

The Breeding Problem

Cats have a remarkable reproductive capacity; they have evolved to reproduce quickly and effectively.

A female cat can commence her first fertile cycle and become pregnant as young as four months of age. With kittens being born only 9 weeks later, it means kittens can have kittens. Almost every time a cat is mated, she will become pregnant.

A female cat's fertile cycle depends on a number of factors which include warmth and daylight hours. Australia has mild winters and long daylight hours which enables cats in some areas to breed throughout the year.³

³ Dr Carole Webb; Reproductive Biology and Behaviour of the Cat 2010



The Kitten Equation

DOES IT REALLY MATTER IF THE ONE FEMALE CAT THAT I OCCASIONALLY FEED IS NOT DESEXED?

Yes it does! Cats multiply at an alarming rate. If one homeless cat is capable of producing up to 41 kittens in a year, in only 4 years 1 homeless female cat and her kittens are capable of producing a grand total of 3, 822 more homeless cats.³

³ Dr Carole Webb; Reproductive Biology and Behaviour of the Cat 2010



CAN'T THE HOMELESS CATS JUST BE DESEXED?

There are a number of problems with just desexing and then returning the unowned cats to the streets (often known as TNR, or trap, neuter, release).

Homeless cats often suffer from diseases and welfare problems and there have been instances where trapping the cat for desexing has made the cat "trap shy" and difficult to catch again. Where a homeless cat may need to be trapped again due to an injury or sickness, it may refuse to be caught, resulting in pain and suffering.

Releasing the cat to the streets does not resolve the nuisance problems or stop them from preying on wildlife, or guarantee their health.

Trap, neuter and release programs have only been shown to be effective in terms of population control in closed cat communities; most Australian cat colonies are not closed communities.

Cat colonies grow by people abandoning their cats and other homeless cats joining the colony. Public education programs on the importance of desexing, microchipping and confinement of cats to the owner's property, are sound alternatives to TNR programs.⁶

⁶ RSPCA Australia Research Report – TNR 2011; Cat Crisis Coalition Vic 2007.



What are the laws about cats?

All councils have the ability to introduce by-laws to manage cats in their area. Your local council is your first contact point if you have a query or complaint about cat management in your suburb.

Some councils have already introduced by-laws restricting the number of cats per household while others require all cats to be registered and microchipped. Check with your local council if you are unsure as to the requirements for owning cats.

But remember – Under the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*, any cat that is found without identification can be euthanased.

Protect your own cat

There are two vital steps you can take to protect your own cat. Firstly, ensure it is microchipped and secondly, confine your cat to your property.

The Dog and Cat Management Board's website has useful information about responsible pet ownership.

There is an information sheet you can download about the importance and safety of micro-chipping your cat, as well as a publication titled "Good Cats Play at Home" which will help inspire ideas about how you can safely confine your cat and keep it healthy and happy.

Visit www.goodcatsa.com and search under the resources tab for more information.

Visit www.goodcatsa.com/homeless to find out how you can help solve the problem.



What You Can Do To Help

Food alone isn't love. A cat needs all the benefits of a loving home.

If you're currently feeding a cat other than your own, consider taking full ownership or take it to your local vet, the Animal Welfare League, RSPCA or another animal shelter. They can check for a microchip, to determine if the cat has an owner. They can help find the cat a new home, by entering the cat into a rehoming program which involves desexing, microchipping, vaccinating and a veterinary health assessment.

If you have a known local problem with homeless cats which you would like to resolve, consider enlisting the assistance of neighbours in the area to catch them. Traps can be accessed through either your local council, or the RSPCA and you will be able to relocate trapped cats to a shelter.

We cannot save all cats - but by removing a homeless cat from the streets you will possibly be saving it from a life of misery and the birth of kittens into a homeless existence.

Only by dramatically reducing the number of homeless cats can we reduce the numbers that die each year.

DC128 PUBLISHED 06/2012 salmonstudio.com.au



Homeless Cats. The Facts.



Thousands of homeless cats roam South Australia¹, with many enduring a harsh existence in and around our suburbs.

Homeless cats spend most of their time looking for food and security, avoiding danger and claiming territory by urine marking.

Male cats spend a considerable amount of time fighting for territory or looking for females to mate with; while female cats spend their short lives either pregnant or raising kittens.

Food can come from several sources - garbage pickings, hunting wildlife, stealing from domestic and other animal bowls or by meowing at doors to tempt people to feed them.

