

# Feral Cat Activist



A Publication of Alley Cat Allies

News for the Humane Community / February 2008

**WHY SANCTUARIES ARE NOT THE ANSWER FOR FERAL CATS** By Kathleen Harer of Space Coast Feline Network

## Case Study of a Feral Cat Sanctuary

The Space Coast Feline Network (SCFN), an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) organization, was established at the Kennedy Space Center in 1995 by concerned Space Center employees caring for some 100 feral cats on the property. When management insisted they remove the cats, SCFN built a sanctuary in Mims, Florida, to house these and other Brevard County feral cats. SCFN oversees other preventive programs in addition to the sanctuary.

Kathleen Harer, president and longtime member of the Space Coast Feline Network, oversaw creation of the Mims sanctuary. What follows is Ms. Harer's account of the effort and resources required in the seven years from the time SCFN envisioned the project to when the sanctuary doors opened in 2003, and what it takes to operate this shelter housing 80 cats.

### Introduction

We began the Space Coast Feline Network Sanctuary with the best intentions: to protect and care for feral cats. We have

**Sanctuaries are not a viable answer for feral cats. This case study illustrates that they are a serious drain on resources that could otherwise be applied to far-reaching efforts of preventive programs and humane education.**

accomplished this for a small number of animals, but with the resources we have expended, we could have helped a dramatically larger number of cats through well-planned Trap-Neuter-Return programs and accessible, affordable spay/neuter services for feral and house cats, particularly in low-income areas.

Our vision for the sanctuary was a building composed of four living modules, each housing up to 25 cats, sited on enough land to provide a buffer from contact with the public. The cost



to acquire and improve land and construct the facility was \$100,000. It is estimated that Brevard County is home to 100,000 feral cats. At this rate, housing only half of them in sanctuaries could cost \$50 million.

Constructing sanctuaries for widespread feral cat management would require an enormous amount of land. Even if we could house 100 cats per acre, it would take 1,000 acres to house these animals. Meanwhile,

feral cats not brought into sanctuaries would continue to breed, creating an endless demand for these expensive, limited operations.

Consider instead the cost of spaying and neutering feral cats. If we estimate the cost of surgery to be \$40 per animal (a low rate we have obtained through support from local veterinarians), the \$100,000 we spent to build our sanctuary would have paid for the surgeries of 2,500 feral cats—and prevented the birth of hundreds of thousands more.

### Location, Land, and Construction

Finding an appropriate, affordable site for the sanctuary was our first challenge. Land near the Kennedy Space Center was convenient for volunteers, but the cost was prohibitive and came with irresolvable zoning issues. We finally located a land parcel on the northern edge of Brevard County just outside Mims. Because the area was so isolated, we were able to buy a plot for \$60,000.

Remoteness came with a host of problems, however. Rezoning took nearly a year. To get a permit to build an access road and install electricity, the state and county required that we build a culvert for storm water at the property edge. With dwindling financial resources, we used unskilled volunteers and only two paid workers to build the sanctuary structure. Some building supplies were donated, but we had to purchase the bulk of them. Completing the structure took over 400 volunteer hours over a period of several months, mostly on weekends.

### Costs

When we opened our sanctuary doors in June 2003, we had already spent \$80,000 on land and construction. But water on the property is saline and cannot be used for

*Continued on page 2.*

drinking or even cleaning, so for years we hauled 10 gallons of water to the sanctuary each day. The \$20,000 we've now spent to build a water filtration system brings our start-up cost to \$100,000.

That figure doesn't include the routine, ongoing costs of veterinary care, food, litter, and cleaning supplies to keep the cats and their home safe and comfortable. In a year, we spend an average of \$180 to feed and maintain each sanctuary cat.

We were fortunate that some of our members had adequate management experience to ensure that the project ran smoothly. If they hadn't, we would have had to pay consultants or spend even more volunteer hours to research management issues.

Our volunteers have been very generous with donations, but all of our funding comes from fundraising now, not out of our pockets. We solicit donations in our newsletter; hold fundraising dinners, silent auctions, fashion shows, and luncheons; and send out mailers.

