

Cars Auto Financing Event Tickets Jobs Real Estate Online Degrees Business Opportunities Shopping

Search

How do I find it?

Subscribe to paper

Become a member of the USA TODAY community now! Log in | Become a member What's this?



Home News Travel Money Sports Life Tech Weathe

News » Nation Troops at Risk States Lotteries



After receiving his rabies vaccine update, Sgt. Stripes is released into the area where he was caught earlier in the day in Burlington County, N.J.

By Joan Fairman Kanen for USA TODAY

Updated 41m ago | Comments 22 | Recommend 8

E-mail | Save | Print | RSS



Enlarge By Joan Fairman Kanen for USA TODAY

Two feral cats warily check out traps that have been baited with tuna and placed where the cats are normally fed by caregivers in Burlington County, New Jersey.

Compassion often eludes feral cats; groups out to save them

By Sharon L. Peters, Special for USA TODAY

Mixx it

Other ways to share:

Yahoo! Buzz

Digg

Newsvine

Reddit

Facebook

What's this?

Feral cats — nearly invisible and often reviled — have prowled into the spotlight.

The free-roamers with an aversion to humans have grabbed headlines this spring because of a bounty on their heads in Iowa, a threatened roundup and disposal in Fairfax County, Va., and other elimination plans across the country.

But the cats also are receiving attention of a different sort.

Grass-roots groups and animal-welfare organizations are directing money and energy toward helping the tens of millions of feral cats that skulk about college campuses, cluster around back-alley trash bins, swarm among the rocks at beach communities and colonize the nether-reaches of suburban parks, military installations and abandoned barns and fields:

- PetSmart Charities will announce in July a \$13 million spay-neuter program in Los Angeles. A clinic in Burbank, which Best Friends Animal Society in Utah also is helping fund, will sterilize 20,000 feral cats a year. PetSmart Charities has committed \$862,000 to feral cat programs in Austin and Dallas as part of a \$5.5 million five-year grant to Texas cities.

FIND MORE STORIES IN: United States | Texas | Los Angeles | Dallas | Virginia | Iowa | Utah | Austin | Harris | Humane Society | Burbank | Fairfax County | Best Friends Animal Society

- The Humane Society of the United States has just completed a CD/DVD. Effectively Managing Feral Cats will be free to 6,000 shelters, communities and feral-cat advocates through a PETCO Foundation grant. The Humane Society also holds workshops and has given thousands of dollars to a few small groups

ANIMALS: PETS AND THE REST

Foreclosures slam doors on pets, too

For abuse victims, leaving with pet important

Stem cell therapy offers hope for pets dogged by pain

Index: More pet stories from Sharon L. Peters



FERAL VS. STRAY

Not all outdoor cats are ferals. Nancy Peterson, feral cat expert for the Humane Society of the United States, says the population known as

Macs run Microsoft Office.

Doing work on a Mac, and sharing it with PCs, is easy with Microsoft Office 2008, the latest, most powerful Office yet.

Learn more



E-mail features

E-mail newsletters

Sign up to receive our free Daily Briefing e-newsletter and get the top news of the day in your inbox.

E-mail GO

Select one: HTML Text

Breaking news E-mail alerts

Get breaking news in your inbox as it happens

Featured Advertiser

What's this?

The server room can be a cold and lonely place. At CDW, we provide you with a personal account manager who knows the IT challenges you face. Visit CDW.com for all your technology needs.



free-roaming cats includes:

Indoor/outdoor cats that roam neighborhoods. These are pets, and wandering does not make them "wild."

Cats that were once pets but have been abandoned or gotten lost and have learned to survive on their own or joined feral colonies. These cats, when captured, can usually be re-socialized to live with humans. But their initial reaction to being captured is often frantic, and they can be mistaken for being feral.

Feral cats, which are generally one generation or more removed from being house pets, and their offspring aren't socialized to humans and can rarely be tamed. (But their kittens, if caught young, can become pets.)

launching initiatives to protect feral cats.

<http://www.cdw.com>

• **Alley Cat Allies**, which advises individuals and groups on feral-colony management, is embarking on major research to collect data about ferals and the people who help them. The non-profit group also will launch a year-long educational campaign beginning Oct. 16, National Feral Cat Day, and will push for public disclosure on how many feral cats shelters take in and euthanize to "make more transparent" every community's "animal-control practices applied to feral cats, which most often rely on lethal control methods," president Becky Robinson says.

