populations.



A 2019 study funded by Best Friends Animal Society found that targeted, high-intensity TNR programs in six diverse U.S. communities reduced cat euthanasia at municipal shelters by an average of 83%. This also reduced shelter intake of cats by 32%. Another study, published in 2020, showed that when shelters sterilize and release community cats brought to them, the euthanasia and intake rates may decrease even further. The study gathered data from a municipal shelter in Jefferson County, Kentucky over eight years, from the time it began sterilizing and releasing community cats and found that euthanasia of cats overall declined by 94.1% and cat intake by 42.8% (Spehar & Wolf, 2020).

ACR conducted a “Community Cat” survey of TNR groups and colony caretakers throughout the U.S. The survey responses show a solid increase in TNR practices from 2012 to 2019, and great results for cats from that increase. You can view all of the questions and response data on our website at www.saveacat.org/SurveyResults2019.html.

Out of the 298 responses received, a little over half confirmed that they practice TNR. That group of responders collectively sterilizes about 67,822 cats annually, with one third of the responders reporting sterilizing 100 or more cats in a year. The largest amount of annual sterilizations reported by a single responder was an impressive 15,501.

A non-sterilized female community cat will have an average of 1.4 litters per year. Once a community cat gives birth, 75% of her kittens will not survive to reach six months of age. Kittens are especially vulnerable to cat diseases because their immune systems are not fully developed. These kittens get sick easily and cannot fight infection on their own. They are also less able than a grown cat to withstand a parasitic infection such as fleas and roundworms. TNR is the most humane and only effective practice that dramatically decreases the number of kittens born to such a harsh fate.

Overall, the average number of kittens reported per survey respondent dropped from 3.34 before TNR was practiced in their colonies, to 1.7 after implementing TNR. The percentage of respondents who reported over 20 kittens in their care dropped remarkably from 48% before TNR to only 10% after TNR, revealing the TNR groups have greatly reduced the number of kittens within individual colonies.

TNR usually also involves vaccinating the cats for the most common diseases – including rabies, distemper, and viruses that cause upper respiratory infections – as well as attending to any immediate medical needs. This improves the welfare of community cats and keeps colonies healthy.

US Shelter Community Cat Survey

ACR conducted a nationwide survey on the community cat policies of municipal shelters and private shelters with government contracts. The goal of the survey was to identify key trends in government-funded shelters' attitudes and approaches to managing community cats. We believe the data we collected will help us and other no-kill cat groups identify and resolve the biggest impediments to ending euthanasia of healthy unsocialized cats.

We received survey responses from 226 animal shelters. A little less than half of the respondents were private rescues, unassociated with the local government. The replies from those shelters were not included in our analysis. Out of the remaining replies, about 62% came from municipal shelters and the remaining 38% came from shelters with government contracts.

The responding shelters represented gave us a good sample of communities of varying sizes, as represented in Figure 1.

Although about 36% of respondents do not release cats they receive with tipped ears, 75% of them marked that they are involved in TNR in some way - either through their own programs, through work with independent TNR groups, or by helping individuals with equipment loans/rentals. Another 22% of respondents marked that they are not involved in TNR but are open to the possibility, and only 2.8% did not support TNR.

One interesting finding is that out of a small majority of those who are involved

