



Cats-chitchat/pictures-of-cats.org

FERAL VS. FRIGHTENED PET: WHO IS THAT CAT?

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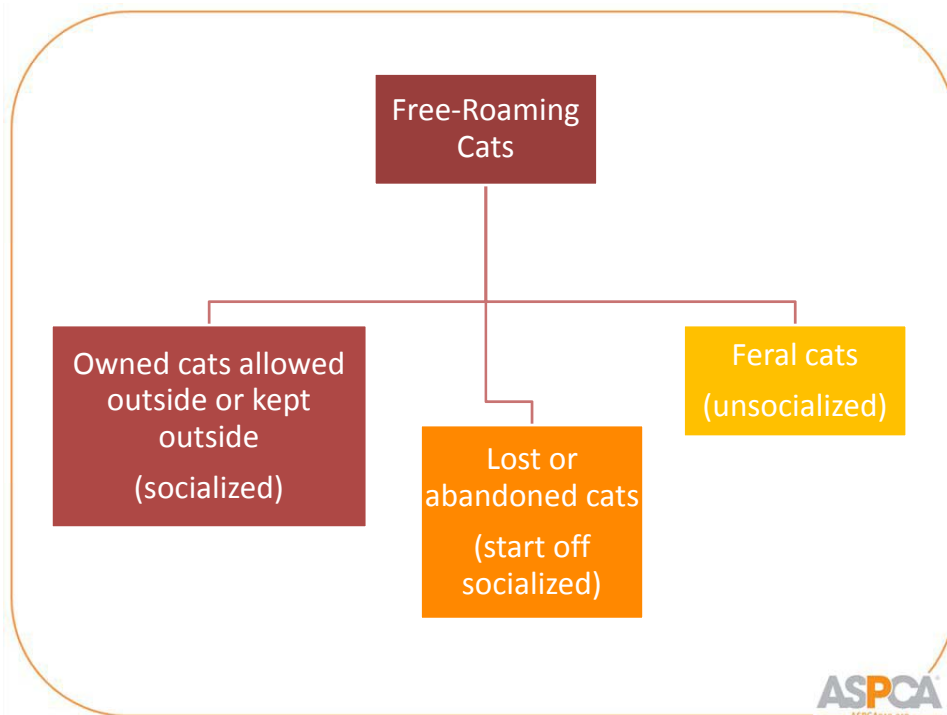


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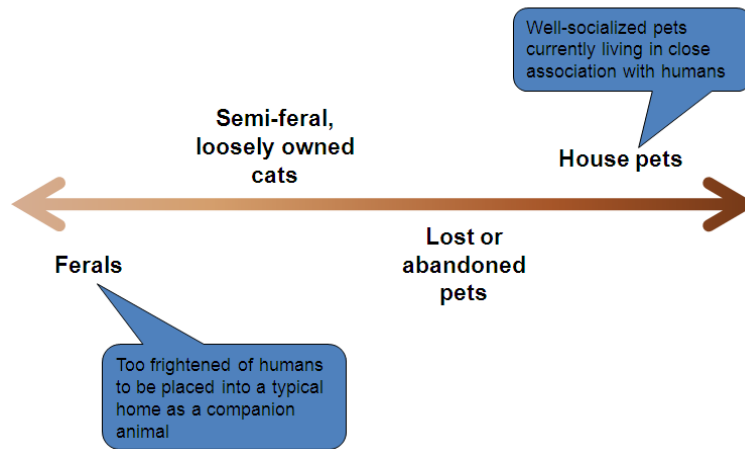


Outline

- **Feral and frightened cats in shelters**
 - Phase 1: National survey of methods currently used by shelter and rescue programs
 - Phase 2: update
- **Free-roaming cat blood work**
 - Do they seem to be good surgical risks?
 - Data for TNR and adoption organizations



The Socialization Spectrum of Cats in Shelters



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Decisions depend on socialization status

Example decisions:

	Holding period	Housing	Trap-Neuter-Return	Adoption	Euthanasia
Ferals	No	Stressful & risky	Yes	No	?
Former pets	Yes	Often settle down	No	Yes	No

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The Fear Factor

Feral?

Semi-feral?

Socialized pet?

Fear factor



How do welfare agencies tell the difference?



Study Objectives

- **Develop a valid and reliable method of determining which cats are truly feral and which are frightened, but socialized cats who may have owners or may be adoptable**

– The method must be practical in a shelter setting with limited training



The Survey Objectives

- 1) How does the animal welfare profession assess & categorize incoming cats?
- 2) How long are cats held & what outcome options are available?
- 3) To what extent are agencies cooperating?



