The Cat Superhighway: creating a roadmap for #allthecats

Dr. Kate Hurley
UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program
Million Cat Challenge
www.sheltermedicine.com
www.millioncatchallenge.org
sheltermedicine@ucdavis.edu
Why superhighways?

“No matter how rational and high-minded you try to be, you can’t make decisions after decision without paying a biological price. It’s different from ordinary physical fatigue — you’re not consciously aware of being tired — but you’re low on mental energy. The more choices you make throughout the day, the harder each one becomes for your brain, and eventually it looks for shortcuts.”
Why superhighways?

Length of stay and movement from one housing unit to another are major risk factors for URI.

Cage moves activated feline herpesvirus in 18-83% of cats.
Historical pathways

Return to owner

Adoption

Humane euthanasia

Suffering, painful death and/or causing unacceptable problems or risks out in the community
New Approach

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Results

- Euthanasia **down 75%**
- Euthanasia due to URI **down 99%**
- Cats picked up dead **down 20%**
- Intake (cat and kitten) **down 29%**
Repeatable results

- 11,749 cats sterilized and returned over 3-year period
- Euthanasia **down 84%**
- Calls for dead cat pickup **down 24%**
- Intake **down 38%**
Unwinding the effects of removal?

“Contrary to expectation, the relative abundance and activity of feral cats increased in the cull-sites, even though the numbers of cats captured per unit effort during the culling period declined. Increases in minimum numbers of cats known to be alive ranged from 75% to 211% during the culling period, compared with pre- and post-cull estimates.”
1 in 7

Diagram: Cats eating bowls of food, with some cats marked 'R' and others 'RT'.
Benefits of RTF for feral cats

• Reduces crowding, illness and euthanasia in shelters
• Reduces birth and translocation with associated risks
• Addresses the source of many nuisance complaints
• Stabilizes community cat populations more effectively than other available tools
What about friendly cats?

• Originally adoption was preferred over RTF where capacity existed

• Adoptive homes saved for cats that can’t go back

• Provide “Fates better than death” only for those that exceed adoption capacity
But remember this?

- Return to owner
- Adoption
- Humane euthanasia
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One difference between cats and dogs
Another difference between cats and dogs

Search and identification methods that owners use to find a lost dog

Linda K. Lord, PhD, MS; Thomas E. Wilmer, MD, MBA; Amy K. Federick, MD; Julie A. Funk, PhD, MS; Pavlo J. Rapoport, MD

Objective: To characterize the process by which owners search for lost dogs and identify factors associated with time to recovery.

Design: Cross-sectional study.

Sample Population: Owners of 191 dogs lost in Montgomery County, Ohio, between June 1 and September 30, 2009.

Procedure: A telephone survey was conducted.

Results: Of the 191 (98%) dogs were recovered, median time to recovery was 6 days (range, 0 to 81 days). Most (48.9%) dogs were recovered within 1 day, and 85.7% were recovered within 7 days. The median number of days to recovery was 6 days (range, 0 to 75 days). The median number of dogs per neighborhood was 0. The median number of dogs per neighborh...
Difference between cats and dogs

Methods by which cats and dogs were recovered by their owners

- Returned home on their own
- Found in neighborhood
- Posting neighborhood signs
- Call or visit to a shelter
- ID tag
- Microchip

Cats vs. Dogs

20
Not a fluke

- Random digit dialed national survey of > 1,000 households
- 15% of households had lost a cat
- Of those, 75% were found
  - 1/54 by visit to shelter
  - 48/54 by returning on their own or searching neighborhood
“Of the cats that were found alive, the vast majority were found outside (83%). This was followed by the option offered as ‘cat being found inside someone else’s house’ (11%), inside the house where they lived (4%), and inside a public building (2%), therefore less than 2% of found cats were in a shelter or municipal animal facility.”
Uneven impact

Ouch
Return to Field Owner

- Return to field for friendly healthy lost cats can bypass the mismatch in timing, search methods, transport barriers and cultural expectations that prevent lost cats from getting reclaimed from shelters
- Spay/neuter/vaccination improves cat health and decreases roaming for cats whose owners might not have the wherewithal to bring them in for those services
Another difference between cats and dogs

“There was one cat that kept coming back smelling of ladies’ perfume and they used our device to track it down to a neighbour’s house.”

Not all who wander are lost
Uneven impact

CAT INTAKE PER 1000 CAPITA VS MEDIAN INCOME
Uneven impact

• 1 in 6 people in America live in poverty
• 1 in 5 people in America speak a language other than English at home
• Cultural norms and expectations as well as access to services can vary
• > 90% of people in underserved communities have never been to a shelter at all
Theory

- Most pets in disadvantaged communities adopted from a source other than a shelter
- Return to field for friendly, healthy pet cats can close the loop on sterilization and vaccination for cats already “adopted” from another source
- Open doors for further education and risk mitigation

HSUS Pets for Life Report 2014
“Star is the light of Mayra’s life. The snowy-white cat has lived more than 10 years in her Texas home, but one day someone in the neighborhood saw Star outside, scooped her up and brought her to the nearest shelter.”

