

# ISFM takes a stand on welfare of unowned cats

September 6 2013

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Long-term confinement is not a humane option for the control of feral and stray or abandoned cat populations, according to new guidelines issued by the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM) in its *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* published by SAGE. According to the society, which is the veterinary division of the charity International Cat Care, culling to control cat populations is also rarely effective or acceptable, whereas trap–neuter–return programmes and rehoming (in appropriate cases) can offer effective and humane solutions, but need to be properly managed and targeted.

The domestic cat (*Felis catus*) has successfully developed to occupy many different environments and current estimates suggest that we coexist with about 272 million [cats](#) globally.<sup>1,2</sup> Cats adopt a spectrum of lifestyles ranging from free-living ferals, with little or no human contact, through to street and community cats, and those kept as pets in homes where they are usually dependent on human care.

Because cats are adaptable and often reproduce efficiently, populations can grow to a point where interventions are required. Overpopulation can result in unnecessary suffering, particularly if the cats are perceived as a nuisance to humans. In developing its guidelines, ISFM looked realistically at the plethora of situations where population control may be required and provided practical, considered, objective solutions that are in the best interests of individuals and groups of cats.

The guidelines indicate that:

- Prevention of reproduction by [neutering](#) is critical in managing all cat populations. So-called 'trap-neuter-return' (TNR) programmes, whereby whole colonies of feral, street or community cats are managed through planned neutering and rapid return to their territory, is a well proven method.
- Humanely administered [euthanasia](#) is a legitimate welfare option, in particular for cats experiencing sustained suffering, whether physical or psychological.

For [domestic cats](#):

- Neutering is equally important to avoid the welfare problems associated with unwanted kittens. According to the guidelines, too few pet cats around the world are neutered and efforts need to be made to improve this.
- The guidelines indicate that cats should be neutered around 4 months of age (not the 'traditional' 6 months old); and neutering can be performed safely from as early as 6 weeks of age.

For a previously owned stray or abandoned cats:

**More information:** The 'ISFM Guidelines on Population Management and Welfare of Unowned Domestic Cats (*Felis catus*)' can be found in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery 2013, Volume 15, pages 811-817. These can be downloaded freely from:  
[jfm.sagepub.com/content/15/9/811.full.pdf+html](http://jfm.sagepub.com/content/15/9/811.full.pdf+html)

## References

1 Batson A. Global companion animal ownership and trade: project summary, June 2008. World Society for the Protection of Animals, 2008.

2 What is a feral cat? Variation in definitions may be associated with different management strategies? J Feline Med Surg 2013; 15: 759-764.

Provided by SAGE Publications

Citation: ISFM takes a stand on welfare of unowned cats (2013, September 6) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-09-isfm-welfare-unowned-cats.html>

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