

PAWS for Action – All about cats
To run 4/10/2016

According to a survey published by the American Veterinary Medical Association, U.S. households were more likely to contain a dog (36.5%) than a cat (30.4) at the end of 2011. However, there are more pet cats than pet dogs because households with cats are more likely to have multiple cats.

I'm a dog person through and through but I love cats and I miss having one in my home. The reason I don't have a cat today is because we are unable to keep a cat contained inside and the street I live on is too busy for outdoor cats. We have a doggie door which I'm not willing to give up. The free access our dogs have to our beautiful back yard is an important part of their daily life.

Cats are exquisite creatures inside and out. They have finely tuned senses that cause shelter life to be exceptionally hard on them. Their senses of hearing and smell are many times more powerful than dogs. One study showed that keeping cats in standard size shelter caging is one of their biggest stressors. The stress they experience in shelters leaves them prey to upper respiratory disease among other ills.

Shelters who follow the guidelines published by the Association of Shelter Vets place their cats in colony housing when possible. They provide toys, scratching posts, hiding places and high vantage points. Daily spot cleaning is recommended so as not to overwhelm the room with the smell of disinfectant. Deep cleaning is done sparingly.

In Columbus, GA the good news is that animal control intakes of cats has dropped lower than anyone has ever seen around here. This is due to the Best Friends Community Cat program operated out of Columbus Animal Care and Control.

This is a trap-neuter-release program and its working. Since its inception in 2014 PAWS Humane and participating veterinarians have spayed or neutered over 3,500 cats in the Columbus area. The cats receive a rabies shot at the time of surgery and are re-released to the colony they came from, never to create another litter of kittens.

Now that we are not overrun by cats in our shelters we are looking at live release options for the cats who are not necessarily house pet material. You know the kind...they snuggle up to you for ten minutes and just when you think you have a new best friend they bite your hand for no apparent reason.

Who knows what is going on in this kitty's head but you are going to think twice the next time you call her onto your lap. If you adopted her from PAWS Humane, or any other shelter or pet store for that matter, you may consider returning her under the warranty of merchantability.

Cats are not dogs but most of them want to be close to us and be petted and snuggled at least some of the time. We expect this and it is what many of us love about cats. Their need is not incessant but is enough for us to develop a relationship of mutual trust.

Most animal welfare organizations require adopters to pledge that they will not allow their cats outside. I'm well aware of the many dangers to cats whether it be cars, anti-freeze or raccoons. But not all cats are cut out for life indoors, so what is to become of them if we don't open our minds to the many possibilities for a happy life.

At PAWS Humane we are promoting our less affable cats as “indoor/outdoor” or even “barn cats.” I personally think that some cats would consider this preferable if given the choice. The conversation is there for the having with our potential adopters as we try to find the best match for each animal in our care.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.