



"State of the Mewnton": A Survey of 567 Feral Cat Care Organizations

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Introduction

Although many best practices guidelines for feral and community cat care have been published by organizations such as Alley Cat Allies, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), the Association for Shelter Veterinarians, the American Association of Feline Practitioners, Best Friends Animal Society, Neighborhood Cats, and others, little is known about how groups "in the trenches" actually operate. Our survey sought to fill some of that gap via an online survey.

We developed our questionnaire based on each author's interests and expertise. Advertised as "The State of the Mewnton," our survey topics included issues about organization demographics, administration and policy, environmental and public health, caretaking and trapping, adoptions of friendly kittens and cats, medical policies and procedures, data collection and program efficacy metrics, research interest and participation, and conflict with bird/wildlife advocates and animal control agencies.

Methods

Our online survey was open for two months, from January 19 to March 19, 2018. We cast an inclusive net, asking for participation from organizations of all sizes that were involved in any aspect of feral/community cat care and advocacy. We limited the scope of our survey to organizations based in the United States. Due to the variety of questions that applied to many types of organizations, all questions after the demographics section were optional.

We advertised the survey to organizations by posting in Facebook Groups dedicated to feral/community cats, cat rescue, or trap-neuter-return (TNR), inviting participation from feline, shelter medicine, and feral cat student clubs at veterinary schools, emailing organizations listed on Petfinder's rescue database and the Humane Society of the United States' (HSUS) database of community cat organizations, contacting groups found by searching Google for terms such as "feral cats," "stray cats," and "TNR," and drawing upon our personal contact lists. We believe that we made a contact attempt to several thousand organizations. While we attempted to remove duplicate email addresses and avoid reaching out to any group multiple times, it is unknown how many of our contact attempts could have been duplicates or made to an organization which has ceased to operate. For those reasons, we cannot calculate a response rate. We used R for statistical analysis.

References & Best Practices Guides

* Alley Cat Allies. (2017). Veterinary Resource Center. Retrieved January 1, 2018, from <https://www.alleycat.org/resources/veterinary-resource-center/>

* Alley Cat Allies, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), & Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals. (2016). *Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and Colony Care*.

* American Association of Feline Practitioners. (2017). American Association of Feline Practitioners Practice Guidelines. Retrieved January 1, 2017, from <https://www.catvets.com/guidelines/practice-guidelines>

* Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Veterinary Task Force to Advance Spay-Neuter, Griffin, B., Bushby, P. A., White, S. C., Rigdon-Brestle, Y. K., Appel, L. D., ... Tyson, K. (2016). The * Association of Shelter Veterinarians' 2016 Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 249(2), 165–188. <http://doi.org/10.2460/javma.249.2.165>

* Best Friends Animal Society. (2017). Community Cat Programs Handbook. Retrieved January 1, 2018, from <https://bestfriends.org/resources/community-cat-programs-handbook-stray-and-feral-cats-resource>

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* International Companion Animal Management Coalition. (2011). *Humane Cat Population Management Guidance*.

* Kortis, B. (2014). *Community TNR: Tactics and Tools*. Phoenix, Arizona: PetSmart Charities.

* R Core Team. (2017). R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing. Vienna, Austria: R Foundation for Statistical Computing. Retrieved from <https://cran.r-project.org>

* Sparkes, A. H., Bessant, C., Cope, K., Ellis, S. L. H., Finka, L., Halls, V., ... Yeates, J. (2013). ISFM Guidelines on Population Management and Welfare of Unowned Domestic Cats (*Felis catus*). *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, 15(9), 811–817. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1098612X13500431>

