



ALLEY CAT RESCUE

AN ALLIANCE FOR CAT PROTECTION

2023 Special Report

CATS IN CRISIS

The effects of the pandemic on companion animal welfare are as strong as ever, and this is especially true in the case of cats. While our world was basically frozen from 2020 through most of 2022, the rapid breeding cycle of cats continued. Very few sterilizations and few shelter intakes of abandoned and lost cats during the shutdown have created a truly challenging crisis of community cat overpopulation.



Sterilization Backlog

It is not surprising that during the pandemic, fewer people were able to do Trap-Neuter-Return. For those who did continue to trap, clinic staffing shortages due to illness, mandatory quarantine periods, and the requirements for social distancing dramatically reduced their ability to schedule a spay or neuter. A study of data from 212 spay/neuter clinics found a decrease in surgeries of an astounding 80 percent from before the pandemic (February 2020) to May 2020 (Guerios et al).

Along with community cat sterilizations, pet cat spays/neuters also declined, even as adoption rates increased. Traditional veterinary clinics also experienced staffing shortages and many clinics suspended sterilizations, scheduling only essential and emergency appointments (Guerios et al). As some cats are allowed access to the outdoors, and some inevitably get outside, an increase in unsterilized pet cats contributed to the creation of more community cats.

Now that COVID lockdowns have ended, the high ratio of backlogged spay/neuter surgeries and young animals born in 2020 and 2021 needing to be sterilized is overwhelming. Dr. Julie Levy, who co-authored the aforementioned data study, referred to this perfect storm as a “compounding vicious cycle” (Cannon, “Millions of Pets”).

Shelters Are Overflowing

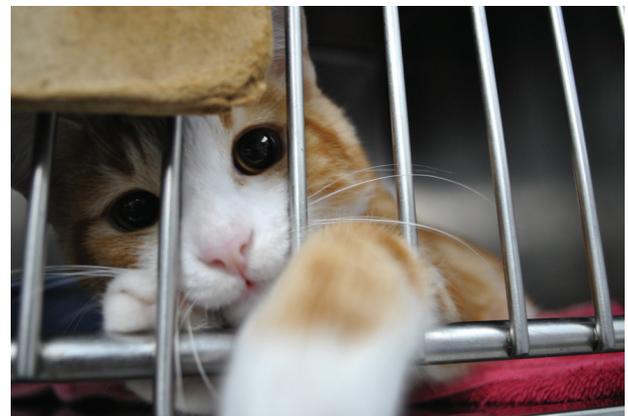
Intake numbers for cats (and dogs) have increased since the height of the pandemic. This

can partially be attributed to the fact that intake during the pandemic was unusually low - 25 percent lower in 2020 than in 2019 (Rodriguez et al.). In order to handle staff shortages and limit interactions with the public, shelters changed to accepting only emergency surrenders.

However, the rise in intake is more than relative. The offspring of cats who could not be spayed during the pandemic, and those kittens' kittens, have been filling shelters since they began accepting surrenders and strays again. Public shelters have also been hit by an 18 percent decrease in transfers of animals to private rescues (Ramirez) as the latter are themselves inundated. Many shelters are now turning animals away.



As more animals are being brought to shelters, fewer are being adopted out. According to Marc Peralta, chief program officer for Best Friends Animal Society, shelter intake (of all species) has risen around 5 percent, while adoptions have fallen by 2 percent (Ramirez). Inflation has been cited by numerous animal welfare groups as the main reason for both surrenders and low adoptions rates (Ramirez). The results of a Forbes Advisor survey of 2,000 dog and cat owners reveal that finances have become a heavy burden for many people.



Survey Results Snapshot *

- 63 percent of respondents “said that inflation has made it more difficult” to pay an unexpected vet bill
- 49 percent have paid for vet bills with either credit cards (44 percent) or loans (5 percent)
- Of those respondents who had to give up their pets:
 - 12 percent said they could not afford the everyday expenses
 - 10 percent said raised rent forced them to move somewhere that doesn’t allow pets
 - 7 percent said they could not afford the vet bills
 - 5 percent said they could not afford the pet deposit required by landlords
 - The remainder of respondents gave reasons unrelated to finances or preferred not to answer.

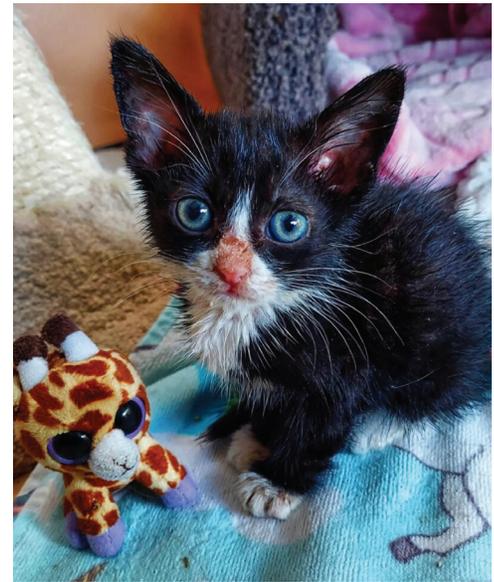


**data from www.forbes.com/advisor/pet-insurance/pet-cost-inflation.*

According to another source, the American Pet Products Association, 35 percent of pet owners said in September 2022 “they were concerned about the expense of having a pet in the current economy” and half of those said they may need to give up their pets (Bogage and Lu).

