

Glossary

adoption — process used by rescue groups or shelters to place rescued or abandoned cats and kittens in homes. The process can involve interviews, home visits, and questionnaires, and a fee is usually charged. (This partly offsets costs to the shelter, plus it makes for a safer adoption for the cat, as unscrupulous people will likely not pay a fee for a cat they would harm.)

alter — to neuter or spay (applies to both male and female cats.)

animal control agency — most are local government agencies that respond to calls regarding stray and dangerous animals. These animals are then impounded; hence the term “pound.” These are usually not animal welfare agencies, as they exist mostly to protect the public more than saving animals. Many, however, now work with local rescue groups to save more animals’ lives.

alley cats — feral cats living in alleys, backyards, or under porches.

backyard breeder — a person who chooses not to spay or neuter the cats living in their backyard, or one who allows a family pet to constantly have endless litters.

caregiver — someone who provides food, water, shelter, and veterinary care for their own cat or a feral colony; the term “owner” is rarely used.

carnivore — an animal who derives his/her nutritional requirements from consuming animal tissue or flesh.

castrate — to neuter a male cat to prevent reproduction.

cat collector or hoarder — a person who takes in a greater number of cats than he/she can adequately care for. In these situations cats may not receive enough food and water to stay healthy, may not receive veterinary care, and living conditions tend to be cramped or unsanitary. Collectors are often unaware that living conditions for the cats (and themselves) are poor, that they are causing the cats more harm than good, and are unable to accept that they are overwhelmed. Hoarding is a defined mental disorder similar to obsessive compulsive disorder.

cat fancy — people who breed and show cats.

cat guardian — a new term that is preferred by many to describe a “cat owner.” This term refers to the caring of and possibly sharing living space with a cat. This term can refer to someone caring for a pet cat or a feral cat colony.

catch-and-kill — an outdated method of feral cat population management where cats are trapped and killed in an effort to reduce their numbers.

colostrum — milk from a mother cat after a kitten is born. Helps protect the kitten. Colostrum is crucial for newborns. They receive no immunity via the placenta before birth, so beneficial antibodies need to be ingested.

community cat — a cat who lives outdoors, either in a colony with other cats, or by themselves as part of the local community. Can refer to both feral and stray cats. See *free-roaming cat, outdoor cat*.

companion animal — any domesticated animal (i.e. cat, dog, bird) whose physical, emotional, behavioral, and social needs can be met as companions in the home, or in close daily relationship with humans.

desex — to neuter either male or female cats to prevent reproduction. Term usually used in Australia.

domesticate — to tame an animal, especially by generations of breeding, to live in close association with humans as a companion or work animal, and usually creating a dependency so that the animal loses his/her ability to live in the wild.

domestic cat — an animal who has adapted to humans, usually over many generations. One who has a genetic predisposition to being socialized. *See also companion animal.*

eradication — the complete removal of a species from a given area, typically done by culling. Common methods involve poisoning, shooting, or catch-and-kill.

euthanasia — purposefully ending the life of a pet. Often employed when an animal is in poor health, is suffering, and cannot be treated. The decision to euthanize is typically at the discretion of the animal's caretaker.

ex-feral cat — a feral cat now tamed and living with a human. These cats are sometimes only "tame" with the original rescuer.

feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) — a lentivirus (i.e. slow-acting virus) specific to cats that is usually transmitted through deep bite wounds. FIV is less common than FeLV, and FIV positive cats often live long lives symptom-free. FIV can eventually lead to a weakened immune system, making

cats susceptible to other viruses. Positive cats can live with other cats in a home, as once neutered they usually will not fight to the extent that they will cause the deep bite wounds needed to transmit the disease.

feline leukemia virus (FeLV) — a retrovirus specific to cats, FeLV is the most common cause of cancer in cats. It can lead to blood disorders as well as a weakened immune system, making the cat susceptible to diseases that she might otherwise be able to fight. FeLV is present in a cat's bodily fluids, is contagious, and can spread through bite wounds, mutual grooming, and occasionally through food dish and litter box sharing.

feral cat — a cat who was previously domesticated but became lost or abandoned and reverted to a wild state, or a cat born to a feral mother who has had little or no human interaction. Sometimes called community cat or wild cat. *See community cat.*

feral cat colony — a group of feral cats living together in an area. Usually started by an unneutered female or male cat who became lost while looking for a mate, or a cat who was abandoned, and found a reliable food source behind a shopping mall, cafeteria, or fast-food restaurant.

free-roaming cat — an outdoor cat who wanders freely and chooses her own living space. Can refer to feral and stray cats, as well as domestic cats allowed outdoors. *See outdoor cat, community cat.*

house cat — a cat who lives indoors, often specifically inside a residential area rather than a barn or other living space. Most often a domestic cat, except for re-socialized feral cats. *See indoor cat.*

indoor cat — a cat who lives strictly indoors.