### Staffing the Sanctuary

Perhaps the greatest difficulty we face is recruiting and keeping volunteer caregivers, a problem exacerbated by the remote location and demanding upkeep of such a facility.

We have some 25 volunteers, most of whom volunteer one weekend day per



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month; for weekday visits we rely on a small, dedicated group of caregivers. Most of our volunteers are older and eventually will no longer be able to help. When we lose a volunteer, we must not only replace that person, but also cover shifts until we do. At times, when no one was available on a particular day, we've had to just put out extra food and water. We lose several volunteers each year.

Taking care of the cats is no small job. Every shift, caregivers scoop litter boxes, clean and disinfect "accidents," set out fresh food and water, and, if there is time, sweep and wash the floors. Each week one volunteer buys and transports cat food, litter, and cleaning materials; another launders the cats' bedding at her home, which is an enormous task. Less frequent but routine tasks include cleaning the fans, spraying for fleas and ants, and checking all the cats for medical problems. Ten or twelve volunteers perform a thorough cleaning quarterly.

### Veterinary Care

Without a generous and supportive veterinarian, caring for our cats would be more difficult or even impossible. Our veterinarian has helped us with monthly Trap-Neuter-Return clinics and provided the sanctuary cats a lot of care for free. Not all veterinarians are willing or able to work with feral cats, and certainly not all are willing to donate time and supplies.

But our location and small number of volunteers limit the level of ongoing veterinary care we can provide. In the short-term, we try to send a sick cat home with a volunteer if medication can be administered in food. We

cannot, however, offer long-term medical assistance to cats who cannot be touched.

### Sanctuary Capacity

The sanctuary concept limits us to caring for a small number of animals over a long period of time. In our experience cats don't get along in groups larger than 20 to 25. Our sanctuary is designed to house up to 100 cats, 25 in each module, reserving one module for FELV-positive animals. Within a month of opening, we reached capacity.

Realistically, we cannot take in more animals until current cats die from sickness or old age. We lose about five cats each year. At this rate, it will be 20 years before we replace the original population. Meanwhile, the county's feral cat population continues to grow.

### Conclusion

Ten years ago our cats were living in a colony on the Kennedy Space Center property, and—as is often the case with feral cat colonies—volunteers could easily feed and monitor the cats on their way to or from work. Any incoming cats could be trapped, spayed or neutered, and vaccinated, then returned to the colony.

Opponents of Trap-Neuter-Return often suggest that sanctuaries are a plausible way to manage feral cat populations. They seem to think that all you have to do is build a fence. In reality, constructing and running a sanctuary is costly and self-limiting. Sanctuaries require endless volunteer hours, physical resources, and funding to help a finite number of cats. The potential to help cats through Trap-Neuter-Return, on the other hand, is limitless. ■

## Feral Cat Activist

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Visit us online at [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)

Contact us at [www.alleycat.org/response](http://www.alleycat.org/response)

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Feral Cat Activist is published by Alley Cat Allies. It is distributed free of charge to inform caregivers, advocates, veterinary professionals, animal control officers, shelter personnel, public officials, and the media about the life and death issues surrounding stray and feral cats.

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Cover photo by Molly Wald, inside photo by Clay Myers.

Alley Cat Allies (ACA) is a national, nonprofit organization based in Bethesda, MD. ACA promotes nonlethal population control for feral cats through advocacy, workshops and conferences, print, video, and web-based information; and helping individuals, groups, agencies, and institutions work with feral cats.

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# Making It Work at the Local Level

The goal of Alley Cat Allies' *Every Kitty—Every City* campaign is to overhaul animal control policies by engaging local residents and equipping them with the tools and knowledge to take on their local power structure. Community workshops are a vital part of this grassroots effort.

While workshops may initially be conducted by Alley Cat Allies organizers, the immediate objective is to enable one or more local advocates to assume this responsibility and, through community workshops, to develop a network of activists and supporters.