Poll 1

What do you do with feral cats in your program? (check all that apply)

- a) Our program doesn't handle feral cats
- b) Euthanized after holding period
- c) Euthanasia as soon as determined to be feral
- d) If ear-tipped, returned to colony/caretaker
- e) Provide TNR yourself or in collaboration with another group
- f) Combinations of euthanasia and TNR

Answer using the Poll Box on right side of screen



Subjects & Survey Administration

- Haphazard sampling method
- Confidential responses
- ASPCA, SAWA, HSUS, S/N clinics, Campus Feral and Shelter Vet listserves
- Online survey completion
 - Open for 1 month (March to April, 2009)

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How do you decide if a cat is feral or not?

1. What guidelines or criteria do you use to assess whether a cat is feral or not when it first comes to your program or colony? These might include particular behaviors, activities, interactions with humans, observations from a distance, responses to other animals, how the cat uses transportation, history or location, age, condition of the cat, etc. Please be as detailed as possible.

2. Have these guidelines for determining if a cat is feral been written down?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Additional comments (if needed):

3. How soon after a cat enters your program do you decide if the cat is feral or not?

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Survey questions

- What guidelines or criteria do you use to assess whether a cat is feral or not when it first comes to your program or colony?
- Have these guidelines been written down?
Yes ☐ No ☐
- How soon after a cat enters your program do you decide if a cat is feral or not?

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Survey questions, continued

- **For those cats determined to be feral, do they go into a socialization program?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

Comments: _____

- **If you have a brick-and-mortar shelter, what is the procedure for handling a feral cat?**

- ☐ Euthanized after holding period
- ☐ Euthanasia as soon as determined to be feral
- ☐ If ear-tipped, returned to colony
- ☐ Transfer to local TNR group
- ☐ Spay or neuter and return to colony/caretaker
- ☐ Other: _____



Survey questions, continued

- **What type of program is using the guidelines you described above?**

- ☐ Animal control organization
- ☐ Non-profit brick and mortar shelter
- ☐ Spay/neuter clinic
- ☐ Trap/neuter and return program
- ☐ Colony caretaker or rescuer
- ☐ Interested individual