• **No More Homeless Pets in Utah** runs a sterilization program and works with city, county and animal control officials to develop alternatives to trapping nuisance homeless cats and depositing them at shelters — "a practice which almost guarantees euthanasia," says the group's Gregory Castle. A decrease in the number of cats in colonies and concurrent lower euthanasia rates have been "dramatic" in some locations, he says.

ONLINE RESOURCES ON FERALS

Hundreds of websites can aid people looking for info about feral cats. Among them:

- **Alley Cat Allies** maintains a comprehensive assortment of info ranging from events and conferences to basic Q&A to legalities at alleycat.org.
- **Maddie's Fund**, which finances scores of animal causes, has nearly 500 ferals articles and resources. [Click here](#) for a good starting point, for interviews with ferals experts and details about model feral programs.
- Go to the **American Veterinary Medical Association** for articles and debates about feral management and the group's official position on TNR.
- **The Humane Society of the United States** has lots of feral cat information updated regularly.
- **The American Bird Conservancy** says free-roaming cats kill hundreds of millions of birds a year (a charge disputed by others who say there are easier-to-catch food sources) and have launched a campaign called "**Cats Indoors!**"
- **No More Homeless Pets in Utah's** site, utahpets.org, has informational aids, including solutions to conflicts and trapping instructions.
- Downloadable documents -- from trapping tricks to post-surgery guide -- are at FixNation.org.
- At feralcat.com there's info and links to many resources and guides, including how to tame a feral kitten.
- Go to aspca.org/tnr for info and guidance from the ASPCA. There's also a list of upcoming training sessions in New York.

All major efforts involve trapping, neutering and returning the cats to their colonies. This method thwarts future litters and reduces the yowling, spraying and fighting that annoy humans. In the process, the cats usually are vaccinated, treated for minor problems and given a notch in the ear to identify they are sterile. Over time, the colony will grow smaller through attrition.

"TNR is not only the most humane, it is the most practical way of stabilizing the populations and ... reducing them," Castle says.

"Some New York neighborhoods no longer have feral colonies, or the colonies are much smaller," says the ASPCA's Aimee Hartmann, which holds workshops throughout the city, performs hundreds of sterilizations and loans traps to groups employing the method.

Scores of other groups participating in the practice report similar results.

Opponents speak out

The TNR method is not without detractors. Many veterinarians refuse to do such sterilizations because they say cats shouldn't live outdoors because they become victims of the elements, predators and vehicles. And some bird and conservation groups say feral cats can decimate bird and small-mammal populations and spread disease.

Advocates counter that ferals exist because house pets were set loose or escaped, they adapted to survive, had litters, and now, a generation or more removed from being house cats, they can't be tamed. And refusing to deal with that reality leads to more litters and more cats killed once they become public nuisances, are captured, taken to shelters and euthanized because no one will adopt them, advocates say.

Moreover, most ferals don't live short, hideously deprived lives but are quite healthy and less apt to harm wildlife than toxins and development that overtakes habitats, says Julie Levy of the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, an expert in infectious disease and feral cats. When neutered and vaccinated, such animals live many years.

A right to roam free

"For a long time, the prevailing feeling was that these animals aren't deserving of help," Robinson says.

But attitudes are changing.

"There are people who have been taking care of these colonies for years, getting up before dawn, leaving food and water." Once regarded as odd, they're increasingly regarded as "unsung heroes."

Today, a live-and-let-live attitude is taking root, she says.

A 2007 Harris survey found that 81% believe feral cats should be allowed to live out their lives roaming free.

Still, many people have never seen a feral colony and are unaware of their numbers, which, combined with strays, could be as high as 80 million, Levy says, so these animals occupy a lower rung on the public's concern-about-creatures hierarchy.

Advocates insist the separate-and-unequal distinction is specious.

"A good proportion of these free-roaming cats were once owned, or they are one generation removed from house pets," says Susana Della Maddalena of PetSmart Charities. "We don't think it's fair to exclude them from help."

Share this story:



Yahoo! Buzz

Digg

Newsvine

Reddit

Facebook What's this?

Posted 11h 57m ago

Updated 41m ago

E-mail | Save | Print | RSS

To report corrections and clarifications, contact Reader Editor Brent Jones. For publication consideration in the newspaper, send comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification.

Guidelines: You share in the USA TODAY community, so please keep your comments smart and civil. Don't attack other readers personally, and keep your language decent. Use the "Report Abuse" button to make a difference. Read more.

You must be logged in to leave a comment. Log in | Register

Empty comment input field with a vertical scrollbar on the right side.

