

International Programs for Feral Cats

Years ago, at a conference on animal protection, I spoke of a campaign to help feral cats in Australia. I referred to two campaigns in Australia to kill feral cats. The first campaign was when a member of the Australian Parliament suggested wiping out cats in Australia by the year 2020 through the use of a lethal feline virus (panleukopenia or feline distemper). And the second campaign was in 1999, when Robert Hill, the Federal Environment Minister, announced that the Australian government would begin field trials of the experimental poison FST-2 to kill feral cats. The designers of the new poison claimed that it specifically targets cats and would not kill other animals. Other so-called “safe” poisons are now known to cause birth defects, cancer, and additional problems in both animals and humans.

FST-2 works by slowly suffocating cats by depriving their blood of oxygen. The RSPCA in Australia has “cautiously accepted the results of the laboratory work.” The July 3, 1999, *New Scientist* magazine stated: “The effects of FST-2 are very similar to carbon monoxide poisoning. Cats given a fatal dose are dead within an hour” (Bonner, 1999).

The article goes on to quote Clive Marks

of the Victoria Institute of Animal Sciences: “It is very important that we do not have cats eating a sub-lethal dose, which leaves them debilitated.” Hugh Wirth, a veterinarian and president of Australia’s RSPCA, stated in the article that “he is satisfied that the poison is humane” (Bonner, 1999).

A young Australian woman in the audience got very upset with me and thought I was singling out Australians, making them out to be cruel and inhumane towards animals. I told her that most countries have tried killing feral cats as the first option, and that actually it was scientists from my home country of South Africa who first used the lethal feline distemper virus on the feral cats of Marion Island. (Refer to the chapter “The Effectiveness of TNR Programs” for more information.)

In truth there is no utopia for animals anywhere in the world. I wanted to start this chapter on international campaigns by making it very clear that the goal of Alley Cat Rescue is to bring nonlethal control, specifically Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), to feral cats everywhere in the world. Feral cats are considered by many to be “introduced” or “alien pests.” Feral cats were introduced by humans

hundreds of years ago, and killing them will not miraculously wipe them out. We should be ethically bound to treat all sentient beings with compassion, and whenever proven, nonlethal methods are available, we should be morally bound to use these instead of resorting to killing. When we have made these statements, the anti-cat folks have said, "What about all the birds and small mammals that cats prey on?" The answer to this is:

1. We are controlling and reducing the number of stray and outdoor cats, using acceptable and effective programs. Killing does not work. In fact it is counterproductive, allowing for unneutered cats to enter the vacated territory and the breeding to continue.
2. Cats prey mostly on rodents — they are rodent specialists — and they help society by keeping rodent populations in check.
3. Predation on rodents helps birds, as studies show that rats do far more damage to birds than cats do.
4. The birds preyed on by cats are mostly young, old, or sickly and would not survive to see the next breeding season.
5. Most feral and domestic cats live in urban areas. According to the 2009 "State of the Birds" report, "114 native urban birds species show a steady, strong increase for the past 40 years."

6. ACR asks all cat advocates to help birds and other wildlife by making simple changes to their lifestyles that will protect the habitat of birds. Take steps towards creating bird-friendly gardens, not using pesticides and fertilizers, and reducing the consumption of animal products, which contribute substantially to habitat destruction, climate change, and pollution. This is the single most important thing any of us can do to help birds survive.

Feral cats are under attack in almost every part of the world. The same myths that exist in one country about feral cats exist in other countries as well, with the possible exception of England. One and a half million feral cats live mostly harmoniously in England (most live in crowded London), without being considered a major health hazard to local humans. And TNR programs for feral cats have been implemented for a long time. As part of our dedicated work to help cats, ACR will continue to bring communities from around the world together, so we can humanely manage feral cat populations and reduce their suffering. For more information on any of our international programs, please visit our website.

