

On the Positive Side: Trap, Neuter, Return program sees expansion

by Frank Bryce

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The Community Cat Colony Management Program and registration, often referred to as Trap, Neuter, Return or TNR, continues to grow as more cat colony managers learn of the assistance and support from local cat colony management advocacy organizations. In fact, a number of cat colony registration participants have already brought their colonies into compliance with city or county animal control ordinances before they even apply for colony registration or permits. There is still some resistance from some official administrations as to how and why ordinances apply to certain colonies but those issues are being pursued.

In the January/February 2016 issue of Animal Sheltering magazine of the Humane Society of United States, there is an article "Good Colonies Make Good Neighbors," which stresses six facets of good colony management and responsibility of the managers. The "Essential Peacekeeping Steps" address the possibility of human conflicts arising when colonies are amid folks with different attitudes toward the colony's existence. The article emphasizes 100 percent sterilization of colony cats with immediate trapping and spaying or neutering to prevent a lot of animal welfare problems.

"The better part of valor" addresses the core principle of cat colony management that colony cats that are unseen do not generate complaints. Sterilization reduces many of the cat behavior issues associated with complaints. Other behavior tactics include feeding in discreet out of the way areas of the colony site, keeping feeding stations clean, and feeding at the same time each day so leftover food can be removed so as to not be an attractant bugs, rodents or wildlife.

As strange as it seems "flying above the radar" in an honest and open way is a positive approach for cat colony managers. This approach gives colony managers the opportunity to comply with city and county ordinances and discuss issues with those who are in opposition to colony management. Taking an open, positive approach with a discussion of issues that may exist or be perceived to exist may persuade detractors to give colony management a chance to change behavior of cats or people.

As in almost every incident or situation, there is the "NIMBY" or "not in my backyard" and concerns must be addressed with active solutions to prevent further unwanted actions by the cats or the adjacent neighbors involved. Contentious situations can be averted with early lines of communication and development of deterrents to the cats' unwanted behavior. The average person who is not familiar with the successful deterrents available will much more inclined to accept nearby cats if they realize such deterrents exist.

Since there is seldom or never a place to relocate colony cats, we need to "think migration, not relocation." Relocation sites are not often available, often illegal and are risky for cats. Explaining that the colony cats are vaccinated, sterilized, cared for, attached to their territory and actually have nowhere else to go helps others understand the need for the colony site to continue. Simply moving the feeding site and shelters that have been provided to other areas of the colony site may eliminate trespassing issues. And finally, "achieving good, not perfection" is the real goal. How to care for colony cats has continued to improve and does not have to be an extreme burden on colony managers.

Information about care, trapping and colony management is readily available as well as resources for assistance. The last statement of the article is: "Even if you're not able to provide that 'perfect' colony home, you're still doing really, really good by providing that TNR." Colony managers can contact the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico for more information at 575-523-8020.

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