

Survey Report: Santa Clara County's Pet Population

In the past years, proposals to reduce the numbers of animals euthanized at animal shelters have been made at all levels of government throughout the country. These proposals claim to solve "the problem".

However, a problem cannot be solved until that problem is DEFINED. In this case, it first needs to be determined if the number of animals being euthanized, under the current system, is remaining static, increasing or decreasing. This information is available from national and local authorities.

Once that information is analyzed, it is then necessary to determine the source of the animals entering the shelters and being euthanized. Differentiation between dog and cat populations must be considered, since cats as a species have unique traits, and cannot be considered as simply small dogs! Specific questions need to be answered regarding pet ownership in our communities, to gain insight into regional trends. Once this is done, then the problem can be assessed and appropriately targeted solutions can be formed.

Up until now, though, these essential questions have not been asked. And up until now, any recommendations and proposals, no matter how well-meaning, were simply guesswork guided by people's emotions and beliefs - not hard data.

Certainly, people's beliefs about animals, and animals being euthanized in the shelters, are highly charged, highly emotional issues. Media seize upon the sensational images of animals behind bars, animals being euthanized, barrels of dead animals, serving to fan these emotional fires. Thoughtful questions regarding pet ownership aren't nearly as exciting for the nightly news!

Sadly, hastily enacted proposals, based on emotions, can actually cause harm to the very animals they seek to protect. good, well-directed, enforceable proposals cannot be based on knee-jerk reactions; they require a firm knowledge of community and facts.

- * Summary
- * Background

- * Are Euthanasias Going Up or Down?
- * Results of the NPA Survey
- * Discussion
- * Recommendations
- * FY 93 Animal Statistics - Santa Clara Valley Humane Society
- * Credits and Copyright

SUMMARY

In August 1993, National Pet Alliance sponsored a scientific survey of pet ownership in Santa Clara County, California. While questions were asked regarding dogs and their owners, the majority of questions related to cats - because four times as many cats are euthanized in our shelters as dogs. We wanted to see if we could determine why.

Our survey discovered:

- * The vast majority of owned cats, 86%, are already altered. Another 6% of owned cats are too young to be altered. Only 4% of the owned cat population is female, unspayed and old enough to have kittens. Education as to the importance of altering pet animals has obviously been effective in our community.

- * We did find 16% of the currently spayed females did have a litter of kittens prior to their being altered. Most of these were accidents, often because the owner was not aware young cats can become pregnant. Also, HALF of the females that had a litter before they were spayed were cats adopted as strays "off the street", and often they were already pregnant. Only SIX of the cats in this group were allowed to have kittens on purpose.

- * Most people received their pet cats as gifts from friends, or adopted a stray off of the street. only 3% of all owned cats came from breeders, and these cats were MUCH more likely to be indoor-only pets, and so less likely to become accidentally pregnant or to stray.

- * Unowned cats constitute a whopping 41% (minimum) of the known cat population. 10% of all Santa Clara County households feed stray cats.

- * Only 0.58% of owned cats disappear, with no indication as to their fate. Through statistical projects, the number of owned, stray and DOA animals handled by Animal Control is only 8.5% of ALL stray and DOA cats handled by Animal Control.

Further information, not from our survey, reveals that national numbers of animals being euthanized has dropped dramatically over the last decade. Locally, Animal Control reports a drop of almost 10,000 cats handled from FY92 to FY93. While at first glance, one would assume that this is due to cutbacks in services, there is a one-third drop in the number of cats being owner surrendered!

Our community should be proud of the high number of responsible cat owners who have their animals altered. Clearly, the main cat population in question consist of unowned cats. Any proposal which purports to reduce the number of animals being euthanized at the shelter MUST address this issue, or it will fail in its efforts.

BACKGROUND

A problem cannot be solved until the problem is defined. Accurate data is essential. The proponents of anti-breeding legislation commonly use raw numbers in an effort to condemn all breeding - purposeful or not.