ACR Helps Cats in South Africa

From an early age, I rescued a variety of animals; my family always shared our home with countless companion animals. In the mid 1970s, I worked with

the Johannesburg SPCA to TNR feral cats, which lead to my wanting to assist feral cats after moving to the United States. Years later, I've come full circle, dedicating part of my work to helping cats in South Africa, with the African wildcat project.

African wildcats (*Felis silvestris lybica*) are the ancestor of today's domestic cats. Unfortunately, like so many cat species (cheetah, leopard, tiger), the African wildcat (AWC) is in danger of extinction. Human encroachment is one reason for their decline. Land development forces AWCs to live on smaller tracts of land. Their habitats are fragmented, making migration from one tract of land to the next dangerous. Plus, habitat loss decreases the number of prey animals, making finding food more difficult. There has also been an increase in conflicts with humans; farmers shoot the cats, believing they kill livestock.



Alley Cat Rescue

African wildcat in South Africa. This wildcat's numbers are in decline due to habitat loss and interbreeding with ferals and strays. Alley Cat Rescue has a TNR project in South Africa.

Besides the dangers imposed by humans, hybridization is also a threat to the African wildcat. Local domestic cats (whether they are family pets, strays, or feral), breed with AWCs, which dilutes the species' gene pool, decreasing the number of purebred wildcats. Currently, the African wildcat is considered endangered and is protected under CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Appendix II. Unfortunately, this protection is limited (hunting is only regulated and/or prohibited in a few countries) and in South Africa, there is no legal protection for them. Farmers routinely kill African wildcats out of fear that they will kill farmed animals and livestock.

Adding to the problem, veterinarian clinics are sparse and locals do not have the transportation nor the money to take their cats to the vet. This means fewer companion cats are sterilized, which increases the probability of domestic cats breeding with the AWCs. ACR saw this first hand while visiting South Africa, when we spotted stray and feral cats in several of the cities on the outskirts of game reserves; the cats who were being "cared for" we were told were NOT being sterilized. It was clearly evident that interbreeding between wildcats and stray/feral cats is easily occurring and the need for TNR is critical for both cats.

In 2009, ACR visited with the Faculty of Veterinary Science of the University of Pretoria in Onderstepoort, South Africa to discuss the possibility of a partnership that would include operating a mobile

clinic on the borders of Kruger National Park to spay and neuter community cats. Due to the U.S. economic downturn, sadly this has not been possible. This campaign would go a long way in keeping unneutered feral cats under control, and help keep the African wildcats in the park free from hybridization.

ACR has also been working consistently with a group in Sun City, the Las Vegas of South Africa, to provide TNR to feral cats living at the resort, as well as cats living on the perimeter of Pilanesberg Game Reserve. Again, our efforts are to prevent the interbreeding of feral cats and African wildcats. To learn more about our program to save the African wildcat, please visit our website.

ACR Helps Cats in Mexico

In March of 2007, ACR visited Puerto Vallarta, Mexico along with four veterinarians and two vet techs to hold a free spay/neuter clinic. Over two days, we spayed and neutered 100 cats and dogs, including several feral cats. Many generous animal lovers helped with the clinic by volunteering, organizing, and donating supplies.

Laura Gelezunas, a Banderas News video journalist living in Puerto Vallarta, had seen the problem with her own eyes and contacted us for help. When Laura first called me, she explained that she was an American working in Mexico, and she had a passion for animals. She told me the plight of animals she had seen in

Mexico and asked if we could send any help to curb the overpopulation problem. Of course we jumped at the opportunity to take our expertise in working with stray and feral animals to help in Mexico.

This was the first mash-style spay/neuter clinic that ACR had organized, and the largest clinic for Puerto Vallarta. Vets joined us from all over the U.S.: Dr. Pervaiz Manzoor and Dr. Javaid Manzoor came from Maryland, Dr. Ajaz Alvi came from Chicago, and Dr. Bill Pearce came from Texas. Dr. Pearce was the only vet who had previously participated in spay/neuter clinics in Mexico. When asked why he volunteered at spay/neuter clinics, Dr. Pearce said, "Why do you do this? Because it's the right damn thing to do. And what brings me out? Because I can."

