

Feral Cats in the City of Vernon

**A presentation to the City of Vernon
September 24, 2007**

Any business owner in the north end of Vernon cannot help but be aware of the large feral cat population in that area of the city. The Animal Care Society has received reports of feral cats and kittens living near Toyota and the Superstore, the Prestige Inn patio, Floorco, Coldstream Truck Parts, Baker's Dozen, Kitty Kat Upholstery, Kal Tire Administration Building, the Skyway Condos and Bramble Bush Floral & Gifts.

In the south end of Vernon, we've been informed of feral cats living behind businesses like Guardian Building Products on Waddington Drive, along Vernon Creek at Polson Place Mall, across the highway at the former Park Royal Motel, all along 24th Avenue to Howard House and Okanagan Restoration Services.

Feral cats are the offspring of domestic pets who have been abandoned by their owners, typically when they reach sexual maturity and start spraying, in the case of males, or when they become pregnant, in the case of females. Unless their kittens are trapped and socialized at a very young age they are wild animals and can never become domestic pets. Our spay/neuter assistance program for low income owners is designed to prevent abandonment and, during the last five years, this program has altered 1,050 cats. We know that we have prevented the abandonment of hundreds of cats and the unwanted births of thousands more.

Over the last five years we have also been operating a trap/neuter/release program for feral cats. We have ten humane traps which are constantly on loan to businesses and individuals. We collect the cats, transport them to Creekside Animal Clinic or Crescent Falls Veterinary Hospital, and return them neutered and tattooed to their territories. Most businesses who have contacted us are willing to continue to monitor the cats for us and to alert us should any new cats join the colony. Trap/neuter/release is the only practical solution to the feral cat problem. Combined with our spay/neuter assistance program it humanely reduces the problem through natural attrition. Extermination on its own is ongoing, expensive and VERY unpopular with the public.

Unfortunately, none of the businesses we have helped in Vernon has been willing to contribute to our vet bills. Sometimes compassionate employees will give small donations but business owners seem to feel that they did not cause the problem so they shouldn't be expected to pay for the solution. Although we work very hard fundraising and receive generous 50% discounts plus free tattoos from Creekside and Crescent Falls our expenditures are considerable. [A spay is approximately \$85 and a neuter about \$60.] As the only organization providing this service our help is desperately needed and we're doing a tremendous amount of work. Vet bills for this July and August totaled more than \$16,000.

Two years ago we asked council for a small grant of \$3,000 for our spay/neuter program. We also asked you to consider enacting a mandatory spay/neuter/identification bylaw for cats. Both our requests were refused. Today we ask you to consider making us a \$5,000 grant to our trap/neuter/release program. A small volunteer society cannot handle this problem without financial help. Please remember that unaltered female cats can have three litters a year and the kittens of the first litter born can give birth to their own kittens by the end of the same year. The best way to make this problem worse is to ignore it.