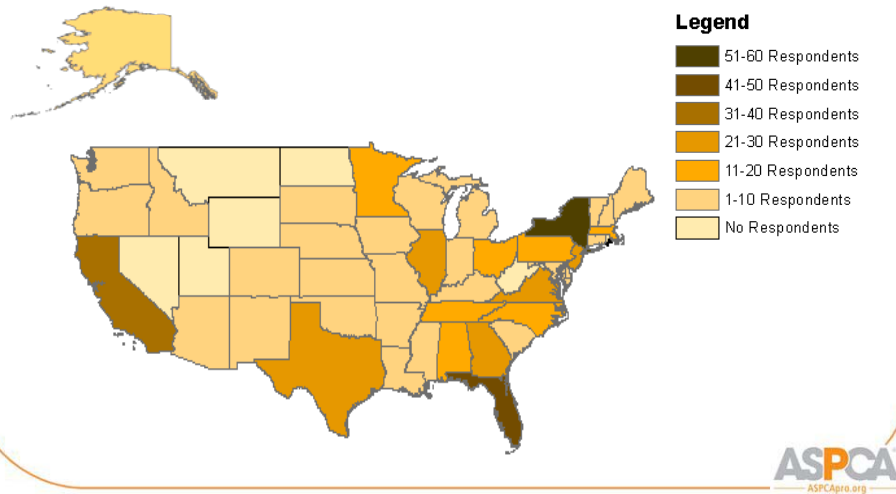
☐ **In what state are you located?** ☐

- **May we contact you about this project? (Not required)**

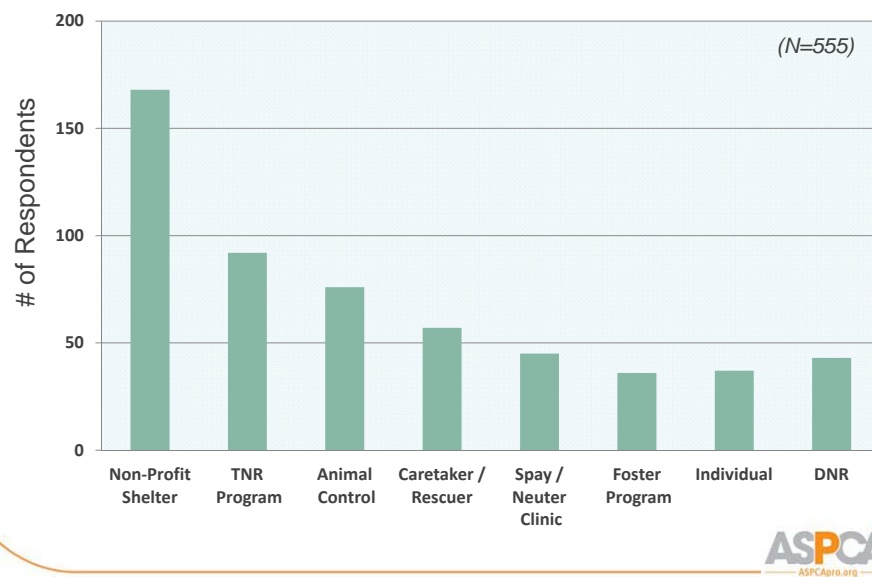


Responses

555 respondents from 44 states



Responses





Objective 1: How are cats assessed?



How are cats determined to be feral?

- **Responses divided into:**
 - Tests
 - Behaviors / Responses
 - Other info sources & observations



How are cats determined to be feral?

- **Tests:**

- Approach cat while eating
- Approach cat in cage/trap
- Approach cat in familiar outdoor environment
- Expose cat to an unfamiliar cat
- Touch cat in cage/trap with object
- Pet or pick up cat
- Clean cat's cage
- Remove cat from trap/carrier
- Observe cat undisturbed in cage or trap
- Meow at cat
- Feed cat



How are cats determined to be feral?

- **Behaviors / Reactions:**

- Biting
- Body carriage
- Charging, striking or lunging
- Ear position
- Escape, avoidance or hiding
- Pupil dilation, eye contact, blinking
- Freezing
- Gait (slinking)
- Muscle tension
- Piloerection
- Respiration rate; panting
- Rubbing on objects
- Self-maintenance behaviors (eat, drink, groom, use litter box)
- Tail position
- Vocalization



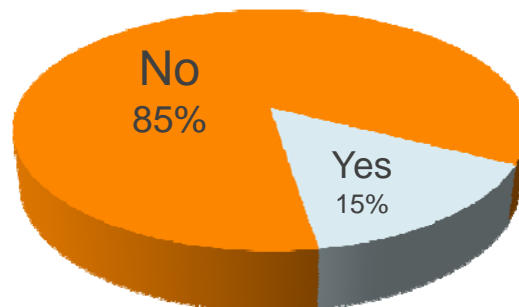
How are cats determined to be feral?

– Other info sources & observations:

- Apparent size of cat's outdoor home range
- Condition, cleanliness, dishevelment of trap or cage
- Information from caretaker or neighbors about cat's behavior or history
- Medical conditions
- Presence of other feral cats in the area
- Physical appearance/coat/body condition
- Presence of collar, neutered or declawed status
- Presence of injuries/scars
- Transportation method (carrier vs. trap)



Are these guidelines written down?



(N=508)





Objective 2:

Minimum holding times & outcome options



Poll 2

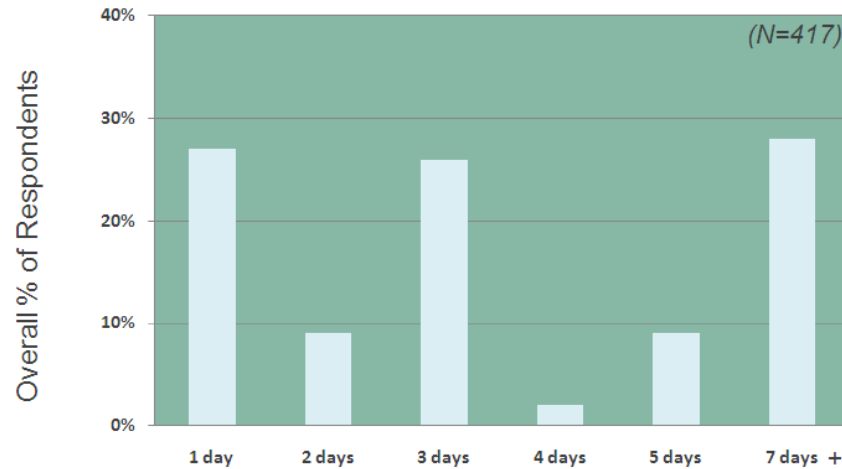
What is your organization's minimum holding time for cats to determine their socialization?