Along with sterilizing 100 cats and dogs, our veterinarians shared vital surgery techniques, postoperative care treatment, and tips for working with feral animals to the dedicated vets working in Puerto Vallarta, who now run their own spay/neuter clinics. There are an estimated 45,000 stray dogs and 100,000 stray cats living in the Puerto Vallarta area. The success of this clinic will prevent hundreds of thousands of unwanted animals from being born and is the first step in the fight against pet overpopulation.

Israel

For many years, both The Cat Welfare Society of Israel (CWSI) and Arad for Animals have been working tirelessly to

stop the cruel poisoning of cats in Israel. In 1998, after one attack by a rabid dog in an isolated area nine kilometers outside of Arad, the city announced that it would eradicate all stray cats and dogs in Arad. After the discovery of one rabid fox in the city of Arad in 1999, officials responded by ordering the poisoning of all stray and feral cats in the area (Friedman, 1999).

The Israeli government used alpha-chloralose to poison cats. This poison causes convulsions and consequently a slow, painful death. It does nothing to stop the spread of rabies. Israel's Ministry of Agriculture and Veterinary Services used to authorize municipal veterinarians to put out food laced with strychnine in the streets and fields. Stray animals along with companion animals would eat the poisoned food and die of asphyxiation over a period of 24 hours.

Israeli Veterinary Services claimed that the mass poisonings were necessary to protect the public from rabies (Friedman, 1998). Many scientific experts and world agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), have stated that poisoning animals is not only cruel but also ineffective in controlling rabies. In fact, it increases the spread of the disease by creating vacuums into which rabid animals can then enter.

WHO claims that the oral vaccination of wildlife is the only effective means to eliminate and control rabies (WHO, 2013). And the National Academy of Sciences stated as long ago as 1973 that, "[p]ersistent trapping or poisoning as a

means to rabies control should be abolished. There is no evidence that these costly and politically attractive programs reduce either wildlife reservoirs or rabies incidence" (National Research Council, 1973).

In the late 1980s, Rivi Mayer was one of the first people to suggest spaying and neutering street cats in Israel. Again, prior methods of population control meant poisoning. Fortunately this has changed and poison is now illegal. Mayer says neutering cats is not part of Israel's culture yet. More education needs to be done to get people to spay and neuter pet cats and the strays they feed.

In January 2000, CWSI, with the help of several veterinarians, trapped 70 feral cats at a kibbutz and neutered and vaccinated them in one weekend. This event led to the establishment of a TNR program for feral cats in that area.

The municipality of Tel Aviv has good intentions, but they don't keep up with the amount of cats being born on the streets. They have to do at least 100 spays and neuters a day to keep up with the rate of cats giving birth. "We can do 10 cats today, so 10 cats are going to reproduce less kittens," says Dr. Zvi Galin, Tel Aviv's chief veterinary officer. Dr. Galin contends, "It's something. For me if I can help one, I can help one. It would be good to help thousands, but I can't do it" (Rosen, 2012).

The citizens of Israel are becoming more interested in companion animals and in supporting humane, nonlethal control

of animal populations. A lot of credit for these changes must go to the tireless work of people like Rivi Mayer from CWSI and Ellen Moshenberg, who have never given up the struggle for humane care of animals.

Gambia

As is the case with many resorts throughout the world, hotels in the tiny African country of Gambia have colonies of stray and feral cats. Often hotels, which do not consider any other possibility, kill the cats. But the problem does not go away, and the hotels must keep killing.

A group of concerned people in the U.K. got together and found two Gambian hotels willing to let them use their facilities for a neutering project. The Gambian Livestock Services gave permission for a veterinarian to bring medical supplies and equipment into the country to help the cats. Funds were raised through appeals to airlines, pet food companies, travel agencies, and trap manufacturers. Veterinarian Jenny Remfry, who has had a tremendous amount of experience setting up international neutering programs, went along to help set up the program.

