

## Cat Neutering Programmes

By Jenny Remfry VetMB BSc PhD MRCVS on behalf of SNIP International

### Organisation

Cat welfare groups based in the UK often need vets and nurses to go with them to parts of the world where problems of cat over-population could be alleviated by neutering the homeless and feral animals. Organising a neutering programme in a country lacking good facilities is quite difficult – the cats have to be trapped; a site suitable for sterile operations must be ready to receive them before surgery can commence, and there must be a quiet place for post-operative recovery. Check out the group organizing the visit. Also, it has to be recognised that owned domestic cats are an important source of unwanted kittens. If these cats are to be included in the programme, there is a risk of opposition from local vets.

### The need for speed

Cat neutering programmes have to reach at least 70% of the targeted population in order to be effective. (Below this, the remaining females breed rapidly to build the numbers up again.) A successful programme with efficient organisation may present up to 20 cats a day for surgery. A newly-qualified person or one with little experience of surgery may find this difficult.

### Professional etiquette

The problem of visiting vets treading on the toes of local vets has been a great problem in the past. The experienced organisations that ask for volunteers now gain the agreement of local practitioners, and sometimes the national veterinary association, so that volunteers may practice on the understanding that they are not competing with local practitioners and are not receiving payment. In the most successful programmes, the local practitioners join in and may even take over.

Newer organisations setting up programmes in new countries may need guidance on how to obtain the agreement of the local veterinary professional organisation. The BVA Overseas Group may be able to help.

### Procedures to be followed

Before starting, the procedures to be undertaken should be agreed with the team organiser.

These should include

- Criteria for euthanasia
- Vaccinations, particularly against rabies
- Treatments against ecto- and endo-parasites
- How to mark the cat as neutered:  
(In a feral cat control programme, it is essential to be able to recognise neutered cats which have been returned to their sites, and the tipping of the ear has over the years been proven as the best marker. In Europe and the USA it is considered to be a necessary mutilation, and a considerably smaller insult to the animal than the removal of its gonads. It does not really matter which ear is tipped, so long as there is consistency.)
- Surgical approaches for castration and spaying:  
(British veterinarians usually spay cats by removing the uterus and ovaries via a flank incision on the left side. Male and female feral cats then have the tip of the left ear removed while under anaesthesia. Practitioners in other countries may find this surprising. Discussions often ensue about the relative merits of flank and mid-line approaches, and the necessity of removing the uterus as well as the ovaries, as well as the necessity of ear-tipping. The rationale of the British approach is that wound breakdown in the feral cat is less likely to have serious consequences if the incision is in the flank; leaving the uterus behind could lead to complications if the cat is pregnant at the time of surgery.)

### **Special equipment**

Established organisations will have cat traps and transfer-restraint cages, and will know how many they need to make full use of surgery-time. The general experience is that, to keep one surgeon fully supplied with cats ready for surgery, the team will need at least 2 traps, 4 transfer-restraint (squeeze) cages and 12 recovery baskets.

Do not attempt to neuter feral cats without this equipment.

The ideal team will comprise an organiser plus 2 trappers, 1 nurse and 1 vet, or multiples of that.

For information on trapping see

[www.snip-international.org](http://www.snip-international.org)  
[www.catactiontrust.org.uk](http://www.catactiontrust.org.uk)  
[www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)

Useful publications are

“Cat Care and Control” from World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA)\*

"Feral Cat Manual" from Feline Advisory Bureau (FAB)\*\*

For information on equipment see [www.mdcexports.co.uk](http://www.mdcexports.co.uk)

If funds are short, it may be worth applying to SNIP International for donation of equipment, see [www.snip-international.org](http://www.snip-international.org).

### **How to volunteer**

For information on groups organising cat neutering projects overseas visit the Worldwide Veterinary Service website at [www.wvs.org.uk](http://www.wvs.org.uk).

\* WSPA: [www.wspa.org.uk](http://www.wspa.org.uk) e-mail: [wspa@wspa.org.uk](mailto:wspa@wspa.org.uk) tel: +44 (0)20 7587 5000

\*\* FAB: [www.fabcats.org](http://www.fabcats.org) e-mail: [information@fabcats.org](mailto:information@fabcats.org) tel: +44 (0)1747 871872