



ALLEY CAT ALLIES SPECIAL REPORT

Hurricane Katrina Disaster Response

A protective dad watches over kittens at the ACA base camp. All were rescued together from a flooded apartment.

IN THE DAYS AFTER Hurricane Katrina made landfall, calls and e-mails poured into Alley Cat Allies:

"We had several cats living in the courtyard. They have been neutered and cared for by the cafe staff. They're probably still waiting there."

"Can someone rescue my cat... the balcony door can be jimmed open and there's a cat carrier. Please help save her!"

"There is a colony of cats that are living under the docks. Please get some food to them."

"Please help. We have two cats stranded in our house in New Orleans. . . They are our world..."

"There are many feral colonies near where the 17th Street levee breach occurred."

A LLEY CAT ALLIES (ACA) is not a disaster response organization, but it was startlingly clear to us that for every forlorn dog caught on camera, a frightened, hungry cat was hiding, unseen by those who could help. And while the regular rescue groups were working at full capacity, they could not save all the animals.

We also foresaw a feline population explosion in months and years to come, given the number of cats now out of their demolished homes and wandering the streets. We believed we might head that off by working with humane groups in the region.

The decision was quickly made. While ACA staff members began organizing equipment, supplies, and volunteers, we dispatched field representative Kim Kean to scout suitable locations for a base camp near New Orleans. And we issued a plea for assistance to our *Feral Power!* listserv.

In a matter of hours, ACA donor Millicent Canter offered us the use of her property outside Bogalusa as an emergency shelter and volunteer base camp. ACA's Bonney Brown and the first of our hearty volunteers made

their way into the hurricane zone.

Over the next three months, 361 stray, feral, and pet cats rescued from ravaged areas and 150 volunteers from across the nation passed through the Bogalusa camp. Hundreds of other cats in Louisiana and Mississippi received food, veterinary care, and a chance to live, thanks to the outpouring of support from donors old and new.

What's next for the cats of the Gulf region?

In the months ahead, Alley Cat Allies will work with local groups in the region to reestablish spay/neuter programs. We will provide networking and training opportunities for local animal control officers and shelter personnel, veterinarians, local humane groups and feral cat caregivers. We will help to create spay/neuter projects specifically targeting stray and feral cats and a strong support system for the local TNR groups and caregivers.

Alley Cat Allies will be there as the Gulf region rebuilds to help the many outdoor cats live a better life—a healthy, sterile, and peaceful life.

The Great Trailer Park Rescue

ACA volunteers and staff have many moving stories to tell about helping victims of the storm. This is one.

BY JIM DAVIS

Blissfully unaware of impending danger, the cats of Michael Court swirled about feeding stations, happily greeted visitors, and playfully romped from trailer to trailer.

They had no way of knowing that they, along with their "people," were being evicted—that the trailer park they called home, after surviving the wrath of Hurricane Katrina, would soon be leveled by a bulldozer.

Fortunately for the cats, caregiver Thelma Guaraggi had the presence of mind to call Alley Cat Allies for help.

Hurricane Katrina delivered only a glancing blow to Michael Court trailer park, which is just outside New Orleans. While there was moderate damage to some trailers and water and gas service was disrupted, the people and cats survived intact.

The real blow came a few weeks after the

hurricane, when the trailer park owner issued eviction notices to every tenant, citing storm damage and failure of some residents to pay their rent on time. The aging trailers would be demolished—to make way for new trailers supplied by FEMA for *other* hurricane victims.

Unfortunately, Michael Court was a home of last resort for many residents. Out of money and still waiting for help from FEMA, they had no place to go. Without gas or water,



Volunteers unload traps and carriers at the Kenner trailer park.



ACA volunteers work with Thelma to document the trailer park cats.



Girl Kitty's person, Ned, sought help for her the day after he swam from his home, leaving her in the attic with food when he could not figure out how to swim with her. He returned to the house many times to find her without success. At last ACA rescuers caught her in a humane trap. Here Ned and Girl Kitty are reunited at the ACA rescue base camp.



Camp director Diane Blankenburg leads the morning meetings, reviewing priorities for the day, before volunteer teams launch into a long work day.

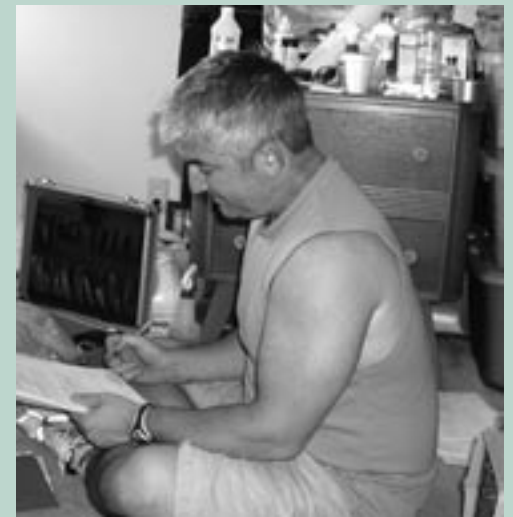


ACA volunteers set up feeding stations for feral colonies whose caregivers have been unable to return.

Dr. Marcus Brown of Virginia prepares for a long day of vet work in the stifling September heat



Millicent Canter, our base camp host.



they survived cold nights in unheated trailers without basic sanitation, depending on daily visits from the Red Cross for food and water. Many planned to live in their cars once their evictions became final.