Figure 1

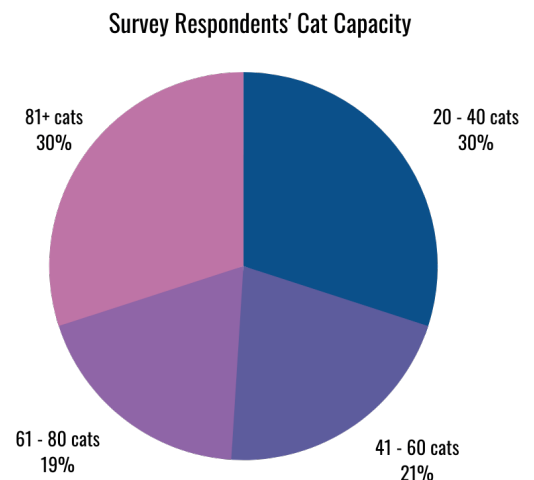
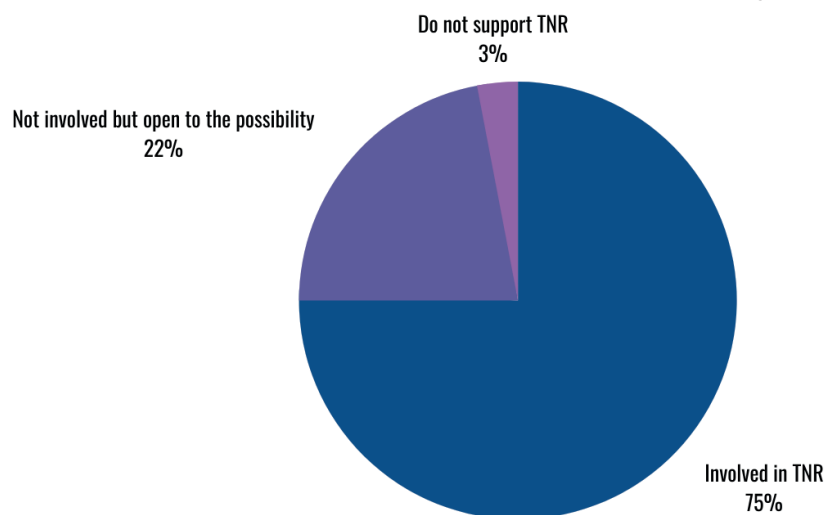


Figure 2



in some way with TNR, 52%, said that they have not noticed a decrease in cat intake numbers since performing or facilitating TNR. Yet 68% said that they have noticed a decrease in cat euthanasia numbers. That translates to a lot of lives saved!

When asked whether their communities are aware of feral cats in the area, 98% of respondents said yes. Unfortunately, about 34% reported that their community is not sympathetic to feral cat colonies and 38% reported their community is “somewhat” sympathetic. Enacting policies of humane management of community cats and their right to live in their outdoor “homes” is difficult without public support. Complicating the task for some of the shelters is the fact that one quarter of them (about 27%) reported local wildlife groups were difficult to work with.

All survey respondents were offered a free copy of ACR’s [Guide to Managing Community Cats](#), which we hope will help them introduce or strengthen practices that protect community cats.

Recent US Laws Affecting Cats

Policy reform and new laws affect the welfare of cats in homes and outdoor communities. Here are the most recent changes in policies affecting U.S. cats.

Laws That Passed

- Bill HB236 - Delaware
 - This bill increased the revenue stream for the state’s Spay/Neuter Program, which provides spay/neuter services for free-roaming cats and dogs and pets of low-income families.
- State Resolution SR402 - Georgia
 - The Georgia Congress passed this resolution to recognize February 22, 2022 as “World Spay Day,” during which the value of pets is recognized and all pet owners are urged to spay/neuter their companion animals.

Laws That Did Not Pass

- Bill HB1987 - Hawaii
 - This bill called for a count of feral cats per island by June 30, 2023 and then a reduction of all feral cat populations by December 2025 through culling. Thankfully, the bill died in the Committee due to widespread protest by concerned individuals and cat groups.
- Bill SB2328 - Mississippi
 - This bill would have, among other things, required the creation of a publicly available, online registry of people convicted of dog or cat abuse. Unfortunately, it died in a Senate Committee in February 2022 without being brought to a vote.
- Bill AB350 - Nevada
 - Similar to SB2328, this bill would have required the Director of the State Department of Agriculture to select a nonprofit organization to establish and maintain an animal abuser registry website.

Undetermined Laws

- Bill HB2459 - Montana
 - This bill would increase the penalties for the offense of animal abuse and establish an animal abuse registry. Let’s hope that Montana lawmakers can see the value in such a registry, unlike those in Mississippi and Nevada.
- Bill HB2224 - Arizona
 - This bill would ban owners from declawing their cats, and would punish veterinarians who perform the procedure (except in cases in which declawing is medically beneficial to the cat) making them liable for fines of up to \$1,500 or suspension of their licenses. The bill was

passed by the House Government & Elections Committee and will next be voted on by the full House.

- A similar Maryland bill, SB67, is also up for vote. It has been passed by the Senate and is next to be voted on by a House committee.

Check to see if your city or state has a declawing ban in place. If it does not, contact local policymakers and share resources from ACR's website <http://www.saveacat.org/news/declawing-what-you-need-to-know> with them about the realities of declawing. Effective and humane alternatives to the declawing exist, and everyone should explore these alternative options and refrain from this torturous procedure.

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