Monarch Airlines provided transportation for the 12 large containers carrying the equipment. Many of the hotel guests were interested in the procedure. Some German tourists even adopted three kittens and took the kittens back with them to Germany. As a result of these efforts, a

former Gambian government employee has organized the feeding of the hotel cats and will help coordinate future TNR projects.

Peter and Frances Miller, who initiated the project, have obtained non-profit status in the United Kingdom. They have obtained permission from seven hotels to neuter their cats and are working on training people in Gambia to help with trapping and feeding.

The Cats of Lamu

A unique population of cats lives on the island of Lamu, off the coast of Kenya. Cinematographer and film director Jack Couffer believes that the cats are the descendants of the cats of Egyptian pharaohs. Couffer spent 20 years on this island observing and caring for the cats.

In 1998, Couffer wrote "The Cats of Lamu." He and his wildlife photographer son, Mike, took all the photos. Dr. Jane Goodall had this to say about the book:

This is more than a book about cats — it brings to life a little known corner of Africa, with its age-old way of life and the fascinating relationship between the people and the cats themselves. The photographs are stunning, capturing the essence of Cat: They complement and add a great deal to the text. (Couffer, 1998)

The cats were mostly left to their own devices, with plenty of fish scraps to live

on, although many people fed the cats as well. Often, Couffer found that some residents were feeding anywhere from 20 to 50 cats each day.

Couffer writes:

The cats play an important role in the ecology of the town. Despite several centuries of frequent visitation by trading ships — the chief means of dispersal of rats and their diseases — there has never been bubonic plague in Lamu. Sharing duties with marabou storks, the cats provide the best the town has to offer as community sanitation crew and vector control department. (Couffer, 1998)

Unfortunately, he goes on to explain a time when the cats of Lamu were portrayed as disease carriers and killed. He says, “In spite of the record that the cats help in suppressing the plague, the possibility of the cats spreading the plague was used as a scare tactic to try to get public acceptance for killing off the cats” (Couffer, 1998). Finally, realizing that there was no way they would be allowed to kill the cats of Lamu, the KSPCA sent in teams from the World Society for the Protection of Animals who trapped and sterilized around 6,000 cats.

In recent years, a nonprofit trust, The Lamu Animal Welfare Clinic (LAWC) formed on the island to provide treatment, vaccinate, and neuter the cats. Since it started its operations in 2004, the clinic has cared for more than 10,974

animals all over the Lamu Archipelago. Lamu cats are famous — believed to be a preserved gene pool of the long-legged, fine-boned Egyptian cats of ancient times — honored rat-catching passengers on the dhows of the Arab traders of centuries ago. On the ships and in the shops and houses they are appreciated for efficient work in keeping the rodent population down. Their position in Lamu, a predominantly Muslim town, has been enhanced by the fact that the Prophet Muhammad was particularly fond of cats.

England, France, Italy, and Greece

All of these European countries have had TNR programs in place for many years. In England, the two larger and well-known groups are Cats Protection and the Cat Action Trust. However, several other groups such as SNIP (Spay/Neuter Islington's Pussies) have neutered cats in part of London, and they also have established an international team of veterinarians who will travel to foreign countries to implement spay/neuter programs.

Another group in England is The Celia Hammond Animal Trust (CHAT); which was founded in 1986. Over the years, CHAT has sterilized thousands of feral cats, and now has two veterinary clinics where they provide low-cost surgeries, as well as a dedicated rehoming/sanctuary center. Celia Hammond, who, over 30 years ago gave up a lucrative model-

ing career to help cats, told *Your Cat* magazine that she thinks she has helped rescue over 50,000 cats over the years.

In France, another famous model, actress, and singer, Brigitte Bardot, became known for her animal rights activism. In 1986, she established the Brigitte Bardot Foundation for the Welfare and Protection of Animals, which has helped thousands of feral cats through spay/neuter programs.



