The Breeding Problem

Cats have a remarkable reproductive capacity; they have evolved to reproduce quickly and effectively. A female cat can commence her first fertile cycle and become pregnant as young as four months of age. With kittens being born only 9 weeks later, it means kittens can have kittens. Almost every time a cat is mated, she will become pregnant. A female cat’s fertile cycle depends on a number of factors which include warmth and daylight hours. Australia has mild winters and long daylight hours which enable cats in some areas to breed throughout the year.1

1 Dr Carole Webb; Reproductive Biology and Behaviour of the Cat 2010

The Kitten Equation

Does it really matter if the one female cat that I occasionally feed is not desexed?

Yes it does! Cats multiply at an alarming rate. If one homeless cat is capable of producing up to 41 kittens in a year, in only 4 years 1 homeless female cat and her kittens are capable of producing a grand total of 3,822 more homeless cats.1

1 Dr Carole Webb; Reproductive Biology and Behaviour of the Cat 2010

What are the laws about cats?

All councils have the ability to introduce by-laws to manage cats in their area. Your local council is your first contact. If you have a query or complaint about cat management in your suburb.

Some councils have already introduced by-laws restricting the number of cats per household while others require all cats to be registered and microchipped. Check with your local council if you are unsure as to the requirements for owning cats.

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But remember – Under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995, any cat that is found without identification can be euthanased.

What Can I Do To Help

Food alone isn’t love. A cat needs all the benefits of a loving home.

If you’re currently feeding a cat other than your own, consider taking full ownership or take it to your local vet, the Animal Welfare League, RSPCA or another animal shelter. They can check for a microchip, to determine if the cat has an owner. They can help find the cat a new home, by entering the cat into a rehoming program which involves desexing, microchipping, vaccinating and a veterinary health assessment.

If you have a known local problem with homeless cats which you would like to resolve, consider enlisting the assistance of neighbours in the area to catch them. Traps can be accessed through either your local council, or the RSPCA and you will be able to relocate trapped cats to a shelter.

We cannot save all cats - but by removing a homeless cat from the streets you will possibly be saving it from a life of misery and the birth of kittens into a homeless existence.

Only by dramatically reducing the number of homeless cats can we reduce the numbers that die each year.

Visit www.goodcatsa.com/homeless to find out how you can help solve the problem.

CAN’T THE HOMELESS CATS JUST BE DESEXED?

There are a number of problems with just desexing and then returning the unowned cats to the streets (often known as TNR, or trap, neuter, release). Homeless cats often suffer from diseases and welfare problems and there have been instances where trapping the cat for desexing has made the cat “trap shy” and difficult to catch again. Where a homeless cat may need to be trapped again due to an injury or sickness, it may refuse to be caught, resulting in pain and suffering.

Releasing the cat to the streets does not resolve the nuisance problems or stop them from preying on wildlife, or guarantee their health. Trap, neuter and release programs have only been shown to be effective in terms of population control in closed cat communities; most Australian cat colonies are not closed communities.

Cat colonies grow by people abandoning their cats and other homeless cats joining the colony. Public education programs on the importance of desexing, microchipping and confinement of cats to the owner’s property, are sound alternatives to TNR programs.6


Protect your own cat

There are two vital steps you can take to protect your own cat. Firstly, ensure it is microchipped and secondly, confine your cat to your property.

The Dog and Cat Management Board’s website has useful information about responsible pet ownership. There is an information sheet you can download about the importance and safety of micro-chipping your cat, as well as a publication titled “Good Cats Play at Home” which will help inspire ideas about how you can safely confine your cat and keep it healthy and happy.

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Thousands of homeless cats roam South Australia, with many enduring a harsh existence in and around our suburbs.

Homeless cats spend most of their time fighting for territory or looking for food and security, avoiding danger and claiming territory by urinating and spraying urine, defecating in the garden, and claiming territory by urine marking. Food can come from several sources - garbage pickings, hunting wildlife, stealing from domestic and other animals or by meowing at doors to tempt people to feed them.

Homeless cats create nuisance through noise, spraying urine, defecating in the garden, and killing wildlife. They threaten owned animals through fighting and spread diseases to people such as cat scratch fever, toxoplasmosis and ringworm to name a few. Homeless cats may be part of a colony of other homeless cats or live alone. The lone cat tends to move around much more frequently in search of food and prey that is not killed is likely to die later of shock or infection. Scientists tell us that cats prey on more than 186 kinds of native Australian birds, 64 mammals, 87 reptiles and 10 species of amphibian and numerous invertebrates.

I’m only feeding the one cat, it won’t kill wildlife
Cats kill wildlife. They are instinctive hunters and pray that is not killed is likely to die later of shock or infection. Scientists tell us that cats prey on more than 186 kinds of native Australian birds, 64 mammals, 87 reptiles and 10 species of amphibian and numerous invertebrates.

The Cat just keeps turning up in my backyard!
Homeless cats can be a nuisance and these cats are often disturbing to local residents. Governmental authorities may have to step in and take steps to deal with them.

Are you a Semi-Owner?
If you are feeding a cat that is not your own, and you are not willing to take full ownership of it, you are a semi-owner.

It belongs to someone else
Research in 2009 of peoples’ attitudes and behaviors towards cat semi-ownership in South Australia identified:

- 26% of those surveyed had fed unowned cats over 65% of respondents who fed unowned cats were not planning to take full ownership of the cat
- 6 out of 10 semi-owners believe that the cat belongs to someone else.

Believing that someone else owns the cat also influenced the fact that only two out of ten semi-owners had desexed the cat.

You are probably not only feeding the one cat!
If you are feeding a cat that is not your own, and you are not willing to take full ownership of it, you are a semi-owner.

It looks hungry
For many people, it is hard to ignore a meowing cat. Most people who engage in semi-ownership of cats do so out of kindness.

Providing food is the most common semi-ownership behavior, with most semi-owners (82%) providing food on a daily or alternative day basis.

Providing food to a homeless cat maintains them in a fertile condition enabling a female to breed more kittens into a homeless existence. Increasing homeless cat population contributes to the high destruction rate of cats in South Australia.

What’s that noise?
Mating cats are very vocal, and undesexed male cats fighting over a female cat can cause significant noise – generally in the middle of the night! Yowling, screaming, fighting, sprays of urine and other nuisance behaviors can all be associated with undesexed cats.

We’re not just feeding a cat
Providing food to a homeless cat maintains them in a fertile condition enabling a female to reproduce an entire colony in 12 months.

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