Broad, undefined statements such as: "All were killed because they were homeless" or "10,000 HEALTHY killed" are meaningless. They may be healthy but were surrendered for biting children. They may be homeless, but they may not have been put up for adoption as they were unweaned.

In an effort to find out what the true source of the animals and ownership patterns are, National Pet Alliance sponsored a first-ever survey of Santa Clara County, California residents designed to find out how many unowned cats are in the community and what the reproductive habits of the owned cats are.

Shelters do not tell the public that the commonly cited "25% of the animals handled are purebreds" are actually dogs. Since 50% of owned dogs are purebred, they are NOT over represented at the shelter. Further, since the vast majority of euthanasia are cats, the fact that 25% of the dogs handled are purebred cannot justify restrictive breeding ordinances for pedigreed cats. The shelter has no idea how many of the cats are owned cats. We do.

This survey needs to be duplicated in various parts of the country, the data pooled, and a comprehensive report issued. If you have volunteers willing to input the data

and compile the results, it is possible to duplicate the survey for approximately \$6000. The bulk of the cost is for an INDEPENDENT research company to make the calls. To obtain the results we did, over 7200 calls were attempted. Great care must be taken in designing the calling pattern or the results will not be scientifically valid. One cannot simply buy a list of working residential numbers. The calls MUST BE RANDOM.

Now that this labor intensive six-month task is finally over, NA would like to get on with what we do best: helping communities fight by finding solutions that WORK.

We need your support with dollars. Our treasury was completely drained by this survey. We need you help both writing to legislators and editors, and to NPA, to let us know where the problems are. We now have hard data which proves OWNED cats are not the case of any major problems at the shelters. Help us if you can. If you truly wish the pedigreed fancy to continue, we must stand together and fight.

- Karen

Johnson

ARE EUTHANASIAS GOING UP OR DOWN? National Trends

In the late 1980s, nationwide reports of euthanasias were estimated to be in the range of 20 million annually. In 1991, the estimate was 13 million. Current projections put the number of animals euthanized somewhere between 5 and 8 million. These reports are from the Humane Society of the United States, but there is a recent Tufts University study that puts current projections at about 3.5 million. By any method of calculation, there is a tremendous drop in animal euthanasias.

Locally

According to the Santa Clara Valley Humane Society (SCVHS) and the Santa Clara County Animal Shelter (SCCAS) figures, the number of cats and dogs euthanized in our county has remained fairly steady over the past eight years - approximately 32,000.

However, the number of animals surrendered to be euthanized by their owners has increased 300% over the same time

period, and was 4,748 for fiscal year 1992 (FY92). If the total number of animals euthanized has remained constant, but the portion of owner surrendered animals is dramatically increasing, then the number of animals being euthanized for other reasons must be decreasing.

Also, during the past eight years, while the number of animals being euthanized in SCC is remaining constant, the human population has been steadily increasing. Figure 1. Shows the population of San Jose from 1985 to 1992, versus the total number of animals handled at the shelter.

Graph

The number of cats entering the shelter far surpasses the number of dogs. Euthanasias for cats in FY93 was 14,207 versus 3,564 for dogs. Unfortunately, the SCVHS has not provided the data on the number of cats euthanized simply because they are underage kittens - an automatic death sentence which no ordinance will solve.

Recently released figures from Animal Control (AC) show a FY93 total of 17,771 animals euthanized. This is a drop of close to 10,000 in ONE YEAR!

Why such a drop? The most obvious reason is AC ceased picking up stray animals halfway through the fiscal year due to drastic funding cutbacks.

But, that is not the entire story. The number of animals surrendered by citizens decreased by 3,578 last year. Are more people keeping animals they would have normally turned in to AC, or are more people deciding to dump these animals on country roads rather than taking them to the shelters? Will we see an explosion of litters of stray animals which will be the product of these roadside abandoned animals?
Conclusions

National trends show a dramatic drop in the number of animals being euthanized by shelters.