The fate of the cats was equally uncertain until Guaraggi contacted Alley Cat Allies. The self-styled “den mother” of the park, Guaraggi was one of several residents who fed the cats on a daily basis and had seen that most of the happy, healthy cats had been spayed or neutered with the help of a local humane group, SpayMart.

Over a three-day period, ACA assembled a team of more than 30 trappers in conjunction with Animal Rescue New Orleans (www.Ani-

malRescueNewOrleans.com) and snatched 77 cats from the path of the bulldozers. Many of the cats were so friendly and trusting that they could be simply picked up and placed in carriers. Others, including at least three litters of kittens, were secured only after days of patience and painstaking searches underneath trailers.

Throughout the ordeal, Guaraggi worried more about the cats than herself. She spoke distractedly of moving to Arkansas to stay with her brother or of living in her car with a few of her cats. She knew she couldn’t keep them all.

But thanks to Alley Cat Allies, she knows they all are safe. A few of the cats are being held by SpayMart for return to Guaraggi, while

Best Friends Animal Society took about 30 of the cats for adoption. ACA placed the rest in various no-kill facilities to be put up for adoption.

For Thelma and her neighbors—the paraplegic man who watched the neighborhood from his specially outfitted van, the woman raising three polite young boys in a spotless trailer, the Army sergeant who returned from Iraq on the day his eviction notice arrived—the future isn’t as bright. Despite legal efforts, they have been forced out of their homes.

Now they have joined the ranks of Hurricane Katrina refugees. In a last bit of irony, most are now awaiting placement in their own FEMA trailers. ●



Kerry Moyers-Horton of Atlanta grooms a recently rescued cat.



Tents to shelter the cats at the ACA base camp in Bogalusa.



Dr Kate Howard examines a new arrival.



Karlyn Sturmer stands on broad shoulders to rescue a cat trapped in the attic.



ACA volunteers were the backbone of the rescue operation. We could not have done this without them.



Trenee shared a touching moment with her kitty when she arrived at the rescue base camp.



Camp director Rebecca Guinn takes a well-earned break.



This kitty was rescued in the Superdome weeks after the storm.



Blizzard, above, suffered serious trauma that ruptured her diaphragm and made it difficult for her to breathe. Here she is recovering from surgery.



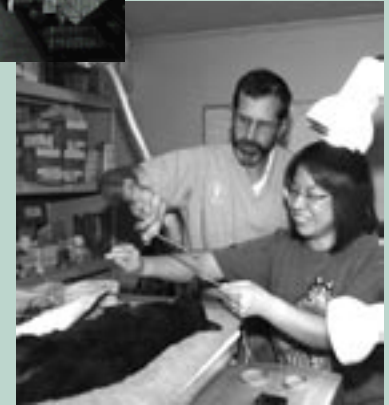
A volunteer patrols the rows of cages checking on the rescued cats in the 30 X 30 foot air-conditioned tent.



Named for his likeness to Forrest Gump, Gumpy and his family were thrilled to find each other.



Sycamore, an older kitty, is grateful for some comfort from a volunteer.



Dr. Richard Speck and a volunteer vet tech eartip a feral cat. Eartipping helps identify neutered feral cats.

Photographers who contributed to this special report: Jim Davis, Laura Guimond, Rebecca Guinn, Julie Linford, Valerie Schumacher

Can You Safeguard Animals in a Disaster?

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EXPERTS know that many people choose to stay in harm's way with their animal companions rather than evacuate without them. This has resulted in human and animal lives lost. But if you plan ahead for the worst that can happen, you could save lives.

The first step to safeguarding the animals in your community is to find out what your state will do for animals. Then develop a neighborhood evacuation plan that includes pets.

YOUR STATE: Contact your state's Emergency Management Agency and ask if animals are included in the state disaster plan. You can also search online to see if your state has an "Emergency Animal Response Team."

What if animals are not included in the plan? Get the ball rolling to change that now by contacting humane groups and public officials and sharing information about what is in place in some other states.

YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD: Work with neighbors and local animal welfare organizations to organize a neighborhood or communitywide animal disaster plan. Create a buddy system to



rescue companion animals, plan ahead where and how animals will be evacuated and housed (most shelters for humans will not accommodate pets), and work with local officials to ensure that they will support your plan when disaster occurs.

Disaster proofing your feral cat colony

Now you have a plan for companion animals should an evacuation take place, but what about feral cats?

The following are steps you take to give feral cats a survival advantage in a disaster:

- Be sure that all the cats are neutered and eartipped. Take a good photo of every cat. Keep the photos, health records, and other feral cat documentation with your companion animals' records, so you'll have it all together in one place, easy to grab on the way out. Accurate records present your best shot at identifying the cats, should they later be trapped by rescuers.
- If you live in a flood-prone area, locate feral cat houses and feeding stations on higher ground.
- If the cats commonly seek refuge under a shed or building, be sure that they have more than one escape route from beneath the building.
- If possible, place a laminated sign on the cat's house or feeding station letting rescuers know that this is a managed colony site and that you are the contact person. Give a cell phone or other number where you can be reached.
- We do not recommend confining feral cats as a disaster approaches. Their best chance to survive is depending on their own instincts and abilities to react to changing circumstances. Like wild animals, feral cats will flee from danger if they can.