The Most Innocent Victims

When there are too many cats outdoors and in shelters, young and newborn kittens suffer the most. 75 percent of kittens born to community cats suffer and die before reaching six months of age. Orphaned, unweaned kittens brought to shelters are almost always euthanized unless a foster steps up to care for them, as shelters do not have the resources to care for such young and dependant animals; nursing kittens need to be fed constantly every two to three hours and kept warm as they cannot yet regulate their body temperatures. Even older kittens who eat on their own are at high risk of catching common feline viruses that abound in crowded shelters.



Overcrowded shelters can be deadly for adult cats too. If someone cannot keep their pet and can't find a shelter that will take her, they may abandon her on the streets. Cats who are used to being cared for by people are typically not able to fend for themselves outdoors. Within shelters, cats who have not been adopted are euthanized to make room for new intakes. The outlook for cats even in no-kill shelters is quite grim when there are not enough people adopting them, as the shelters, understaffed since the pandemic, cannot provide them with the long term high quality of life every cat deserves.

Trap-Neuter-Return is Still the Solution!

Sterilizing and returning community cats back to their homes prevents unsocialized cats from being euthanized in the shelter system, and it helps ease the load on shelters so that adoptable cats are not put down as often for lack of space and resources. TNR prevents community cats from producing kittens, who may perish outdoors or if turned in to a shelter.



We at Alley Cat Rescue advocate for TNR programming that goes beyond the basics. When we can, Alley Cat Rescue takes in the kittens of community cats once they have been weaned, but when they are still young enough to be socialized with people, thereby decreasing community cat populations immediately and sparing the kittens from the possibility of ending up in a shelter.

We also care for many colonies of community cats. We provide our colony cats with warm and dry shelters, food, water, and medical care for any injuries and ailments they may experience. Colony management improves the lives of the cats, and also ensures that the

population is controlled, as any new cats who join the group are quickly sterilized and vaccinated.

We also work with and support TNR partners in other parts of the country to increase our life-saving impact. We focus sponsorship on groups in states with low income areas with high shelter euthanasia rates.

We are very proud of the work we do for all cats, in the United States and abroad, which has helped sterilize thousands of community cats. We are grateful too that we have had great success with getting veterinarians involved in offering community cat sterilization services to other groups and individuals who do TNR.



References

- “Animal Welfare Statistics.” *Best Friends Animal Society - Save Them All*, bestfriends.org/no-kill-2025/animal-welfare-statistics#1. Accessed 13 Feb. 2023.
- Bogage, Jacob, and Yiwen Lu. “People Are Giving up Pets. Blame Inflation.” *Washington Post*, 27 Dec. 2022, www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/12/27/inflation-pets-abandoned/.
- Cannon, Austin. “Millions of Pets Weren’t Spayed and Neutered During the Pandemic and That’s a Big Problem.” *Daily Paws*, 14 Sept. 2022, www.dailypaws.com/pet-news-entertainment/animal-advocacy/millions-of-pets-not-spayed-neutered-during-pandemic-study.
- Guerios, Simone D., et al. “COVID-19 Associated Reduction in Elective Spay-neuter Surgeries for Dogs and Cats.” *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, vol. 9, Frontiers Media SA, Sept. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2022.912893>.
- Metz, Jason. “42% of Pet Owners Can’t Cover a Surprise Vet Bill Amid Inflation.” *Forbes Advisor*, 8 Dec. 2022, www.forbes.com/advisor/pet-insurance/pet-cost-inflation/.
- “National Dashboard.” *Best Friends Animal Society - Save Them All*, bestfriends.org/no-kill-2025/animal-shelter-statistics?_ga=2.151563133.576333148.1677693897-1723581368.1675115127.
- “Pets by the Numbers.” n.d., *HumanePro*, <https://humanepro.org/page/pets-by-the-numbers>. Accessed 13 Feb. 2023.
- Ramirez, Marc. “‘Nationwide Crisis’: Facing Lower Adoption Rates, Some Shelters Reconsidering Euthanasia Policies.” *USA TODAY*, 22 Dec. 2022, www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/12/22/animal-shelters-overcrowding-prompts-some-revisit-euthanasia/10933722002. Accessed 10 Mar. 2023.
- Rodriguez, Jeffrey J., et al. “Trends in Intake and Outcome Data From U.S. Animal Shelters From 2016 to 2020.” *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, vol. 9, Frontiers Media, June 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2022.863990>.

PO Box 585
Mt. Rainier, MD 20712
www.saveacat.org

facebook.com/alleycatrescueinc
Instagram: @alleycatrescue