



## MHS Policy on Healthy Community Cats

Every year, Maui Humane Society takes in thousands of community (free roaming, outdoor) cats brought to us by concerned citizens. The cats may be feral (wild), lost or abandoned strays, or pets belonging to unidentified owners. For many years, even decades, our policy was to euthanize these cats if they were not reclaimed or were unadoptable due to temperament or lack of space. This approach historically has failed to reduce the number of cats entering our shelter and there is no evidence it has reduced the population of outdoor cats in our Maui community. There are several reasons why removing cats from the environment and euthanizing them fails to impact their numbers on anything but a temporary basis:

- Not enough cats in an area are removed quickly enough to prevent their continued reproduction and population growth,
- The food and shelter that were available to removed cats remain in place and before long, new cats arrive to take advantage and fill the vacuum, and
- Many community members feed and care for outdoor cats and oppose their removal.

Where communities across the United States have seen success, as reflected by lower cat intake and fewer citizen complaints, there has been an active sterilization of community cats. No longer able to reproduce, the cats continue to fill a niche and prevent new, unaltered cats from taking over. Once fixed, the cats also roam less, make much less noise and do not create a foul odor when marking territory. They do continue to provide rodent control. If enough of the cats in a neighborhood are sterilized, their numbers will drop over time. This policy of managing community cats through sterilization is endorsed by The Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA, Best Friends Animal Society and many other leading national animal welfare organizations.

In keeping with this progressive approach, Maui Humane Society no longer euthanizes healthy community cats due to lack of space or unsuitability for adoption. Instead, we practice a sterilization program. We spay or neuter the cat, tip the left ear, insert a microchip, vaccinate, administer deworming medication and return the cat to their original location. We are able to safely assume from the cat's healthy body condition that they are being fed and cared for by a community member. In addition to increasing the number of outdoor cats who are sterilized, our policy also reduces the overall population of cats on Maui. It also prevents the tragic euthanasia of pets who were captured while roaming and lack owner identification.

**What if I don't want cats on my property?**

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There are many ways to keep unwanted cats or other animals out of your garden or yard, including motion-activated sprinklers and cat-proof fencing. For more information, please visit the Neighborhood Cats website at <http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/how-to-tnr/colony-care/keeping-cats-out-of-gardens-and-yards-2> . Using deterrents is more effective for keeping your property cat-free than repeatedly trapping and removing cats.

### **Will returning the cats lead to increased cruelty and abandonment?**

The experience of communities with these sterilization programs has been that returning healthy, fixed cats to their territories does not result in more acts of cruelty or abandonment. Citizens are generally law-abiding and harming a cat or releasing a cat at a new location where it cannot be assumed there is adequate food or sustenance are crimes under Hawaii's law. Also, as discussed, when a cat is sterilized, much of the behavior which people find annoying – noise, odor, fighting – is dramatically reduced.

### **Will returning cats harm wildlife?**

We do not return cats to locations specifically managed for the preservation or protection of wildlife. Overall, reducing the outdoor cat population through sterilization will protect wildlife more than endlessly repeating the cycle of removing and euthanizing cats.

### **What can I do to help?**

The more cats in an area who are fixed, the better the sterilization program works. If you are feeding outdoor cats who are unaltered, or if you are aware of them, please let us know. We can advise you how to safely capture them and bring them to our spay/neuter clinic, or we can arrange for our staff or volunteers to assist you.

Together, we can solve Maui's cat overpopulation crisis while respecting cats' lives and treating them as humanely as possible. Mahalo!