

CATmatters_{update}

Every Cat Matters. Every Person Counts. Fall 2006

The Challenge of Helping Feral Cats

by Mike Franzman

Last issue we touched upon two feral cats that Helen & Aliya Roginiel had been caring for, and the unique challenge of dealing with a feral cat, as opposed to your basic stray domestic animal. What makes a cat 'feral' exactly? Merriam-Webster defines feral as:

suggestive of a wild beast; not domesticated or cultivated; having escaped from domestication and become wild.

Wikipedia goes on to say:

Adult feral cats born feral usually cannot be socialized. Adult feral cats born in a domestic environment and reverted to the feral state can sometimes be re-socialized. Feral kittens, however, can often be socialized to live with humans if they are taken from a feral colony before they are about twelve weeks old.

Based on their wild nature and distrust of humans, feral cats present a very different scenario than tame ones, and therein is the challenge: Feral felines, as much in need of food, water, shelter and medical care as any domesticated cats, are simply not easy to get near. Their wild nature prevents humans from getting close enough to help, thus many feral cats go neglected, uncared for, seemingly existing just beyond human intervention.

Jean Maatta & Michael Frame have proven otherwise. They both have first-hand experience dealing with feral cats, due to some unique circumstances that developed around their Hamden home.

"It was about 3 years ago, and a couple of cats showed up in the yard," says Jean. "My husband put some food out for them. I didn't think it was a good idea, because everyone knows they will stay around. I knew if we started feeding them they would become our responsibility if they didn't have homes, and I felt one house cat was enough." Mike began feeding the cats regularly, and even though the feedings continued throughout the season, these particular strays

exhibited their feral nature – "We still couldn't get near them, but kept feeding them every day".

Then things began to become more urgent. "One day our friend pulled up in the driveway, and he spotted right away that one of the cats was nursing. We had no idea that she had been pregnant or that she had kittens." The trained eye could tell by seeing the mother, that this feral cat had recently had a litter of kittens. "After our friend left, we went into the basement, and there were two kittens in one of our window wells - they were maybe 4 or 5 weeks old. We decided to do something about them, because you'll end up with more if you don't."

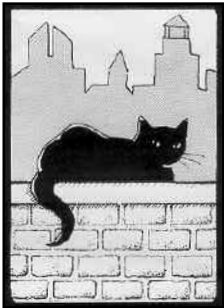
A lot more in fact: Research shows that an unsprayed female can produce at least 40 kittens over a 10 year period, and those kittens will also reproduce if

not spayed or neutered; you end up with thousands upon thousands of cats in no time! This rough statistic is only exacerbated by the fact that each day only 10,000 humans are born in the US, but 70,000 dogs and cats are born daily. At this rate, it is easy to see there can never be enough homes for these animals. This brings up the whole raison d'être for an organization like GNHCP that promotes the concept of trap/neuter/return (TNR). Knowing something must be done, Jean & Mike got in touch with Cheryl at GNHCP, in order to capture these difficult-to-catch feral kittens. "We originally were going to start by trying to catch one of the kittens, but didn't

realize how feisty a feral kitten could be. Then we borrowed a Have-A-Heart trap, but that wasn't successful either. We also didn't want to separate the kittens from the mother yet, in case they were still nursing so we knew we had to catch all of them at once.

We set up two traps side by side. One kitten was bolder, and one more shy. The way it happened was the bolder kitten went into one trap to eat, but didn't spring the trap right away. The timid kitten followed into the

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The Greater New Haven Cat Project, Inc. (GNHCP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed in 1996 to address the problems of cat overpopulation, neglect and abuse in our area. GNHCP provides spay/neuter assistance for feral, stray and abandoned cats, and promotes responsible pet ownership through educational workshops. The organization is comprised solely of volunteers, and is funded through private donations, fundraising events and grants.

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Bopper waiting for dinner



Jean & Mike's ferals
lounging on the patio

other trap, and then both traps sprung at the same time. Cheryl arranged to have the two kittens taken care of: vaccines, neutered, and then brought them back to us to release in the yard.” “The two kittens from the first litter were named Bopper & Sarge. Sarge was named because she had three black stripes on each paw. People had told me that if you don't get a feral cat within three months of its birth, you won't have much luck taming it. Bopper was 7 or 8 months when we got him, and now he is the friendliest cat we know. We are planning to integrate him into our household this fall. We have Plexiglas covers over our window wells; Bopper has spent the last two winters sleeping in there, with bedding we've added. The mom and dad also frequently use them. They watch us through the basement windows.”

They continued to try and catch the mom & dad cats, but this is never an easy charge with feral cats. About a week later they met with success and managed to trap the male and have him neutered. Now they could focus solely on the mom, but our story took yet another feral turn: “By now, we found that the mom was pregnant, again – she had a second litter! We knew this because she got bigger, then disappeared for a few days, and then came back looking slimmer!” This litter would prove even more difficult to catch than the first.