Submit

Comments: (22)

Showing: Newest first



GWnumber1 wrote: 10m ago

It's OK to kill fetuses, just not feral cats!

Recommend | Report Abuse



GWnumber1 wrote: 10m ago

The only thing missing from the picture above is a bull's-eye!

Recommend | Report Abuse



GWnumber1 wrote: 25m ago

Let's feed them to stray dogs!

Recommend 1 | Report Abuse



TomyChezeBurger wrote: 26m ago

After receiving his rabies vaccine update, Sgt. Stripes is released into the area where he was caught earlier in the day in Burlington County, N.J.

These morons don't realize that these cats do not belong roaming in nature. They kill endless numbers of song birds, game birds, rabbits etc....and other wildlife. They are very detrimental to the environment. I can't believe how stupid some of these animal groups are. I have no problem saving animals but these things cannot be adopted out and have no other purpose to serve. Catch them and destroy them humanly if you want but for Christ sake don't release them back into the wild. Everyone I see while out hunting I shoot and the environment is better off for it.

Recommend | Report Abuse



truckman wrote: 29m ago

They are not indigenous, they are an invasive species, treat them like one. Feral cats are killing off birds, reptiles and amphibians that are native and soon to be endangered. Bad owners are the reason for this mess. Leave out food with something to sterilize them or a permanent solution.

Recommend 1 | Report Abuse

PBinNC wrote: 35m ago

Wake up, people, TNR will reduce the numbers. Otherwise you have endless killing to do.

[Recommend](#) | [Report Abuse](#)



Must Love Boxers wrote: 36m ago

There is a family of ferral cats outside my building - mom, sister and brother. They have been spayed and neutered, and given shots by a guy on the first floor. A few of us take turns feeding them, but they also supplement by keeping down the field mice. They run from most people, but will allow me to come within a foot or so of them, mostly because I feed them. I cannot have cats in my building so this is the next best thing. They do bring joy to a lot of people - the daughter is absolutely beautiful with her cream fur with dark chocolate highlights, chocolate face and blue eyes. They will play with a toy on a string, but can't touch them.

They have a right to live, especially when kind hearted people keep up their shots.

You have to have a cold heart to say, "Just destroy them". It isn't their fault that they are in their situation.

[Recommend](#) | [Report Abuse](#)



TheLink wrote: 38m ago

Bird populations in the world are going down not because of feral cats but because of people encroaching on their habitat. Take a look at your town and tell me if this isn't true.

Cats reduce the vermin population in your community.

Killing cats results in more cats coming in and reproducing. Leaving sterile cats installed results in stable colonies. Agencies have tried killing cats for the last 60 years in the US. The result is even more cats.

The only way to reduce the cat population is trap, neuter, and release animals where they were picked up. Public policy needs to change in what has been a dismal attempt at feline population control. Let's install some logic into our approach to this issue.

[Recommend](#) **1** | [Report Abuse](#)



Madd Maxx wrote: 55m ago

Feral cat is nothing compared to a Fischer cat.

[Recommend](#) **1** | [Report Abuse](#)



Jim19 wrote: 58m ago

Feral cats or, indeed, any cats allowed outdoors will destroy songbird populations. For the sake of passerines in North America feral cats should be trapped and humanely destroyed. Cat owners must be required to keep their cats indoors just as dog owners are required to keep their animals on a leash.

[Recommend](#) **1** | [Report Abuse](#)

[1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [Next](#) ▶

Sponsored Links

Earn From 3.04% to 3.35%

With AAA rated, GE Capital Corp. Not an offer of securities for sale.
[GEInterestPlus.com](#)

Wachovia Free Checking

No monthly fee, No minimum balance, direct deposit, Check Card & More.
[www.Wachovia.com](#)

Score Watch® From Equifax

Your credit score is connected to everything. Be alerted to key changes
[www.equifax.com](#)

[Get listed here](#)

Newspaper Home Delivery - Subscribe Today

[Home](#) • [News](#) • [Travel](#) • [Money](#) • [Sports](#) • [Life](#) • [Tech](#) • [Weather](#)

About USATODAY.com: [Site Map](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Jobs with Us](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Right](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Media Lounge](#) | [Press Room](#) | [Reprints and Permissions](#)

News Your Way: [Mobile News](#) | [Email News](#) | [Add USATODAY.com RSS feeds](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Widgets](#)

Partners: [USA WEEKEND](#) | [Sports Weekly](#) | [Education](#) | [Space.com](#)

Copyright 2008 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.

