Animal Services Advisory Board
Free Roaming Cat Task Force
6:45 to 8:30 p.m., April 23, 2014

Meeting Summary
Prepared by Suzanne Roy

The purpose of this meeting was to hear comments and concerns from stakeholders interested in wildlife protection.

Task Force Members Present: DeWana Anderson, DVM (Chair), Judy Miller, Suzanne Roy, Warren Porter.

OCAS Staff Present: Bob Marotto

Wildlife Stakeholder Representatives Present: Scott Anderson, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Wildlife Stakeholder Representatives invited but not present: Maria Palimar, DVM, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Heather Hahn, Executive Director of NC Audubon Society, Bobby Schopler of the Duke Lemur Center, Kendra Mammone, Executive Director of CLAWS.

Public Present: Kristine Bergstrom, DVM, and former member of the Animal Services Advisory Board; Deanna Rowan, Margaret Heath and Betty Smith.

Mr. Marotto began the meeting by outlining the concerns with predation by outside cats and free roaming cats on birds and other wildlife. He stated that the studies that have been done indicate that there are significant impacts of predation of free roaming cats on birds in some if not all situations. He outlined three scenarios that illustrate concerns about free roaming cats he has encountered during his 20 + years of work in the animal control field.

> Nuisance concerns – cat at bird feeder scenario
> Conservation concerns - changes to ecology/population dynamics due to presence of cats, which are a non-native species. He referenced a New York Times opinion piece (March 21, 2014) by a writer for Smithsonian, National Geographic, etc. as an example of these concerns.
> Predator turns to prey – cats being taken by coyotes.

Mr. Anderson contributed to the discussion, beginning by stating his belief that there is a lot of common ground between cat advocates and wildlife advocates. Namely, the goal of reducing the free roaming cat population.

Mr. Anderson is a bird biologist with the Wildlife Resources Commission. The Commission does not have a position on cats and cat control.

He explained that there have been studies that estimate how many birds are killed by cats. One recent study, based on a review of literature, estimated that cats killed 4 billion birds a year in North America. (Added that you must consider in perspective, i.e. how many birds are there in North America?) Mr. Anderson's key points included:

> Cats are one of many human-induced activities that impact wildlife.
> Cats are not native to North America, so birds that have evolved to live in habitats here have not evolved behaviors and mechanisms to protect them from predation by cats.
> Cats can prey on birds, small mammals and reptiles.
> We need more information and data on impacts. One study that put cameras on cats indicated that they only brought home 30% of what they kill.
> Biologists think at population level – more concern about predation on threatened and endangered bird species than on species that are abundant in our area. Not a significant problem in Orange County, but in some coastal areas where there are many species of threatened, ground-nesting birds, free roaming cats are a significant concern.
> He's pleased to participate in this discussion to see where the common ground lies. The goal is to identify productive solutions instead of being at odds.
> He is not against Trap Neuter and Release (TNR). He is in favor of decreasing the number of free roaming cats.
> There are studies that show TNR has worked to significantly decrease free roaming cat populations, and there are studies that show it hasn't worked.
> A study published this year based on modeling showed that if you sterilize cats but leave them hormonally intact, they maintain their place in the breeding hierarchy and you can have a greater impact on reproduction. You are working with the cat's behavior instead of against it. Downside is hormonally intact animals will continue to exhibit nuisance behaviors such as yowling, spraying, etc.
> Key to success is multiple methods with public buy in.
> In order to work on its own, a TNR program would have to remove from a breeding population somewhere between 70-80% a year. If you don't do it to that level, you're not going to reduce the population.

Discussion followed between members of the public, the task force, Mr. Anderson and Mr. Marotto.

Key points:

> In Florida, the control program is working because it is a multi-pronged approach: TNR, anti-abandonment, aggressive adoption, etc.
> No data exists on effect of sterilization on predation. Ms. Rowan pointed out that predation may decrease because sterilized cats are no longer having to feed their young.
> Concerns about zoonotic disease transmission (toxoplasmosis, rabies, larval migrans, etc.)

The shelter has no requirement for adopters to keep cats indoors.
Mr. Marotto stated his experience regarding property owner issues – people don't want cats dead, but they don't want them on their property either.

The upshot of the wildlife listening session was:

Common ground exists between wildlife stakeholders and free roaming cat advocates. The goal is to reduce the population of free roaming cats.
The most successful programs included multi-pronged approaches to the issue.
Success depends on public buy in and support for program.
TNR and other approaches to address free roaming cats in a humane, publicly-acceptable way are a win-win for all stakeholders.

The Task Force also discussed the issue of TNR as it relates to releasing cats back to managed vs. unmanaged situations.

The question that must be answered is: Is it humane to release cats back to situations where there is no caretaker?

Dr. Bergstrom stated her belief that it is not humane, as the quality of life for the cat can be poor (cars, coyotes, lack of food sources, medical care, etc.)
Mr. Marotto said that we must address the question: What is the quality of life for a free roaming cat and what responsibility do we have for that? He believes that not always more humane to release a cat than to euthanize the cat.
Independent Animal Rescue stated their position that if a healthy cat comes into program, no problem returning it to area it was trapped from. If emaciated cat or cat in poor condition, can't return.
Dr. (DeWana) Anderson referenced the Rhode Island situation – cats must be identified before being released. This provides the ability to track individual cats. If a cat is the subject of multiple complaints, then he/she would be removed from the outdoor population. RI cut the shelter population down significantly with this policy.
Mr. Anderson noted that identification of cats would facilitate collection of data on wildlife impacts as well.
Identification is cornerstone of any program to address free roaming cats.