Homeless cats create nuisance through noise, spraying urine, defecating in the garden, and killing wildlife. They threaten owned cats through fighting and spread diseases.

Apart from the neighbourhood problems they can cause, homeless cats frequently starve to death, are ravaged by disease or injuries, become victims of predator attacks or are hit by cars.

Unknowingly, well intentioned people increase the homeless cat problem by occasionally feeding the local stray. Simply feeding without taking full ownership is a practice referred to as 'semi-ownership'.

¹ RSPCA Australia national animal intake stats 2010 – 2011.

Are you a Semi-Owner?

If you are feeding a cat that is not your own, and you are not willing to take full ownership of it, you are a semi-owner.

IT LOOKS HUNGRY

For many people, it is hard to ignore a meowing cat. Most people who engage in semi-ownership of cats do so out of kindness.

Providing food is the most common semi-ownership behaviour, with most semi-owners (82%) providing food on a daily or alternative day basis.²

Providing food to a homeless cat maintains them in a fertile condition enabling a female to breed more kittens into a homeless existence. Increasing homeless cat population contributes to the high destruction rate of cats in South Australian shelters.

² Ehrenberg- Bass Institute, 2009 Semi-Owned Cat Attitudes and Behaviors' in South Australia



IT BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE

Research in 2009 of peoples' attitudes and behaviors towards cat semi-ownership in South Australia² identified:

- **26% of those surveyed had fed unowned cats**
- **over 65% of respondents who fed unowned cats were not planning to take full ownership of the cat**
- **6 out of 10 semi-owners believe that the cat belongs to someone else.**

Believing that someone else owned the cat also influenced the fact that only two out of ten semi-owners had desexed the cat.²

I'M ONLY FEEDING THE ONE CAT, IT'S NOT THAT BIG AN ISSUE

You are probably not only feeding the one cat! Homeless cats may be part of a colony of other cats or live alone. The lone cat tends to move around much more frequently in search of food and shelter, while colony cats take up camp in a certain place and protect it as their own for as long as possible.

If there is a reliable source of food available, it only takes one undesexed cat within a colony to reproduce an entire colony in 12 months.³

For the lone cat, a reliable source of food can mean an undesexed female cat and her kittens can produce a total of 41 kittens in 12 months.³

³ Dr Carole Webb; Reproductive Biology and Behaviour of the Cat 2010

IT SEEMS HEALTHY ENOUGH

Homeless cats generally have a poorer quality of life than that of an owned cat. They are more prone to disease, malnutrition and can spread disease to responsibly owned cats.

They are also much more likely to spread infectious diseases to people such as cat scratch fever, toxoplasmosis and ringworm to name a few.

In addition, an Australian study found that homeless cats have a very high rate of feline aids (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus), which is rapidly spread to the owned cat population.⁴ The virus is transferred through cat saliva and is transmitted during cat fights.

The life expectancy of a homeless cat is two years; a responsibly owned cat can live to 15 years or more, particularly if safely confined to its owner's property.

⁴ Prevalence of Feline Immunodeficiency Virus Infection in Domesticated and Feral Cats in Eastern Australia 2007. Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery (2007)

IF I FEED THIS CAT, IT WON'T KILL WILDLIFE

Cats kill wildlife. They are instinctive hunters and prey that is not killed is likely to die later of shock or infection. Scientists tell us that cats prey on more than 186 kinds of native Australian birds, 64 mammals, 87 reptiles and 10 species of amphibian and numerous invertebrates.⁵

⁵ Paton, D.C. (1993) Impacts of Domestic and Feral Cats on Wildlife

THE CAT JUST KEEPS TURNING UP IN MY BACKYARD!

Homeless cats can be a nuisance and these cats are often distressing to local residents. Generally they are hard to catch, and may hiss and scratch when approached.

Property owners are legally able to trap the cat and take it to a shelter or local vet where it will be checked for microchip identification. If the cat is unidentified it can be legally destroyed under the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*.

If the cat has a collar and ID tag it must be released from the trap immediately. All animals trapped must be released from the trap or relinquished to a shelter or taken to the vet within 12 hours.

An information leaflet titled "Humane Cage Trapping of Cats" is available on the GoodCat SA website.

WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

Mating cats are very vocal, and undesexed male cats fighting over a female cat can cause significant noise – generally in the middle of the night! Yowling, screaming, fighting, spraying of urine and other nuisance behaviors can all be associated with undesexed cats.

