

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

October 30, 2015

Column #55



### **TRICK OR TREAT: How to handle homeless Halloween cats?**

**By Wanda Sue Parrott**

**UPON OPENING** my door shortly before Halloween, I discovered a terrified black kitten with blue eyes.

“Is oo a twick or tweat?” I asked in babylike babble author Morton Cooper, Ph.D. calls “Pet Talk,” a universal language intoned by feral cat feeders of the world—whose ranks I had promised not to become. Now I faced a huge challenge as kitty hissed at me.

“Whose baby is oo?” I bent down. Whoosh! Kitten vanished under a patch of drought-dried weeds and a tiger-striped queen emerged growling.

Mama’s fangs were bared, she hissed like a sneeze trying to happen, and her ribs protruded so I could imagine the bones rattling. She meowed, “Don’t touch me. Do feed me.”

“Wait here,” I said, racing for my cat Huxie’s kibble sack.

Memory of my landlord-son’s voice nagged my conscience. “Mom, I know you love animals, but don’t set food outside. If feral cats appear, call animal control.”

I had agreed, but now my animal-rescuer’s conscience took over, rationalizing that my Social Security could support two more cats if I cut out Sunday lunches with church friends.

I set out milk and cat food, closed the door, and Googled “feral cats.”

### **Facts About Feral Felines**

According to Wikipedia, feral means: a domestic cat which has been born in the wild, or the descendants of such an animal, which has had little or no contact with humans, and thus is not socialized. It is, in effect, homeless.

A feral cat is distinguished from a stray cat, which has been kept as a pet and lost or abandoned.

Approximately 1,500 feral cats per year used to wind up at the Monterey County Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) shelter, and many were euthanized to make room for more-adoptable domesticated tame cats; however, a program called Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) reduced euthanasia of feral cats by spaying and neutering them, then returning them to their neighborhoods to live out their lives in, hopefully, relative safety. TNR was curtailed when funding ran out.

There is little difference in appearance between healthy feral domestic cats; body language reveals their identities.

**Feral Kitten**



**Domesticated kitten**



Feral cats and kittens can be adopted by humans and given indoor homes; not all feral cats will allow themselves to be cuddled or petted, but many do, especially kittens adopted under the age of 8-12 weeks.

### **Controlling Monterey's Feral Cat Population**

The Animal Friends Rescue Project of Pacific Grove (AFPR) advocates Trap Neuter Return (TNR) as the preferred method of feral cat population control as opposed to trap and euthanize.

According to AFPR: "TNR works. Cat populations are gradually reduced. Nuisance behaviors associated with breeding are virtually eliminated. Disease and malnutrition are greatly reduced. The cats live healthy, safe, and peaceful lives in their territories."

My cat-lover's nature won, and I decided to lure mama and kitty into the house, so opened the door. Shock! Now there were three more kittens, making a total of five feral cats.

"Sorry," I said to mama cat, "your Halloween trick backfired. I cannot treat you all."

I shut the door, called animal control, and advised my son I'd keep my landlord-tenant promise.

### **Follow-Up Feral Factoids**

The animal control officer trapped mama and one kitten. Mama was spayed and her right ear "tipped" (trimmed) to signify she is feral and fixed. Kitten went to the SPCA for a 50-50 percent chance of adoption.

A local feral-cat feeder said the tiger cat had produced two previous litters during her life of less than two years. She also said one of the kittens was found dead of unknown causes.

I learned that a female cat can produce up to three litters, averaging five kittens, each year. One male and one female cat can, in a 7-year period, be responsible for producing 400,000 cats unless neutered and spayed.

I will continue feeding Mama and her remaining kittens pending entrapment around Thanksgiving, when the kittens are big enough (at least 2 pounds) to be neutered and spayed.

Then I will retire as a feral-cat feeder because there is approximately one feral cat on every block in Seaside, (possibly the whole Monterey Peninsula) and three estimated feeders for every such homeless cat. At 80. I cannot afford to be one of them. Can you? If not, there is good news!

### **Neutermania Happens**

Thanks to a generous grant from Newman's Own Foundation, SPCA "Neutermania" is now back up and running for both feral and domestic cats. For \$10, male cats can be neutered and \$20 covers spaying of female

cats. The procedures include deworming, defleaing, microchipping and vaccination. To schedule an appointment for your male cat or kitten at least four months old, please call The SPCA at 831-264-5400.

According to Kelly Lehrian, executive director of AFPR in Pacific Grove, “We have low-cost cat vouchers available for purchase. Information is available at [www.afrpSpayPal.org](http://www.afrpSpayPal.org).” Contact AFRP at 831-333-0722, [info@animalfriendsrescue.org](mailto:info@animalfriendsrescue.org). Kelly adds, “There is also a new low cost spay neuter clinic that opened up in Marina called Who Saved Who Spay Neuter Clinic. Their phone number is 831-324-4897 and they have great prices for the public.”

### **Happy Halloween!**



###

Photos: Hissing cat from Pxfuel; yellow cat drinking milk from Pixabay; kitten in gutter from Flickr; black cat arched back from Flickr. All photos used for illustrative/educational purposes only; no copyright infringement intended.

Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at 831-899-5887 or by e-mail at [amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com](mailto:amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com).