Louise Holton

The Torre Argentina cat sanctuary in Rome, Italy, has about 250 cats living among the ruins.

A remarkable law was adopted in 1998 in Rome. It guarantees cats the right to live where they are born. This means that they are allowed to live in their homes whether these may be in the Coliseum, the Teatro di Marcello, Trajan's Market, or the Caius Cestius Pyramid. It has been estimated that Rome has around 10,000 cat colonies. Many of the cats are now sterilized thanks to the efforts of a few caring individuals (Natoli et al., 2006).

Torre Argentina, Rome's Cat Sanctuary, is one such organization helping to care for around 250 cats, who find shelter in some of the oldest temples in Rome (400-300 BC). Everyday volunteers from different countries feed, clean, and care for the cats. Tourists are welcomed to wander the ruins, visiting with the cats and stopping by the gift shop. Patrons are also encouraged to "adopt" a cat to help continue their life-long care.

And Venetians believe that their city was saved from the devastating plague

of 1348 by their cats who killed the diseased rats. After visiting Venice, an English tourist, Helena Sanders, formed a group in 1964 called DINGO, to spay and neuter many of the cat colonies. Venice also adopted a law to guarantee cats the right to live in freedom (Natoli et al., 2006). DINGO helped to stabilize and reduce colonies using TNR. Thirty years ago the cats numbered around 12,000. The success of DINGO in Venice, using nonlethal control, is a model for other cities to emulate. Venice has been very successful at controlling its cat population, which was down to 5,000 in 1999 (Stanley, 1999).

Many visitors to Greece (me included) immediately see the many cats roaming the streets, laying around archaeological sites, and of course loitering around tavernas looking for a handout. On my visit to Greece, I thought the cats were in better condition than the dogs. I saw many dogs with open wounds from fighting and some were really skinny. We also

were struck by the many puppies walking around everywhere, some without mothers. I saw six Labrador-mix puppies sleeping under a sparse fig tree right near the Acropolis on a very hot day in Athens.

Many of the problems facing dogs and cats in Greece are worldwide problems; abuse, neglect, and abandonment. In Greece, it seems worse to travelers who live in countries that closely regulate pet ownership and licensing. And even though there is abuse and cruelty in other countries, the fact that there is some retribution for animal cruelty, could be a deterrent to those abusing animals.

Poisoning is very common. Thousands of stray dogs and cats were poisoned to “clean up” the streets and parks before the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, as is done in most cities prior to hosting the Olympic games. Government-run shelters are always full and animals live there in appalling conditions. Veterinarians are hard to find, especially on the islands, as I can attest to; I could not find a single veterinarian on the island I was staying on to treat an injured cat. I had to buy supplies and treat him myself.

After being included in the European Union, pressure was placed on the Greek government to bring its animal policies in line with other countries in the EU. But in 2007, they were reported to the European Court of Justice for “continuing lack of action for animal welfare.” The statement read:

The decision to take this action against Greece follows persistent shortcomings identified in the field of animal welfare over a number of years. The standard of animal welfare in Greece remains below par and the necessary legislation has not been adequately implemented. Therefore, the commission has no alternative but to refer the case to the Court of Justice. (European Commission, 2007)

Singapore

“Saving lives through enriching more minds.”

This great statement is the mantra of The Cat Welfare Society in Singapore. It works closely with town councils, housing boards, environmental agencies, and the Veterinary Authority of Singapore to resolve cat issues effectively and humanely. The Cat Welfare Society of Singapore wishes to cultivate a community outreach movement to reach people with the message of responsibility and tolerance. The group helps communities resolve issues related to community and outdoor cats.

China

Beijing is infamous for rounding up and killing thousands of feral and abandoned cats in preparation for the 2008 Summer Olympics. Four years later reveals a typical round-up-and-kill outcome — the cats are back (Bruno, 2012).