- a) One day or less
- b) 3 days
- c) 7 days
- d) As long as it takes
- e) Other (*chat details after submitting answer*)

Answer using the Poll Box on right side of screen

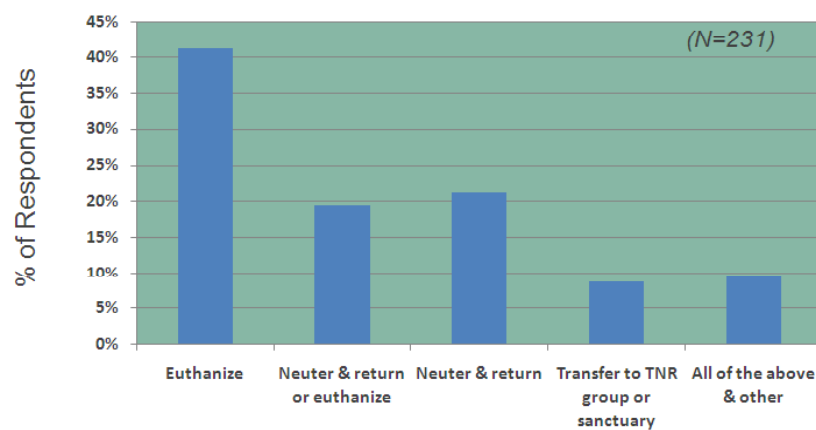


Minimum holding period to determine socialization status



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Outcome options for ferals in non-profit & animal control shelters



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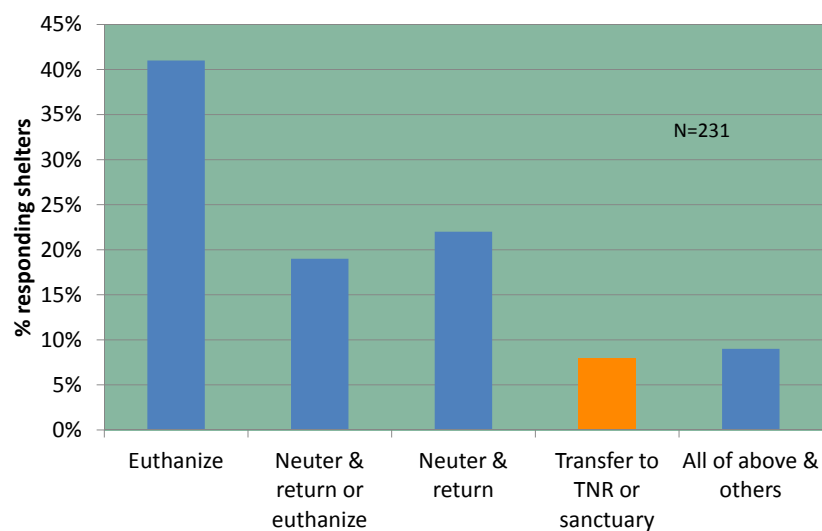


Objective 3:

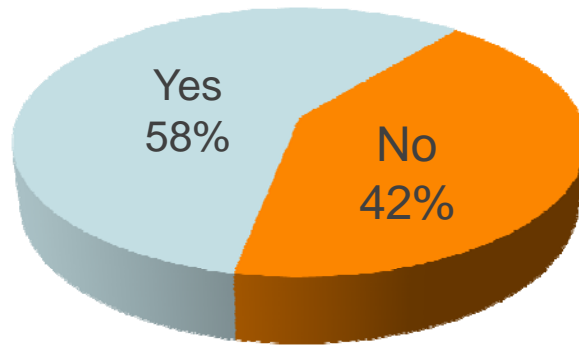
To what extent are agencies cooperating?



Outcome options for ferals in non-profit & animal control shelters



Is TNR or return to caretaker ever an option for feral cats?



(N=425 non-TNR organizations)



Summary

- Most groups do not have written guidelines
- Guidelines must be applicable at, or soon after, intake
- Cats deemed feral in shelters are often euthanized
- Many organizations could decrease euthanasia by including Neuter-Return as an option for feral cats
- Standardized, validated, predictive guidelines are needed to determine socialization status
 - Phase 2!