Locally, even while the number of animals euthanized has remained constant, the source of the animals has changed dramatically. The number of animals being owner-surrendered has increased 300% over the past eight years. And while the local human population has grown considerably, again, the number of animals euthanized has stayed fairly constant.

These figures indicate rather good news. And while animals are still being euthanized, it is not the explosive, upward spiraling problem we have been led to believe. Something is working. Education to the importance of spay and neuter cannot be overlooked as a possible cause.

The dramatic drop of animals handled by AC last year can be directly linked to the reduction of services, but cannot be entirely explained by that situation. There is concern as to whether "bad press" regarding the shelters' services is causing people to abandon animals. Also, the sensational media coverage of animals being euthanized on television, and photos of barrels of dead cats, may also be scaring the public away from the shelters.

RESULTS OF THE NPA SURVEY

Introduction

National Pet Alliance (NPA), a San Jose based, non-profit organization of cat and dog fanciers and owners, decided to determine the nature of the pet ownership in Santa Clara County.

One purpose of the survey was to try to determine the number of UNOWNED cats in the county. The survey concentrated on cats because, as stated above, cats are euthanized at the shelters in much greater numbers than dogs. In addition, this survey was to determine various aspects of pet ownership in Santa Clara County. Questions were asked regarding number and type of animals owned, if these pets were altered, where the pets came from, and several other related questions. Survey respondents were also asked if they owned or rented their homes, to see if there was any relationship between home ownership and pet ownership.

The details of the methodology of this survey appears at the end of this report. A sample questionnaire also is included at the end of this report. Briefly, the survey was conducted by the independent firm of Nichols Research (Sunnyvale) during the months of August and September 1993. 1031 households were surveyed. This includes households that do not own any pets. All areas of Santa Clara County were surveyed, with the exception of Palo Alto. Palo Alto was not included because the survey needed to be compared

with the numbers obtained from Santa Clara Valley Humane Society. Palo Alto operates its own shelter.
Who owns what in Santa Clara County?

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of households which own no pets, own cats, own dogs, or own both cats and dogs.

FIGURE TWO

Pet Ownership in Households

No Pets	51.31%
Dogs Only	18.53%
Cats Only	19.40%
Dogs & Cats	10.77%

Of the households which own cats, there is an average of 1.7 cats. Of the households which own dogs, the average is 1.3 dogs. However, another question asked how many households fed cats they did not own. 103 households (49 of this 103 owned no pets) fed an additional 351 cats.
Purebred cats or domestic variety?

Only 10.7% of the cat owning households claim to own purebred cats. We emphasize the word "claim" because it is sometimes difficult for people who are not experts to accurately identify an animal as purebred. Some people mistakenly believe any cat with long hair must be a Persian, any cat with "points" is Siamese, and big, furry tabbies are Maine Coon Cats! Purebred cats have very specific characteristics, come from breeding programs, and can be registered with various registering bodies, such as the Cat Fanciers' Association.

When we further examine where people obtained their "purebreds" further doubt is raised that all of the cats claimed are truly purebred. Of the purebreds, 47.3% were either found or had been given to them! Only SIXTEEN purebred cats came from breeders, and seven came from pet stores.

Perhaps, in hindsight, a question could have been asked if the purebred was or could have been registered. But even with this gray area, the highest possible number of purebreds is only 10.7% of all owned cats! With only 3.1% of the entire cat sample coming from breeders, this clearly points out that cat breeders are not creating an over-

population problem, nor are they over-represented at the shelters.

Furthermore, 81.3% of the breeder obtained purebreds were indoor only pets, as opposed to 33.3 % of all the cats in the survey. (See Figure 3.)