## WHAT IS A WORKSHOP? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A workshop is a group of people who meet for an exchange of ideas in a specialized field, in this case stray and feral cats. The meetings last about an hour to an hour and a half. These intimate gatherings are usually held in the evening at an easily accessible location, for example, a library or local shelter's dog training room and are made available to residents in areas where targeted trapping is occurring. (For more on targeted trapping see *Feral Cat Activist* October 2006, available online at [www.alleycat.org/newsletters.html](http://www.alleycat.org/newsletters.html).) Workshops offer an opportunity for residents who feed cats to meet others in their area doing the same, as well as for those who want to know more about Trap-Neuter-Return and what is being done for the cats in their community. The strength of this system grows through consistent repetition, and it can support many aspects of a local campaign.

## WORKSHOPS ARE A FORUM TO

**Teach people.** Demonstrate and review the basics of trapping stray and feral cats, managing a feral cat colony effectively, and the availability of local resources. Even experienced caregivers can benefit from reviewing the best practices of Trap-Neuter-Return. Doing it right enhances credibility with local government. The workshop program also includes educational materials, videos, brochures about how to easily deter cats, and doorhangers to recruit caregivers.

**Build the network.** Both experienced and novice caregivers need to meet each other, find out who is doing what and where in the community, and build a supportive network—a safety net to provide backup when needed.

**Dispel myths.** Discover the truth about feral cats. Community workshops are an ideal place to share the facts about your community, such as whether local animal control supports or opposes Trap-Neuter-Return. And what are the local shelter's practices—how many cats make it out alive? In workshops, caregivers can get the tools they need to educate neighbors and resolve issues concerning feral cat colonies.

**Advertise and share local resources.** Other segments of the community are often sources of assistance to caregivers, but they are wasted if no one knows about them. Pet supply stores may donate food. Vet clinics may reduce their rates for feral cats. Caregivers may lend traps or help trap colonies. Advertise your workshop—you are providing a resource. You can post a listing on [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org) and with your local news channel's community calendar for free. Get the word out; always emphasize the importance of thanking donors for whatever level of help they give.

**Show people how to get involved.** The end goal is a feral-cat-friendly community. Trapping and managing feral cat colonies are only the beginning. Building community support and reforming ineffective, inhumane municipal policies toward cats are the backbone of our *Every Kitty—Every City* campaign. Workshops are an opportunity to bring people at all levels of experience and neighborhoods to common ground and to inform them of what actions to take to make their community a safer place for cats.

## CONNECTING THE DOTS—VITAL TO THE NETWORK

Workshops are small. Caregivers attending one session may miss the next one, where they would have met a neighbor feeding the same cats or writing to the same local representative. Connecting people is why the workshop organizer must record who attends—keeping all information confidential, of course—and put people with common issues or living in proximity in touch with each other.

Feral cat advocates are voting taxpayers with the right to be heard and acknowledged by local government. Still, reforming a system and mobilizing a community is a huge job. By ourselves, we cannot expect to succeed; working as an organization gives our movement strength and we can flex that muscle.

To view Alley Cat Allies' workshop agenda and video, go to [www.alleycat.org/workshop](http://www.alleycat.org/workshop).



## CALLING ALL FERAL FRIENDS

### Your Updates Urgently Needed

The Feral Friends Network is Alley Cat Allies' database of individuals and organizations experienced with Trap-Neuter-Return as well as veterinary practices and clinics that spay/neuter feral cats. They offer their knowledge and services to help fledgling caregivers.

This is where you come in! We have been unable to contact some Feral Friends despite our outreach attempts, but we know you're out there! If you are a member of our Feral Friends Network, please take a few minutes to update your record so that we can continue to work together to save cats. If you can no longer continue as a Feral Friend, we need to know that, too.

If you see "Feral Friend" printed above your name in the address block of this newsletter, you are in our database as a Feral Friend.



Please update your record by going to [www.alleycat.org/updateff](http://www.alleycat.org/updateff).

If you don't have access to the Internet, call us toll-free at 866-309-6207, option 3.

### Want to become a Feral Friend?

Go to [www.alleycat.org/feral\\_friends](http://www.alleycat.org/feral_friends) to learn how you can apply to join Alley Cat Allies' Feral Friends Network.