“It took us several months this time, and meanwhile we caught raccoons, squirrels, an opossum, and at that point we decided the Have-

a-Heart trap probably wouldn't work. There is another trap provided by GNHCP that you can spring yourself. It is a box with a wooden frame made with chicken wire. The door is an oven rack, propped up with a nail. You tie a string to the nail – when the cat you want goes in to get the food, you pull the string, and the door falls.”

They caught one of the kittens from the second litter, and decided to keep it as it was only three months old, the age where it would likely respond to domestication. “We named him Dinky after a train line in Princeton, NJ. We did this because we already had a cat named Cheshire, or ‘Chessie’, named for the Chesapeake Railroad; they have a sleeping cat as their logo. My husband, being from West Virginia, was familiar with the Chessie System, so we named him after that. The other kitten from the second litter started out in the garage. We didn't plan to adopt him, not wanting to really adopt him, but he ended up in the house along with Dinky – We named him Fuzzy, for obvious reasons.

Our older cat, Chessie had a little trouble accepting Dinky and Fuzzy at first, but now they get along most of the time.”

After the second litter we were able to catch the mom – I think she was a kitten herself when she had her first litter. The mom & dad are now daily visitors. Mike feeds them at 4:30am every day, but they are still very much feral. Mike has been able to touch

them, “but they just about jump out of their skins.” There are also strays that have showed up. One of them had a flea collar on so we assumed it was someone's cat, but over the winter it got really matted, and wasn't neutered, so we ended up having him taken care of through the Cat Project. He came back shaved and looked like a lion, so his name is Leo. What forced us to take care of Leo was that another cat showed up recently that was also not neutered. They were on the verge of fighting so we took care of them within a week of each other. The other cat tested positive for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (Feline AIDS) so he is now on a farm that takes Feline FIV+ cats.

Asked what advice Jean might give to other would-be cat helpers, she replies: “It can take a long time to catch the cats, but it is so much better for them. Cheryl was willing to go to great lengths to help us reach our goals and has been very helpful with the strays that have come along. It is so important to get the cats neutered or spayed. We had two litters before we could get it done. Persistence is the key with ferals. Go and do likewise!

Double the Love - These sisters are 3 months old, full of energy and affection, love to play with humans and with one another.

They have come a long way since they were rescued. Due to the conditions they were rescued from, both have eye conditions which need your commitment to care for, but they are worth every minute. Call and ask about *Wink & Nell* at (203) 782-2287 or visit the website at www.gnhcp.org.



The Greater New Haven Cat Project, Inc.
Sponsored by the Very Best Pet Network.

Memorial Contributions

In Memory of Rex, a beloved cat who belonged my friend Donna Consolini - Adrienne Gallagher

In Memory of Christine - Donna Pursley

In Memory of Adrienne Scarpellino - Adrienne Ardito

In Memory of Mr. Lee - Mikey, Miss Emily & Bubbles Vogl

In Memory of Milo, the beloved cat of Marjorie Mogulescu - Susan Cannon



GNHCP Wish List

Things to keep our Center clean and running smoothly:

Gift cards to WAL★MART, Petco or grocery stores

First-class stamps

Paper towels

Trash bags

Simple Green

Dish soap

Items to keep our animals happy and healthy:

Revolution

Frontline

KMR Powder Formula

Catnip toys

Cat treats

Toy Mice

Photographing Cats

by Hazen Allison Witemeyer

My cat Pumpkin is darling: he's all orange, with dark orange stripes, not another color on his whole body. Sometimes when he's looking at me, he squints his big golden eyes just so, raising his chin, and I swear, he's smiling at me. Don't believe me that my cat smiles?

There are few things that can more quickly make me happy when I am far away from home than a picture of my beloved feline's furry face. But cats are notoriously hard to photograph: if they aren't asleep, they're running around. Even if yours is sitting still, she sure isn't going to want to look at you if you charge at her with a big camera apparatus covering your face.

I combed the web in search of tips and tricks from professional and amateur photographers to help me learn to photo my cats, and consolidated what I learned into these few core ideas. Whether you want a portrait for your family Christmas card or just a few candid shots to add to your (or your cat's) blog, hopefully these few tips will help you capture Princess in all her glory.

Be patient. Cats are only slightly less interested than most criminals in having their mug shots taken. Don't expect to get a great picture in the first few shots – or even in the first sitting. After all, *practice makes purrfect.*

Recruit a photographer's assistant. Having an extra person to help keep Princess interested can make the process much less frustrating.

If your kitty responds to treats, use them. Use them for yourself and your assistant, for that matter.