FIGURE THREE

Indoor vs. Outdoor Cats

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Indoor Only          14.20%  
Outdoor Only       33.27%  
Indoor/Outdoor    52.53%  
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Indoor-only cats are less likely to become strays. Therefore there should be extremely few contacts between the shelters and breeder obtained purebreds due to this factor alone.

Where do Santa Clara residents get their cats?

GRAPH Over 65% of the households obtained their cats either as "gifts" from family, friends, neighbors, etc. OR, one day they opened their front door to find a cat!

Again, only 3.1% of the entire cat sample came from breeders.

Other sources of cats included pet stores, Animal Control or the Humane Society, from vets, in front of a store, or as a response to an ad in the paper. Figure 4 (right) shows the percentages for each.

Are owned cats spayed or neutered?

GRAPH Resoundingly, the answer is, YES!! People are altering their cats. 86.2% of all owned cats are already altered! Of the remaining 13.7% which are not altered, 5.8% of them are too young and the owner intends on altering. Furthermore, less than 4% of the owned cats were unaltered females old enough to reproduce.

Even the most negative nay-sayer must admit that having an 86% rate of altered pets, in this large community, is tremendously positive. We should be very proud of our community. And, it is obvious from this number that education DOES work.

Figure 5 (right) shows the number of owned cats altered, and if they are not altered, the reasons given.

The "Oops" factor

While the NPA survey discovered that 86.2% of owned cats are altered, it was also discovered that 16.3% of the owned, altered cats had a litter of kittens before they were spayed. Far and away the leading cause of this was the "Oops" factor. The survey respondent indicated that "Oops, I didn't realize the cat could get pregnant so young," or "Oops, I didn't realize the cat was in heat and she went outside."

GRAPH Figure 6 (right) shows the reasons given for 16.3% of all owned, altered females having had a litter before they were altered. As shown, the two major reasons were either some variation of the "Oops" factor, or a previously unowned cat showed up pregnant on someone's doorstep, and the household took the cat in as a new pet.

The people whose cats had litters prior to spaying are not the chronic, socially irresponsible, evil people as are often portrayed. These litters were, for the most part, accidents. And this survey showed 50% of the litters born to females that later were spayed, were born to cats adopted "off of the street", often already pregnant. Legislation is not going to prevent either of these incidents from happening.

While education as to the importance of neutering pets not in planned breeding programs is obviously sinking in, there does appear to be a need for further education as to the importance of not putting off the surgery.

People need to learn that, yes, a six-month old kitten can and will get pregnant, especially if that kitten is born in the summer. January and February are the times when cats start their heat cycles.

There has been some exciting strides in the veterinary community in the past few years regarding the spaying and neutering of animals at VERY young ages, and this issue bears further examination.

Only SIX cats in the survey were allowed to have kittens on purpose.

Owned pet population of Santa Clara County

Santa Clara County has 495,480 households (not counting the 24,700 households in Palo Alto). With 30.16% of the surveyed households owning 1.65 cats, the projected number of owned cats is 246,571.

Similarly, 29.29% of the households owned 1.34 dogs, for a projected total of 194,636 dogs.

If you are an owned cat, you live with a home owner

If you own a cat, you are most likely a home owner. 74% of our county's cat owners own their own home (which includes condos, mobile homes and townhouses). Whereas only 59% of the overall population are homeowners.

Only 7.4% of cat owners rent apartments. It is generally recognized that cats are "easier" apartment pets than dogs, and the survey bore that out, with only 3.2% of dog owners living in rented apartments.

One method of getting more cats adopted out of the shelter is to open up more prospective homes. Making it easier for renters to own a small pet would do this. However, landlords must be comfortable that pet-owning tenants won't ruin the property.

The San Francisco SPCA has an innovative program, called The Open Door, which provides bonds against damages to landlords of tenants who adopt pets from the SPCA. When we last checked with the SFSPCA, they had yet to make a single payment for damages!