Results

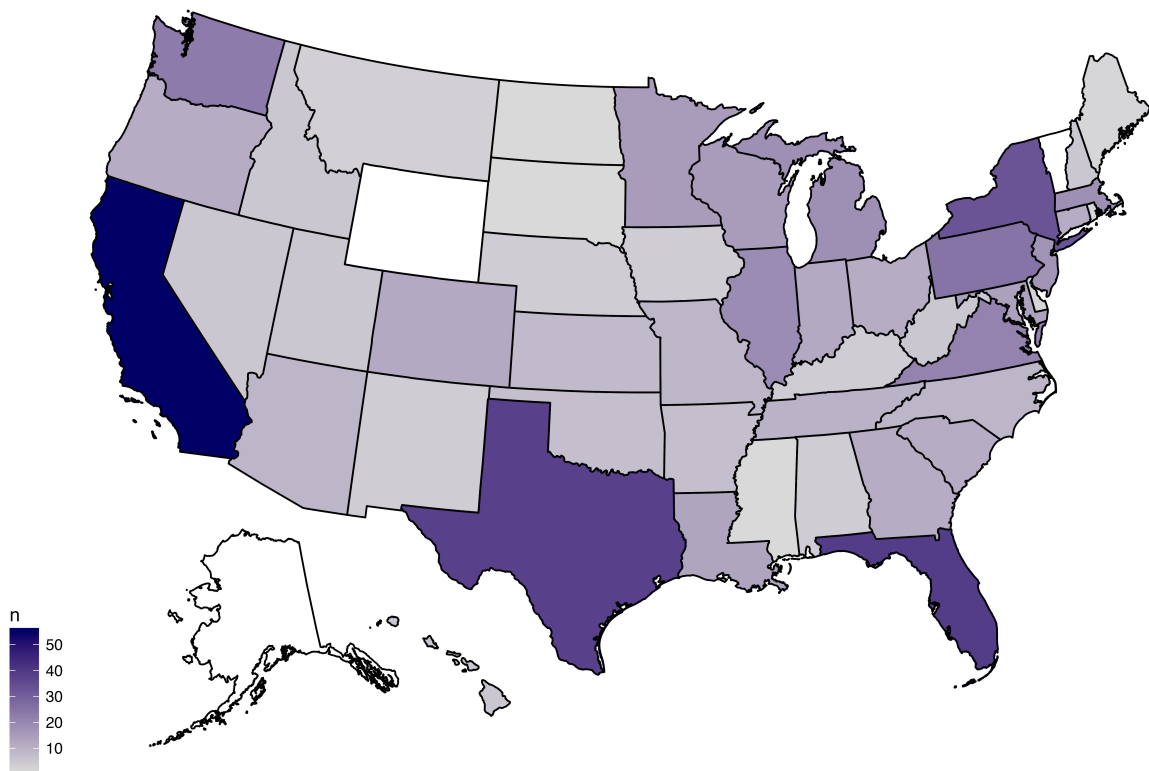


Figure 1: A map of the United States colored by which states had the greatest number of respondents.

Our survey included 567 organizations from almost every state (see Fig. 1). To the best of our knowledge, this is the largest and most comprehensive study conducted about feral/community cat care and advocacy organizations. The following results are a selection of questions and answers.

"Does your organization currently have at least one declared goal that includes both a measurable value and a timeframe? Such as, 'reduce the outdoor cat population of our town 25% by 2025' or 'provide 1000 free spay/neuter surgeries every year.'" 67.9% answered "no," 32.1% answered "yes." (N=563.)

"Are you seeing health issues in feral/community cats that are suspected as being caused by exposures to toxins or environmental contaminants?" 59.0% answered "no," 27.2% answered "unknown," 13.8% answered "yes." (N=544.)

"If you do adoptions of socialized feral/community cats or kittens born to feral/community cats, does your group's adoption information have a position on whether they should be kept as indoor-only animals?" 52.7% require that adoptees be kept indoors, 28.5% recommend keeping adoptees indoors, 9.8% have no position on this issue, 7.7% selected "other," 1.2% recommend that adoptees live both indoors/outdoors. (N=491.)

"If your organization has a standard required fee or suggested donation to pay for veterinary services for feral/community cats, what is that amount in US dollars?" The mean spay cost was \$44.58, mean neuter cost was \$37.72.

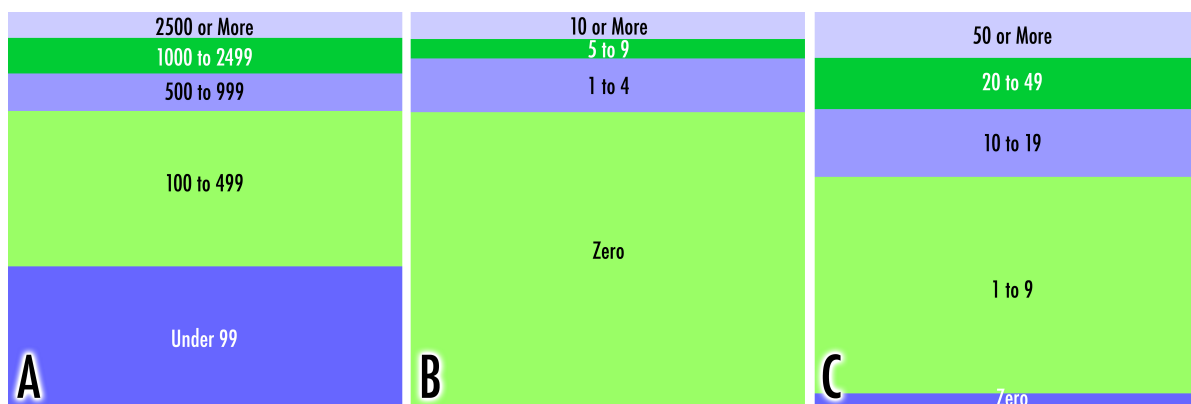


Figure 2A: "What is the approximate number of feral/community cats that you serve per year?"; B: "What is the number of paid employees in your group?"; C: "What is the number of active volunteers in your group?"

