The Cat Came Back: Making the Case for Return-to-Field Programs

1. Introduction
   a. Who are we
      i. Scott Giacoppo, Chief Community Animal Welfare Officer
         2. Oversees all animal field services for the District of Columbia
         3. 27+ years’ experience in animal care, control, rescue, investigations and advocacy
      ii. Peter Wolf, Cat Initiatives Analyst
         1. Best Friends Animal Society
         2. Blogger: Vox Felina
         3. Background: engineering/design, research, analysis

2. Story time (re: the immediate impact of RTF programs)
   a. Tucson, AZ
      i. Community cat/RTF program launched in Summer 2014 (with a few hiccups)
      ii. Days ahead of formal program launch, shelter staff asked whether each cat brought in could be RTF’d
      iii. Few other positive outcomes were available (during summer)
   b. Q: What if your shelter implemented a RTF program?
      i. Q: What would the impact be on your community?
         1. On your staff/colleagues?
         2. On your shelter?

3. RTF: How it works
   a. The basics
      i. Eligible “strays”
         1. Lacking identification
         2. Deemed healthy
         3. No owner-surrenders
      ii. Nuts and bolts
         1. Sterilization
         2. Vaccination
         3. Return (to exact location)
   b. Add-ons
      i. Holding time exemptions
      ii. Other positive outcomes
         1. Adoption
         2. Foster program
         3. Transfer to rescue
         4. “Working cat” program
         5. And more

4. Common concerns w/ RTF
   a. As with virtually every program in animal welfare, there are risks
      i. And therefore legitimate concerns
      ii. So, let’s have a look at some of the most common concerns…
         1. Our example of a common concern
            a. Can’t reduced holding times can be used to kill more cats faster?
            b. This is why laws, policies, and procedures must be crafted with great care
               i. Example: AZ Senate Bill 1260 (2015): Any impounded cat that is eligible for a sterilization program and that will be returned to the vicinity where the cat was originally captured may be exempted from the mandatory holding period…”
         iii. Now, attendees get involved—attendee participation—Part 1
            1. Written exercise
a. What are some of your concerns about an RTF program at your municipal shelter?
   i. Write this down!

2. “Partner share”
   a. Partner A: tell Partner B about your greatest concern
   b. Partner B: is this your greatest concern too?
      i. Briefly discuss why/why not
   c. Reverse order now... Partner B: tell Partner A about your greatest concern
   d. Partner A: is this your greatest concern too?
      i. Briefly discuss why/why not

3. “Group share”
   a. Who wants to share with the group?

5. What the evidence shows us
   a. Nuisance complaints
      i. “Community-wide TNR programs are effective” in part because they “decrease nuisance complaints by eliminating or dramatically reducing noise from cat fighting and mating and odor from unneutered male cats spraying urine to mark their territory” (HSUS 2014)
      ii. Specific case studies
         1. Harrington, Delaware: 550 cats (93 percent of the pre-trapping count) were sterilized and vaccinated, resulted in a 98 percent reduction in the number of nuisance calls (Brown and Kortis 2014)
         2. Texas A&M University campus: “based on the decrease in the number of complaints … those [cats] who remain are less of a nuisance than previously they were” (Hughes and Slater 2002).
   b. Animal welfare concerns
      i. Shelter intake data
         1. Alachua County, Florida
            a. Of 2,366 cats admitted to a two-year, high-impact TNR program in one zip code only 16 (0.7%) were ineligible for the program due to health issues (Levy, Isaza et al. 2014).
         2. San José, California
            a. More than 10,000 community cats were sterilized and returned over a four-year period as part of a shelter-based community cat program, it was observed that “impounded feral cats are surprisingly healthy and have good bodyweight” (Johnson and Cicirelli 2014).
      ii. Infectious diseases
         1. Researchers have found that managed colony cats “had similar baseline health status to pet cats” (Stoskopf and Nutter 2004).
         2. A study of 1,876 colony cats in North Carolina and Florida revealed a 4.3% rate of feline leukemia (FeLV) prevalence, and a 3.5% rate of feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) seroprevalence, “similar to infection rates reported for owned cats” (Lee, Levy et al. 2002).
            a. Comparable findings have been reported in Ottawa, Ontario (Little 2011).

6. Attendee participation—Part 2
   a. Q: What’s one thing you can do next week to implement an RTF program at your municipal shelter?
      i. Write it down (be sure to have a dedicated space on the handout/worksheet)
   ii. Share with partner
      a. Share with group

7. Summary
   a. How RTF works
   b. Benefits
   c. Responding to common concerns

8. Q&A
Literature Cited