# Anti-Cruelty Resource Center Launched

Intentionally killing a cat is a crime in all 50 states, and anti-cruelty laws apply to all cats—companion, abandoned, lost, stray, and feral. Now, with the launch of Alley Cat Allies' Anti-Cruelty Resource Center, there is a central place for concerned citizens, lawyers, journalists, and public officials to learn more about legal protections for cats. In addition to other features, the website provides needed context to the case in Galveston, Texas, of a man who was brought to trial on animal cruelty charges for shooting a feral cat (see below).

Alley Cat Allies' Anti-Cruelty Resource Center will be updated regularly to bring you current developments and ways that you can join the movement to end cat cruelty.



Visit the Anti-Cruelty Resource Center at [www.alleycat.org/anticruelty](http://www.alleycat.org/anticruelty).

## JURY DEADLOCKS

### Animal Cruelty Trial Ends in Mistrial

The jury deadlocked in the trial of the Galveston, Texas, man charged with animal cruelty for shooting and killing a feral cat. After more than eight hours of deliberation over two days, eight of twelve jurors voted to convict. Alley Cat Allies responded immediately with a letter to the Galveston

County District Attorney, urging him to retry the case.

Unfortunately, the District Attorney's office decided against a retrial. While this decision is disappointing, the attention this trial brought to the issue of cruelty to feral cats has been beneficial. Texas law was recently clarified to expressly protect feral cats and to make it unequivocally clear that anyone who intentionally kills any cat, whether companion, stray, or feral, violates Texas anti-cruelty law. It is important to note that although the defendant was not found guilty, he was also not found innocent.



Go to [www.alleycat.org/anticruelty](http://www.alleycat.org/anticruelty) to read Alley Cat Allies' letter to the Galveston District Attorney.

## JOIN FERAL POWER! and Be the First to Learn about Feral Cat Issues.

Members of Alley Cat Allies' online Feral Power! community get breaking news about incidents, events, and proposals that affect feral cats throughout the nation and in your backyard. You can be first to take effective action on behalf of cats!



Go to [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org), click on Get Involved/Join Feral Power!®

# Fast Facts about the Feral Cat Movement

- When Alley Cat Allies was founded in 1990, it was the first organization in the United States dedicated solely to helping stray and feral cats and their caregivers.

- Since then, hundreds of local and regional nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations working on behalf of stray and feral cats have been founded. Alley Cat Allies is still the only national organization dedicated to stray and feral cats.

**"Feral cats may not have owners, but they do have lobbyists. Alley Cat Allies, a national organization founded by an ex-social worker named Becky Robinson, harnesses a fierce coalition of celebrities, cat experts and feral cat colony caretakers to fight for the rights of cats."**

*New York Times Magazine, December 2, 2007*

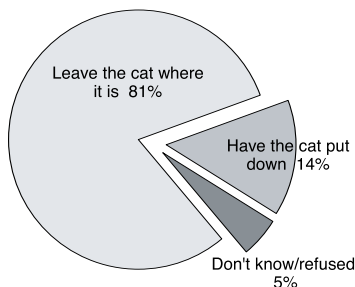
- Cats have eclipsed dogs as the number one companion animal in the United States, with an estimated 90 million cats living in 34 million households. It is estimated that there may be the same number of stray and feral cats living in their outdoor homes.

- More cats—companion, stray, and feral—are intentionally killed in shelters and animal control facilities than die from any other documented cause.

- Alley Cat Allies is the leading advocate to reform the nation's animal control policies and procedures and to stop the killing of feral cats in shelters.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Eighty-one percent of Americans—more than four out of five—believe that leaving a stray cat outside to live out his life is more humane than having him caught and put down, according to a nationally representative survey conducted for Alley Cat Allies by Harris Interactive in April and May 2007.



But current animal control policy in most cities in the United States holds that it is more humane to kill a stray cat now than let him live out his life outdoors. What is most salient to note is that the so-called humane ethic of the animal control and sheltering system ends more cats' lives than does any other documented cause of death.

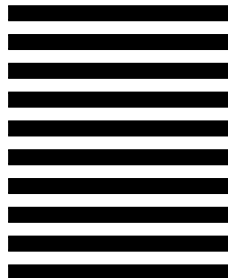
Source: Chu, Karyen and Wendy M. Anderson. 2007. U.S. Public Opinion on Humane Treatment of Stray Cats, Law and Policy Brief. Alley Cat Allies. Full text available at [www.alleycat.org/pdf/public\\_op.pdf](http://www.alleycat.org/pdf/public_op.pdf).