Most often a domestic cat, unless she is a socialized feral cat. See *house cat*.

invasive species — a species that colonizes an area beyond or separate from its traditional environment. Also known as exotic, alien, or non-native species, they are typically thought to negatively impact their new habitat.

kill shelter — usually an animal control agency that euthanizes animals on a regular basis, and that will euthanize for reasons other than poor health and suffering (i.e. cage space).

neonatal kittens — newborn kittens. If they are orphans they will need to be bottle fed and cleaned in a similar manner to the way a mother cat would clean them.

neuter — the surgical removal of a male cat's testicles to prevent reproduction. Some call this to "fix" or "sterilize" a cat, or to "castrate" a male cat. Many refer to "neuter" for both male and female cats, especially in Britain.

no-kill policy — a policy adopted by many humane shelters and organizations that does not allow healthy and treatable animals to be killed, but instead will give each animal the opportunity and resources to live until a home can be found. Euthanasia can be performed, but only in extreme cases where the animal is in poor health and suffering.

outdoor cat — any cat who is not confined to an indoor home. This includes feral and stray cats, as well as domestic cats who live outside some or all of the time. See *free-roaming cat*.

overpopulation — the point at which the size of an animal population grows too large for a particular environment to support. For example, there are still too many dogs

and cats born in the U.S., and there are not enough homes to take them. This is why it is so important to always spay or neuter companion animals.

porch cat — usually a stray or feral cat who has found a safe haven under or on a porch.

rabies — an acute and deadly zoonotic disease caused by a viral infection of the central nervous system. The rabies virus is most often spread by a bite, when saliva is transferred from an infected mammal. Although there is an extremely low incidence of contracting rabies in the U.S., the virus still causes great panic.

rescue — an organization that rescues homeless, stray, surrendered, and neglected cats and provides them with veterinary care and finds them new homes.

semi-feral — a cat who is used to living close to humans, but who is not entirely domesticated, such as a barn cat.

semi-owned cat — an outdoor, free-roaming cat fed by a community neighbor who does not consider him/herself an owner, but still provides food for the cat. These are the people we need to teach TNR to.

shelter — a facility that houses stray and/or surrendered pets for adoption.

spay — the surgical removal of a female cat's uterus and ovaries to prevent reproduction.

special-needs — an animal with a disability or with a permanent medical condition that requires ongoing special care.

sterilize — to spay a female cat or to neuter

a male cat is often said to “sterilize” a cat or prevent reproduction.

stray cat — a cat who lives outdoors, but is socialized to humans. Usually, these are cats who have run away from their homes or have been abandoned. They can become pet cats once again, but if they are independent from humans for too long, they may become feral.

surrender — there are many reasons people give up their cat for adoption to a rescue or shelter. This is called “owner-surrender.”

tom cat — an un-neutered male cat.

trap-neuter-return (TNR) — a comprehensive program in which feral cats are caught in a humane trap, vaccinated, sterilized, ear-tipped, and returned to their original home. Young kittens and any tame cats are removed and placed for adoption. A caretaker ensures long-term maintenance by providing regular food, water, shelter, and veterinary care when needed.

vasectomise — cutting or otherwise inter-

rupting the tubes that carry sperm from the testes, but leaving the testes intact. The cat behaves like a full tom cat, but cannot impregnate a female. Some recommend this for feral colonies, but ACR recommends a full neuter instead; neutering decreases the “annoying” behaviors often associated with feral cats, such as spraying, yowling, and wandering, whereas a vasectomy only halts reproduction.

vector species — an animal that is a carrier of a particular virus or disease; i.e. the raccoon is a vector species for the rabies virus.

wild — often used to describe a feral cat. A true wild cat actually is a non-domestic species, such as the European wildcat, Jungle Cat, or the African wildcat (*Felis lybica*), who is the ancestor of the domestic or feral cat.

zoonotic disease — a disease that can be passed between humans and animals. Actually quite common; scientists have estimated more than half of infectious diseases in humans are spread from animals.