

# Here, Kitty Kitty

Helping the Feral Cat Problem in the Miami Valley

BY JENNIFER HANAUER

**Stray kittens.** Outdoor cats. Porch kitties. When using those terms, the community cat overpopulation situation in the Miami Valley sounds less like a problem and more like a basketful of hugs and kisses. But it is a problem, a sizeable one that is going to take community-wide education, involvement and action to help solve.

Community cats are defined as unidentified cats that live outside. They generally fall under one of two categories, "stray" or "feral." Strays are cats that may have been abandoned by owners or lost, but are usually tame and comfortable around people. A feral cat is one that was born in the wild and is unaccustomed to contact with humans. While stray cats are often found on their own, have a larger success rate of being rehabilitated and placed in loving homes, feral cats will form self-sustaining colonies and will benefit most from being trapped, taken in to be spayed or neutered and then returned to their area where they will maintain their numbers without growth.

In Montgomery County there are an estimated 90,000 community cats, approximately one cat per six residents. Of those, fewer than 3 percent are spayed or neutered. One female cat and her offspring can be responsible for 3,200 kittens over a 12-year period. This population, growing unchecked, is at best a colorful way to handle the city's rodents. At their worst, they are more than just a nuisance to the people and

household pets of Dayton, they are a threat to themselves, spreading and breeding diseases that dramatically decrease their length and quality of life.

Some believe that relocation or euthanization may be the answer to overpopulation. However, these approaches actually have no effect over the course of time. "The numbers will resurge as long as there is a food source," said Brian Wetge, executive director of the Humane Society of Greater Dayton. This is called the "vacuum effect" and occurs in nature as a way of balancing the food chain.

So what can be done? "The answer is the education of our community," said Wetge, "followed by programs that are designed to proactively reduce the reproduction of those cats living outdoors."

One such concept is the Trap-Neuter-Return program promoted by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Residents of a community are encouraged to trap stray and feral cats, bring them in to be spayed or neutered, and then return them to the area from where they were collected. Once spayed or neutered, community cats enjoy a better quality of life and have a reduced risk of infection and tumors. Residents of the area experience reduced nuisance behaviors such as spraying and noisy fighting.

"Ideally, we would find homes for all of the outdoor cats in Montgomery County," said Wetge. "But that's not the reality at the moment." Limitations imposed by the size of their building and the amount of their funding restrains how much the Humane Society is able to help animals in the community. "If every cat and animal-lover were to take in just one outdoor cat, Dayton would become an exemplary model of what a community can do for their animal population," said Wetge. That's where other organizations and some very determined and big-hearted individuals come in.

Meet Tamy Staub. Together with her friend Anne Cossaboon, she has started Royal Rescue, a cat rescue initiative in Centerville -so named because of an inside joke involving the coincidental hair colors of Staub and Cossaboon with Fergie and Princess Di. Royal Rescue focuses on trapping and rehabilitating community cats and then either placing them in homes or returning them to where they were found. For five years, Staub has been working with outdoor cats and estimates that



Recent feral kitten rehabs from Royal Rescue: [Clockwise from top] Nabisco, Violet, Rose.



**"Once they figure out that 'Hey, it feels pretty good to be petted,' and 'hey, I like being fed,' feral cats can become a wonderful addition to a family"**

she has helped nearly 120 during this time

"It's what I love, and it's how I have chosen to give back to my community," says Staub. She rehabilitates feral cats in the basement of her home and has experienced a great rate of success, especially with feral kittens. "The older cats can take longer, months," says Staub. "But feral kittens can sometimes be integrated with the others after just a few days." Staub keeps the new feral cats in a separate room in their own kennel with food and water and a litter box. Over the course of hours and days, she is able to feed them tuna with a wooden spoon, and then pet them with the same spoon, until eventually they allow her to pet them. Staub even keeps a diffuser in the room that releases a feline pheromone that calms the cats. "Once they figure out that 'Hey, it feels pretty good to be petted,' and 'hey, I like being fed,' feral cats can become a wonderful addition to a family," explained Staub.

Staub knows that what she and Cossaboon do with Royal Rescue is a lot to take on. Staub does this in addition to her full-time job, but that doesn't slow down her determination to give these cats a better life. I asked her what people in our community can do if they notice a colony of cats near their home, and she gave me a list of what people can do to help:

1. Learn how to identify feral cat colonies and report to [www.royalrescue.org](http://www.royalrescue.org).
2. Assist with Trap-Neuter-Return programs.
3. Foster a feral cat for a week or more



after spay/neuter surgery before they are released.

4. If you have a farm, accept a feral cat that is spayed/neutered and vaccinated from Royal Rescue to keep your farm free of rodents.

5. Adopt a cat or kitten from Royal Rescue or another animal shelter.

6. Foster kittens while they are waiting to be adopted from Royal Rescue or another shelter.

7. Ensure your own pets are spayed/neutered and vaccinated at an early age.

To learn more or to contact Tamy Staub, email her at [Info@RoyalRescue.org](mailto:Info@RoyalRescue.org). Other useful websites for people interested in helping community cats: [www.hsd Dayton.org](http://www.hsd Dayton.org), [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org), [www.saveacat.org](http://www.saveacat.org).



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