"For kitten spay/neuter, what type of lower limit do you use to determine if kittens can have surgery?" 51.8% use just a weight, 3.5% use just an age, and 38.2% use both. (N=454.) "If you use only a minimum weight, what is that weight?" 61.9% have a 2.0 pound limit, 15.2% have a 3.0 pound limit. "If you use only a minimum age, what is that age?" 41.2% wait until 8 weeks, 18.8% wait until 12 weeks, 13.8% wait until 16 weeks.

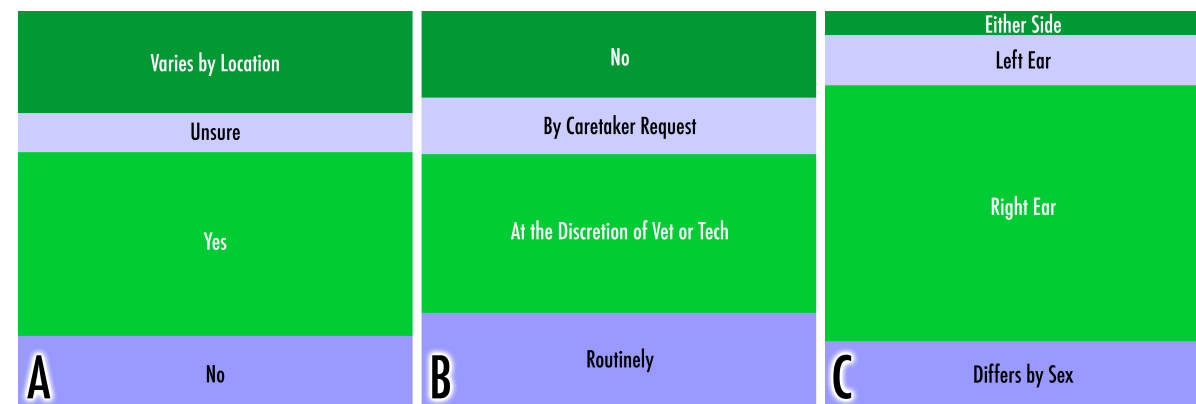


Figure 3A: "Is TNR explicitly allowed or endorsed by local laws and animal control ordinances where you operate?"; B: "What clinical services do you provide to feral/community cats? FIV Testing."; C: "If you use ear tipping/notching of feral/community cats, on which side does it occur?"

"What, if any, published guidelines do you use in shaping your own TNR and medical practices?" The most popular answers were Alley Cat Allies/ASPCA/Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return and Colony Care, Best Friends Community Cat Programs Handbook, Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook, Alley Cat Allies Veterinary Resource Center, and the Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs. (N=567.)

"What methods do you currently use to determine whether your program is effective at saving the lives of cats and/or reducing outdoor cat populations?" 51.0% selected the option "Feedback from trappers/colony caretakers based on their judgement of cat numbers" or listed a similar anecdotal method in a text box. Indirect methods were also common: 31.2% track shelter cat intake, 27.3% track shelter kitten intake, 22.2% track shelter euthanasia numbers, 12.7% track nuisance calls about cats, and 15.9% noted another indirect method in a text box. Only 0.18% (1 group) reported using an analytical method: conducting regular, deliberate transect surveys.

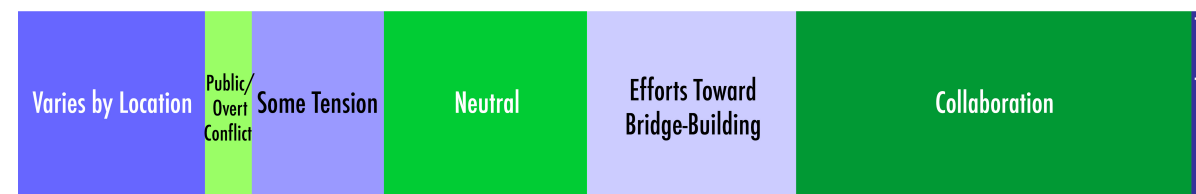


Figure 4: "How would the current relationship between feral/community cat advocates and animal control authorities in your area best be described?"

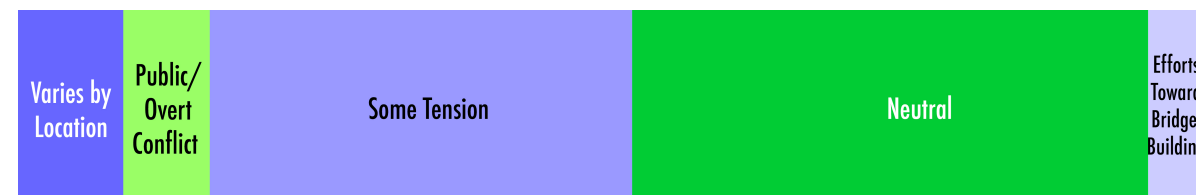


Figure 5: "How would the current relationship between 'feral/community cat people' and 'wildlife/bird people' in your area best be described?"

Discussion

This poster shares just some of the information we gathered. We will be submitting an article with the full results and analysis to an open access academic journal so the information is available to everyone. The article will also be posted on the lead author's website at aeluro.com/mewnton