Owned cats at the shelters

NPA survey respondents were asked if their owned cats had disappeared for 24 hours or more over the last year. 57 of the cats had done just that, but the good news is that 51 of these returned on their own.

10 of the owners of the 57 missing cats checked with the shelter. Of the 6 cats which did not come back on their own: 1 was redeemed at Animal Control; 1 was found dead; 1 returned to a previous home; 2 never showed up; and one respondent had no answer.

One of the owners of one of the two cats which never showed up did call AC.

With one cat which was redeemed from animal control, we have a total of 3 cats in our sample which either were handled by, or could have been handled by AC.

Projecting these numbers out to the owned cat population, .58% of owned cats (1421 cats) should be, or could be, handled by AC annually. Of these cats, two-thirds of their owners should check with AC to recover their lost cats.

Due to the extremely low number of owned cats which disappear, never to be seen again, we project that only 8.46% of the stray and DOA cats handled by AC are owned cats. (4,576 DOA + 12,220 strays=16,796. 1,421 owned cats/16,796=8.46%)

Estimation of the unowned cat population

103 households fed cats they did not own. Some of these good Samaritans owned animals and some did not. These 103 households fed a total of 351 stray cats. So, an average household that feeds strays feeds 3.4 of them. 103 households was 10% of all households surveyed.

Projecting 49,548 Santa Clara County household feeding strays, the KNOWN stray population will be 168,463. The total owned population is 246,571.

The total known cat population, including fed strays is 415,034.

FED STRAYS ARE 40.6% OF THE TOTAL KNOWN CAT POPULATION.

Common sense would also lead one to believe that this is the LOW END figure of stray cats, as there are any number of feral cats not being fed.

DISCUSSION

The previous pages indicate just a portion of the information which can be gleaned from the National Pet Alliance survey. For the sake of brevity, we have concentrated on the most important aspects of the study.

Before a reasonable solution to a problem can be determined, first the problem must be defined. Cries of, "Huge numbers of animals are being killed in our shelters, and something

must be done!" are emotionally stimulating but do not serve to solve anything. Specific questions need to be asked, and answers analyzed.

First, we must look at the assertion "huge numbers of animals are being killed in our shelters." Are they? Well, yes AND no. National figures (from the Humane Society of the United States) show that euthanasias have dramatically decreased in the last decade. Locally, while the human population of just the City of San Jose has grown by over 100,000, the number of animals euthanized in our shelters has remained fairly steady. The number of owner surrendered animals has risen by 300% over the last eight years.

While animals are being euthanized at our shelters, it is not in the out-of-control, upward spiral we have been lead to believe.

The "problem" now can be better stated as: We would like to further reduce the numbers of animals being euthanized at our shelters. Now we need to look to "how to do this?"

Our survey discovered Santa Clara County cat owners are very responsible. 86% of all owned cats are neutered! Furthermore, less than 4% of the owned cats were unaltered females old enough to reproduce. Clearly the message that pet cats, not in a planned breeding program, need to be altered has taken hold.

In the past few years, we have heard that "education just isn't working"! Now we know that for the false statement it is. Of course education works! That doesn't mean we should now be complacent. Our community should continue the message. Additionally, this study indicates a need for more education when it comes to letting people know YOUNG animals can get pregnant.

Proposals with fines and licensing aimed at the irresponsible pet owner are not appropriate in our community. No legislation is able to prevent the accidental litters which happen to otherwise responsible cat owners.

With only 3.1% of all the owned cats coming from breeders (people actually breeding their cats on purpose, usually in a purebred breeding program), it is obvious that claims that the "breeders" are to blame is just not true.

In fact, 81% of breeder obtained cats are strictly indoor-only pets, and these are MUCH less likely to get pregnant accidentally by the "Oops" factor, and they are MUCH less likely to wind up at Animal Control. Again, common sense would bear this out, as one simply does not see the hills and the alleys teeming with packs of Persians and Abyssinian cats!