Feral vs. Frightened Pet: Who is That Cat? Phase 2

- Working with Humane Alliance to evaluate cats in a shelter-type environment
- Recruiting owned pet cats, cats living in colonies or on the street
 - To include feral or semi-feral cats
 - Three day observation then spay/neuter
- Owner/caretaker questionnaire about behavior



Examples of Questions

- Age, sex, how long known cat, relationship with cat
- How long in carrier/trap today
- What did the cat do when
 - I first brought him home:
 - Moved to a new location:
 - Hid for a few days
 - Hid for only a day
 - Never hid but was wary
 - Not wary, adjusted very quickly



More Questions

- On a scale from 0 (never) to 10 (always)

My cat:

- Will let me come within 2 feet while eating
- Will let me pet him/her
 - Also questions for unfamiliar people
- Meows to me
- Will let me hold him/her in my arms for at least a minute or so
- Chooses to stay near me



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Other Questions

- How long does it take this cat to relax with an unfamiliar person
 - Instantly
 - A matter of minutes
 - Some hours
 - More than a day or two
 - Never
 - Don't know



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Behavior Assessments

- In trap
- Transfer to cage
- In cage twice a day
 - Just stand in front
 - Pet with plastic rod
 - Physical condition of cat
 - Physical condition of cage
 - Eating or not
 - Position in cage



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So Far:

- More than 200 cats completed
- Easier to get owned cats than unowned
 - Did ads, stories, added incentive for true feral cat caregivers
- Data collection into October
- Results hopefully in the spring!
- Stay tuned!



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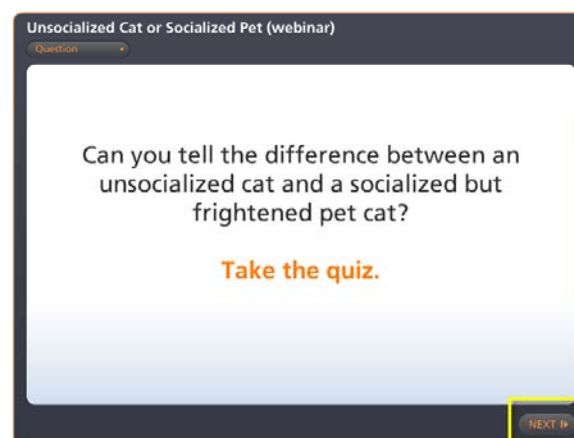
Our Goal

- Is to have a practical method to separate feral from frightened cats in a shelter setting
- Or to demonstrate that with all the assessments we have done, we CAN'T find ones that are practical in a shelter setting within 3 days



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Take a Quick Quiz



After the quiz loads, click **NEXT** to take 2 quiz questions.



See <http://www.aspcapro.org/is-this-cat-socialized.php> for the full quiz.

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Feral Cat Blood Work from a NYC Spay Day January 2010



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Objectives

- To examine results of a complete blood count and chemistry panel for any indications that these cats are not good candidates for high volume high quality spay/neuter surgeries
- To determine the typical results for feral or stray cats in a TNR program
- To compare blood work with physical examination findings (like increased WBC and abscesses)

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Procedures

- **Obtained permission to collect small blood sample**
- **Requested brief history of cat's trapping and health from caretaker**
 - Including time in trap, any vomiting, sneezing, etc.
- **Performed s/n as usual**
 - Included standard physical examination by KM



Cats in the Study

- **Blood was obtained from 102 cats**
- There were no surgical complications at Spay Day
- 52% were male and 5 additional cats already neutered
- About ½ the cats were estimated to be 1 to 3 years old
- Cats weighed from 2.5 to 12.5 lbs (median 6.25 lbs)



Preliminary Results

- 14 cats had indications of mild to moderate dehydration
- 14 had indications of muscle injury (injections, trying to escape?)
- All had normal kidney function
- Most had normal liver tests (only mild elevations)
- Between 20 and 30 cats had a mild anemia (can be due to anesthesia)
- About ½ the cats had an increase in one type WBC (infection or stress)



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Physical Exam Findings

- Only 5 cats had nasal discharge on their exam
- But 15 had eye problems, discharge that could be due to infection
- 18 had ear mites (likely)
- 26 cats had parasites seen
- Significant association between wounds/injury and white blood cell count (expected)
- No changes that would indicate poor surgical risk



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Next Steps

- **Very little has been published on “normal” blood values for free-roaming unowned cats**
 - Preparing a publication using these data
- **Work with a clinical pathologist to get a good perspective on how to interpret and best use results**



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Conclusions

- **Feral cats are big contributors to shelter statistics, especially euthanasia**
- **We are actively working to better understand and improve this situation**
- **Collaborations with other organizations help us leverage our resources**
 - Humane Alliance and Pet Harmony
 - Antech lab provided 100 free blood tests for the second project
- **Many questions still to be answered!**
 - Especially ones that impact shelter live release rates

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www.aspcapro.org/feral-cats.php

