

Sunday Column – The Makings of a CATastrophe!
For publication 3.12.17

It's that time of year again – kitten season is here. We are seeing more pregnant cats in the shelter and that means kittens are just around the corner.

Kittens are notorious for producing cuteness overload; however for those of us who work in animal shelters kitten season becomes a virtual CATastrophe! when they begin to show up on our doorsteps.

It is estimated that approximately 3.4 million cats and kittens enter shelters every year. Sadly, 1.4 million are euthanized which comes to about 3,835 each day. This is in spite of the fact that 91% of owned cats are spayed or neutered.

Those who study community (unowned) cats believe there are as many cats living on their own as there are owned cats. As you may surmise, most of these have not been altered. Cats in warmer climates may have 2 or even 3 litters each year with each litter comprised of 2 – 5 kittens. The resulting population growth is exponential.

It is primarily these community cats who fill our nation's 13,600 animal shelters. They have little hope of a positive outcome as they are often not inclined toward becoming someone's pet.

Best Friends Animal Society, Alley Cat Allies, and other national organizations are working hard to change all that. They fund and coach community cat programs which trap and alter many thousands of cats in target cities each year. Each cat colony must be addressed one at a time with the goal of altering at least 90% of the population. Over time these colonies will eventually die out. It is the humane approach and its working.

Columbus, Georgia is fortunate to have a large community cat project that has been in place since August of 2014. The decline in cat intakes at animal control is quite noticeable but the decline in kittens is even more dramatic.

Nevertheless, citizens will soon be calling us wanting to know what to do with stray neonatal kitten litters they find in their neighborhoods. We recommend leaving the kittens to be raised by their mothers who do a far better job of it than us humans.

Few shelters have the manpower, even when you take volunteers into account, to care for neonatal kittens. Their little lives are fragile and their survival is tenuous. Raising these kittens is not for the faint of heart.

As a citizen the most important thing you can do to alleviate the crush of kittens this time of year is to spay or neuter your pet cats. Our services are available to the general public and we

are currently offering \$10 off our regular spay/neuter prices. We will neuter a male cat for \$40 and spay a female cat for \$75. You can find more information at www.pawshumane.org.

If you would like to spay or neuter community cats we will provide the surgery and a rabies vaccine for only \$35. Cats spayed or neutered under this special will be ear-tipped so that future colony care givers will know they are already altered. It also lets animal control officers and others know that this cat is being cared for and should be left alone. Many municipal animal control agencies and shelters will loan traps to citizens willing to take this on.

This is a humane solution that works when the public supports it.

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.