

Feral cats benefit from help by Sisters residents

By Jodi Schneider McNamee
Correspondent

An estimated 70-million feral cats are roaming the parks, parking lots, backyards and back roads of the United States. That includes Sisters Country.

Last summer Sisters resident Jeri Buckmann, Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce event coordinator, had an eye-opening experience dealing directly with feral cats on her property.

Buckmann has always liked cats, and she and her husband Bob have three rescues of their own.

“Our youngest kitty Gracie was a stray that my daughter brought home to us from a rodeo in Redding; she’s such a sweet cat. I didn’t realize there was a difference between stray cats and feral cats,” Buckmann explained. “But I do now!”

A feral cat is primarily wild or has adapted to feral life, while a stray cat could have been someone's pet that had become lost or has been abandoned. Stray cats are usually tame and comfortable around people.

“Last May we kept seeing a few cats coming on our property from the road and back again, but didn’t think anything of it because

we've had our share of strays before," said Buckmann.

But a large, white cat
really stood out.

“He would sit out in our yard all the time. Then soon after we noticed a momma cat with three kittens around the same area, and put two and two together. The kittens must have been about three weeks old when we first saw them. We also noticed that our cats’ food supply was dwindling that we have on the deck.

"We tried to get close to the momma cat, but she would growl, being very protective of her young. I still figured these must be stray cats and they might be tame enough to approach," Buckmann added.

"But I was wrong; they were vicious, unlike any stray."

Buckmann borrowed a trap and learned how to use it. The Buckmanns put their three cats inside the barn so they wouldn't accidentally trap them.

Some critical safety considerations must always be taken into account. Always use gloves when using a trap, even with kittens. Don't try to transfer adult cats from the trap — keep the trap closed and cover it with a blanket or towel to settle the cat down.

The ASPCA endorses Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the only proven humane and effective method to manage feral cat colonies. Trapping and altering stray and feral cats is one of the kindest things you can do to improve

their lives and end the cycle of overpopulation.

Through TNR, feral cats can live out their lives without adding to the homeless cat population. It's very important to have all feral cats spayed/neutered because it is the only effective way to prevent unwanted kittens. TNR helps the community by stabilizing the population of the feral colony and, over time, reducing it.

“The first cat we caught wasn’t even familiar; it was another feral cat that was obviously around the area, too,” said Buckmann.

“We had made arrangements with Bend Spay & Neuter and they were wonderful. We brought the cat over there in the morning in the cage and they would take care of taking it out of the trap. Then we picked it up in the evening and at that point the cat had been vaccinated, spayed/neutered, and the ear tipped.”

Ear-tipping marks feral cats that have been sterilized, sparing the already spayed or neutered cat the stress of re-trapping.

"Our neighbor needed a barn cat, so after we picked up the first trapped cat, we placed him with her," Buckmann said.

“The momma cat was evasive. So the next one we caught was one of the kittens. It was a beautiful kitten, but still feral.”

Turi McCabe, bookkeeper
for Sisters Area Chamber of



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Bandit, a feral kitten, was adopted by Turi McCabe.

Commerce decided to keep the kitten, which was about six- to eight-weeks-old. McCabe is taking the responsibility of getting her spayed right away.

“We trapped two kittens at once and again took them in to Bend Spay & Neuter,” Buckmann told *The Nugget*. “They were also very cute, but being feral, they were still vicious. We also found homes for them. We finally caught the large, white daddy cat, got him neutered and placed him in a home of another friend that needed a barn cat. It took a few weeks longer to trap momma cat, but finally did. We also placed her to someone else who needed a barn cat.”

Most Sisters residents don't know much about feral cats and how best to handle them.

Many folks who encounter feral or stray cats start feeding

them, but merely feeding the cats without trapping them can actually make the situation worse.

Feeding your pets outside not only can attract other cats, but raccoons and skunks, too. If you do feed your pets outside, feed them at the same time each day and bring the food in when they are done.

“People need to be educated about feral cats, like I was,” Jeri said. “This was such a learning experience for me to understand that there are a lot of feral cats out there reproducing, and it’s not their fault.”

Furry Friends does not have the resources to trap, but does have a trap to loan out. They can also sponsor the spay/neuter through Bend Spay & Neuter for those who need financial assistance. Call Furry Friends Foundation at The Nugget office, 541-549-9941.

Cats breed like rabbits

Cats can breed at an astonishing rate. Unsterilized cats can quickly create a population explosion.

The average number of litters a fertile cat can produce in one year is three, and the average number of kittens in a feline litter is four to six.

In seven years, one female cat and her offspring can theoretically produce 420,000 cats (does not take in consideration any mortality rate).

Cats can also become pregnant immediately after giving birth. They can become pregnant while nursing kittens.

Kittens can be spayed or neutered as young as eight- to 10-weeks of age if they weigh more than two pounds and are healthy.

Trap-Neuter-Return (*see story above*) is the most effective way to manage feral cat colonies and break the cycle of overpopulation.

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