Mary Peng, co-founder of the International Center for Veterinary Services in Beijing says China does not have the tradition of neutering pets. Peng is a Chinese-American native New Yorker who has lived in Beijing for the last 20 years. She has taken on the mission of convincing Beijing's residents that the best solution to the feral cat population is TNR. Peng says Beijing learned in the recent past that exterminating cats just leads to a new colony eventually moving back in. Of course the mass killing of adorable kittens usually causes an uproar.

Peng offers clinics in English and in Chinese on TNR. She helps identify care providers, or cat feeders, to help get them involved with TNR. Cats are sterilized and given rabies vaccines. (China has a high human rabies problem; around 3,000 people die of rabies each year.)

Peng has a good example of a reduced, TNR'd colony. In 2006, 23 cats in a colony were trapped. As with every colony some were taken in and adopted, and today only five cats remain. "We proved to the community it can be done here," she says (Bruno, 2012).

Hawaii (U.S. State Worth Special Mention)

The English explorer James Cook brought cats to the islands of Hawaii in the late 18th century. Cats were valued members of the early sailing ships because they helped control the rodent populations. Mark Twain toured the island of Kauai

in 1866 and said: "I saw cats: Tom cats, Mary Ann cats, long-tailed cats, bobtail cats, blind cats, black cats, tame cats, wild cats, platoons of cats, companies of cats" (Twain, 1975).

Today, with a population of 50,000 residents who have made cats their most popular companion animal, Kauai has a large population of feral cats. Several Kauai natives such as Dottie Beach, a retired board member of the Kauai Humane Society, take care of many of the community cats. Islanders also feed cats at the beach and at the many hotels and resorts. Unfortunately, not all hotels show compassion towards the cats and some call in "bounty hunters" who often use cruel methods to kill the cats.

Other islands like Oahu and Maui have groups such as The Feline Foundation, Hawaii Cat Foundation, and AdvoCATS, all implementing TNR programs for feral cats. The Hawaiian Humane Society has spayed and neutered over 11,000 feral cats for 1,417 feral cat caretakers since 1993. In total, these groups have neutered over 75,000 cats through their low-cost spay neuter programs.

The Feral Cat Task Force of Kauai says the answer to the feral cat problem is to step up education efforts and strengthen local laws. The group is working hard to reach its goal of "zero feral, abandoned and stray cats on the island by the year 2025" (Moriki, 2014).

At the beginning of the year 2000, Hawaii's Department of Health came up

with a plan to amend the Vector Control policy and to implement a ban on the outdoor feeding of free-roaming cats. ACR joined with several groups on the islands and rushed letters, faxes, and emails to the Health Department and the Governor opposing the feeding ban and expressing support for properly managed, well-fed colonies of cats.

After the public outpouring of support for the caretakers and the cats, the state agreed to look at legislation allowing them to study the feral cat issue. There are at least 18 groups in Hawaii implementing TNR on the different islands.

Conclusion

If you are an animal lover and cannot stand seeing neglected animals anywhere, there are several international organizations you can contact, before you travel, for information on how to get help for these animals. Please refer to Addendum 5 in the back of the handbook for a list of organizations.

And when you hear the environmental groups vilify cats and use them as scapegoats for the damage done to the planet, remind them to take heed of the United

Nations-sponsored Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. The report states that humans are rapidly transforming the environment, converting more land into farmland since the end of World War II than in the 18th and 19th centuries combined. The report continues, noting that even these new farmlands have been exploited and polluted to meet the rising demands of humans for food, water, and raw materials, and that up to 30 percent of mammal, bird, and amphibian species are at risk of extinction due to habitat loss and human action (Blua, 2005).

There are community cats living all across the world. As they did centuries ago, they still play a vital role in controlling rodent populations. Rodents do far more damage to birds and other wildlife than cats and are also vectors of diseases, such as the plague, to humans. Let us keep pushing for humane, nonlethal management of feral cat populations.

Alley Cat Rescue's commitment is to help stray and outdoor community cats in the United States and worldwide, and to implement humane care to help improve their lives, put an end to cat overpopulation, and reduce the number of feral cats living in colonies.