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# Marketplace

## How to live with cats in your neighborhood

### Brochure

Easily defuse neighbors' concerns about "cats in their yard." This brochure addresses common issues and provides quick solutions and household deterrents that will help keep neighbors happy. Come in sets of 5.

First set is FREE; each additional set \$5



## Do you believe she deserves to live even though she lives outdoors?

### Brochure

An indispensable tool for introducing neighbors, friends, family, co-workers, government officials, and business owners to the basic facts about feral cats. Explaining where feral cats come from, how they behave, and what they need, this brochure has helped feral cat caregivers and advocates across the country elicit community understanding for feral cats and build support for Trap-Neuter-Return. Come in sets of 25.

First set is FREE; each additional set \$5



## Discover the truth about feral cats

### Truth Card Series

This set of handouts is an ideal way to inform others about feral cats and Trap-Neuter-Return. Topics include The Truth About Animal Control, The Vacuum Effect, Viruses, Feral Cats, and What Americans Really Think. Each set contains 10 on each subject. 50 handouts total.

\$2/set



## Are there outdoor cats in your neighborhood?

### Doorhanger

A simple outreach tool, these doorhangers will introduce feral cats, and Trap-Neuter-Return, and explain why NOT to call animal control. Appropriate for neighborhoods with or without feral cats—because everyone can benefit from more information.

25 for \$2.50; 50 for \$4.50



## "If you don't believe in killing cats..."

### Poster

New for 2007, this colorful poster will enlighten your community to the killing going on behind closed doors. Come in sets of 5.

First Poster FREE; each additional set \$3



### Mail order form to

Alley Cat Allies, 7920 Norfolk Avenue, Suite 600, Bethesda, MD 20814-2525

You can also place your order online by going to [www.alleycat.org/marketplace.html](http://www.alleycat.org/marketplace.html).

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\$5/set - First set free QTY \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Do you believe she deserves to live... - Brochure*  
\$5/set - First set free QTY \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Truth Card Series - Cards*  
\$2/set QTY \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Are there outdoor cats... - Doorhanger*  
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*If you don't believe in killing cats... - Poster*  
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**If you don't believe in killing cats, you are already an advocate.**

**H O T T O P I C**

**Federal Legislation Could Target Feral Cats.** Alley Cat Allies tracks issues developing throughout the country that affect cats—and takes action as soon as it is called for. A hot topic in the spotlight now:

**H.R. 767**, the Refuge Ecology Protection, Assistance, and Immediate Response Act seeks to eradicate “harmful nonnative species” in federal wildlife refuges and adjacent private lands. Although the word “cat” does not appear in the proposed bill, the broad definition of “harmful nonnative species” could leave literally hundreds of both animal and plant species open to target. Cats are among them.



Go to [www.alleycat.org/AntiCruelty/report](http://www.alleycat.org/AntiCruelty/report) for the latest developments and possible Action Alerts for H.R. 767.

To receive Alley Cat Allies’ online Action Alerts, join Alley Cat Allies’ online activist community: *Feral Power!* Go to [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org), click on Get Involved/Join Feral Power!

**Keeping you informed**

We want to do everything possible to help protect and improve the lives of feral and stray cats nationwide. That’s why your Supporter Profile is so important. The better we know you, the better we can offer unique support and assistance that you need as well as alerting you to important developments impacting feral cats. Please take a moment to review your information (printed above), make updates below, and mail this back to us. We look forward to hearing from you...and thanks for all you do to help the cats!

Mr.  Mrs.  Ms.  Other \_\_\_\_\_

First/Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  Home  Work

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**How would you describe yourself?**

- An Advocate* - I work with my community leaders to change policy.
- A Caregiver* - I provide direct care to a local cat colony.
- A Feral Cat Supporter* – I sign petitions and take other actions to show my support for outdoor cats.
- A Humane Society* or  *Animal Control employee*  *Veterinarian* – I share the message of humane care with my co-workers.

After completing this form, fold the page in thirds with the mail panel facing out, and tape shut.