Location and lighting. Put the cat in a place she is comfortable, but clean it up a little first so that the cat and not clutter is the focus of attention in the finished shot. Natural light is best, but a flash can be employed if your pet is indoors, or even shy with a tendency to turn his head so that his face is partially shaded. Just be sure to use red-eye reduction features.

She's ready for her close up. Capture her personality by taking close-ups using a zoom lens or macro setting on your camera. If you have a camera with a mechanical telescoping lens, extend it before getting close to your cat since the sound of a moving lens will distract (or even spook) many cats. Try portrait mode if your camera has one. Don't use the flash at this distance.

Shoot from at or below the cat's eye level. It's nice to see Princess from the same position from which she sees the world, and to show others

what she looks like when she's on that pedestal you put her on.

What kind of camera? Digital cameras are excellent because you can take a lot of pictures and not have to spend money to develop them. If you were only going to use your camera to photograph your cat and price were not an object, you would probably want a digital SLR, or Single Lens Reflective. These are "prosumer" cameras, meaning professional gear aimed at the consumer market. They allow you to change lenses, change shutter speed, and snap exactly the shot you see in the viewfinder. They are expensive, and heavy, but once you try one, point and shoot cameras will never look as good again. Six megapixel resolution should be sufficient, unless you plan to make larger-than-poster size prints, in which case choose 8MP.

There are plenty of good, high-resolution point and shoot digital cameras out there. Choose one with a fast shutter and image stabilizer, and choose one that shoots video. After all, short digital videos on websites like Catster.com and YouTube.com are the next big thing.

Hire a professional, especially if you want to photograph multiple cats or the entire family together. Look for a studio with pet photography experience, and make sure you adore the sample pictures the photographer shows you before you sign a contract.



Girl Scouts Hold Cat Food Drive

The Girl Scouts, Connecticut Trails Council Troop 224 sponsored a cat food drive for GNHCP in mid-June. The event generated 80 lbs. of dry food, 36 cans of canned food and \$134 in donations. Pictured in the

PETsMART Grant

GNHCP was awarded funding from PETsMART Charities in June 2005 for a year-long project, a project that was a marriage of two of our most important activities: educational programs and spay/neuter assistance. Specifically, GNHCP held six low-cost spay/neuter clinics with the TEAM Mobile Feline Unit for low-income residents within the Greater New Haven community. The clinics were a resounding success, with each sterilizing 40 feral and tame cats! Using grant funding, GNHCP also facilitated two educational workshops (Hagaman Library in East Haven and Wintergreen Magnet School in Hamden), whereby our volunteers met with grade school children to discuss responsible pet ownership and the importance of spay/neuter while making cat masks and shelters for cats living outdoors. The enthusiastic children were good indicators of our success, and we have already planned future events with the same groups. Prompted by this project to reach more of New Haven than we currently do, GNHCP's materials were translated into Spanish. The translations included our activity booklet, press release and posters advertising the clinics, and recovery guidelines. Further, we promoted our spay/neuter clinics in Spanish-speaking areas of New Haven. This important community outreach endeavor was effective in reaching parts of our community that we have not typically reached, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of assistance calls we receive. Seeds for collaborations with many organizations were planted, and we expect these collaborations to only grow stronger in the future. We view our successful project as a milestone along the path to reducing cat overpopulation and suffering in our community and it is clear, of course, that much work remains to be done.

photo are: Ayanna Boyd, Tashara Salters, Taylor Edwards, GNHCP volunteer Shawna Bartkus, Angelique Boyd, GNHCP volunteer Jennie Llanos, Tessa McGann and Jasmine Ayers.

Charitable Giving is Tax Deductible

At **GNHCP**, we keep our overhead costs low and the benefits for felines high. We have a strong tradition of stretching our donors' dollars as far as they can go.

Our work would not be possible without the generous financial support of caring people like you. In 2005, **GNHCP** was able to provide spay/neuter and veterinary assistance to 521 feral and stray cats in the greater New Haven area. In addition, 42 cats who were once homeless were placed in permanent homes!

Your donation will go to work instantly to enable **GNHCP** to continue its mission to address cat overpopulation through spaying/neutering and public education. If you prefer, you can designate where you would like your donation to be used: to

provide food and veterinary care for our foster cats or our special needs cats (The Tommy Fund); to the spay/neuter program for feral and stray cats; or for overhead at our Center (i.e., electric bill, rent, etc). With the flurry of activity that takes place from mid-November through the end of the calendar year, now is the time to consider a tax-deductible donation to **GNHCP**.

GNHCP is an authorized tax-exempt, non-profit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. And what does it mean to be a 501(c)(3) organization? For donors like you, this means your contributions are fully tax-deductible to the amount allowed by law.

Please help **GNHCP** continue its good work. Thank you.
GNHCP, P.O. Box 1432, New Haven, CT 06506

*“I have studied many philosophers and many cats.
The wisdom of cats is infinitely superior.”*

– Hippolyte Taine



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