What you DO see is 10% of Santa Clara County households feeding several cats they don't own. These unowned cats account for a MINIMUM 41% of the ENTIRE known cat population of Santa Clara County.

Unowned cats do not get themselves neutered. Unowned cats do not buy licenses. When the vast number of known unowned cats is analyzed against the large number of altered owned pets, it becomes clear that the unowned cat population is THE "problem" in our County. Any proposal which ignores this huge cat population is doomed to failure.

Unowned cats are just that, unowned. They are a community problem. A "solution" which puts the burden of the unowned cat population only on responsible cat and dog owners is unfair.

We live in a unique part of the country, with very special, creative citizens. This survey doesn't pretend to have asked and answered ALL of the issues surrounding domestic animals and their interactions with humans. But we have uncovered some heretofore unknown, and frankly exciting information.

It is time for us to come together to find solutions to the proven needs of our community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following contains our recommendations, based on our knowledge of our community and its needs.

National Pet Alliance has always been in favor of proactive, specific solutions to our community's pet-human interaction. With this survey we can now target specific areas which need the most attention. We can now analyze what is appropriate and what is not. Santa Clara County has a very large unowned cat population. The number of unowned cats amounts to AT LEAST 41% of our total cat population.

The solution to reduce the number of these cats entering, and being euthanized at the shelters MUST be addressed.

We recommend a Trap, Test, Vaccinate, Alter and Release (TTVAR) program. There are many such programs operating nationwide. Feral cats are HUMANELY trapped. Cats are checked for any signs of ownership, and barring that are tested for two major diseases of cats--Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). Both the diseases are infectious, both are fatal, and neither have a cure. Cats testing positive for these diseases are humanely euthanized. Cats testing negative are altered and then released back to where they came from, or if that is deemed unsafe, to a safe area.

This is one type of program, there are several variations; one of the more prevalent is where only MALE cats are altered.

Whatever the type of TTVAR program, the long term gain for Animal Control in this valley FAR outweigh the initial costs. Furthermore, with an aggressive TTVAR program, results would be seen in just a few years time.

We do not believe that unowned cats, simply because they have no "human" address, are necessarily a problem. Certainly they can be, but just as often they can be providing a valuable cog in an ecological system. Raccoons and rabbits, for example, also don't have human owners, and we don't find it necessary to kill them for it. This is part of the reason we recommend the "release" part of the TTVAR system.

We believe TTVAR is a safe, effective, humane and fiscally feasible solution to the unowned cat population.

Every cat, no matter how young, must be altered prior to leaving any animal shelter. This simple step will solve the manpower problems of the follow-up calls to determine if the animal adopted has been altered. This will also prevent the shelters from being unwitting participants in the number of litters produced accidentally (which our survey found to be the main reason owned cats had litters).

Education is clearly one of our best tools. We already have an 86% rate of altered, owned cats! But we can do even better. We need to let people know that young animals can

get pregnant. Many people whose animals had litters had planned on having their animal sterilized but it got pregnant before the owners got around to having the surgery.

We recommend the education continuing from the shelters, and also a cooperative education program from our veterinary community. Recent years have shown some amazing progress in the art of sterilizing domestic animals at very young ages.

We recommend a renter-landlord adoption incentive program such as the San Francisco SPCA has instituted. There are a lot of potential homes out there in the rental community. By providing such an open door policy, more animals can be adopted from the shelters.

In these tough fiscal times, when we don't even have enough money for the libraries, it would be fiscally irresponsible to implement a costly, unneeded licensing program. We suggest using the amount of money the city would lose on cat licensing to fund the positive, TTVAR program instead! Furthermore, the vast numbers of unowned cats in our community are everyone's problems, and the funding for handling them should not be placed solely on the responsible pet owners of our community.

We do NOT recommend punitive, coercive, bureaucratic solutions. They do not work and they are not appropriately targeted for our County and City.

We recommend positive, community interactive programs!
STATISTICS

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