“Prior to the CCP, Star would have joined hundreds of other cats sitting in cages at the shelter, waiting for her family to find her. If she wasn’t picked up, she’d be put up for adoption…”
“Instead, thanks to the community cat program, Star was examined by veterinary staff, vaccinated and spayed. After recovering from surgery overnight and the next day, Sarah and Marla loaded Star into the CCP van and returned her back to the address where she was originally found.

“That’s when Mayra found out that Star wasn’t gone for good, but she was right there and happy to be home. Bursting into tears when Star was handed to her, Mayra was not only overjoyed to have her 11-year-old cat back safe at home, but she wanted to help other cats.”
New understanding

- Return to owner
- Adoption
- Return to Field/SNR
- Humane euthanasia
- Suffering and/or causing unacceptable problems or risks out in the community

Humane euthanasia

Return to owner

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Return to Field/SNR

Suffering and/or causing unacceptable problems or risks out in the community
Two major lanes

- Sterilize, vaccinate and return for most healthy unowned cats brought to the shelter\(^1\)
  - Healthy feral cats to stabilize populations in the community and limit euthanasia at the shelter
  - Healthy friendly stray/free roaming cats to maximize spayed/neutered/vaccinated cats reunited with their families
  - As an avenue to open doors with community members who would not otherwise go to the shelter

- Traditional shelter pathway for owner surrendered cats\(^1\) and:
  - Social kittens on a pathway to adoption
  - Unhealthy stray/free roaming cats (sick/injured/poor body condition)
  - Cruelty, abuse and neglect cases
  - Interventions for significant nuisance situations/public health or wildlife risk
  - As an avenue to open doors with community members and encourage engagement with the shelter

\(^1\)Or divert to TNR/low cost spay/neuter

\(^1\)When pet safety net/home to home options are not appropriate
Exits from the RTF superhighway for friendly adult cats

- Evidence of abandonment versus lost/out and about friendly cats
- Colony creating public health/nuisance/welfare concerns
  - Adopt out friendly cats to reduce size over time
- Sick/injured/poor body condition
- Ongoing concerns after initial return
Evidence of abandonment

• Efforts already made to reunite the cat in the neighborhood of origin
  – Post, scan, social media, talk to neighbors
• Evidence that the cat is lost or abandoned versus indoor/outdoor pet
  – Length of time/consistency of sighting without feeding or encouraging
  – Body condition and health
Is this your cat? collars

• Can give concerned callers a good action step
• Paper and tape reinforcement to allow easy tear-off
• Caution assuming un-owned status when language/cultural barriers may be an issue

https://www.missinganimalresponse.com/pet-detectives/paper-collars-is-this-your-cat/
Metered on-ramps

Found a stray animal?

Found a lost pet or stray animal? Here’s how to help them find their way home.

Check for identification

• If there’s an ID tag, contact the owner immediately.
• If there is no ID tag, consider taking the animal to a local veterinary office to be scanned for a microchip.

Tell your community about the pet you’ve found

• Post information about the animal to our Found Pets Bulletin Board.
• Share on social media.
• Post flyers in your community.

Stray cats

A stray cat who is healthy and friendly likely belongs to someone in your neighborhood. Cats have a far better chance of reuniting with their owner when they’re left in the area in which they’re found. Less than five percent of stray cats that are brought into shelters are reclaimed by their owners. For this reason, we encourage you to leave healthy and friendly cats where you discovered them.
Cadillac version

- Help appointments for found cats
- Low cost vet exam, vaccines, spay/neuter scheduled
- Supplies to hold onto cats for a while or keep them if that’s what they want
- Fund through donations/reduced intake

Benefit of keeping the lane open for adult cats in need

• Cats whose owners can no longer keep them are not adapted to life outside
• Making rehoming/surrender easy and safe reduces the likelihood of abandonment
• Reducing competition can help even “slow trackers” move more quickly and can expand the definition of adoptable and treatable
Exits from the adoption super-highway for kittens

- Kitten is not social and could not become social with reasonable efforts
- Organization does not have adoption capacity for all kittens entering the shelter
- RTF may be preferred to euthanasia where adoption is not an option
When kittens exit the superhighway

- Ideally don’t admit non-adoption track kittens until 3 months of age
- If RTF or TNR kittens < 12 weeks, give rabies vaccine labeled for 3 years and advise finder/trapper to retrap and follow up with booster if possible
- Make extra efforts to assure safe return location/open doors of communication if concerns
- Euthanasia preferable to RTF/TNR where risk of suffering and death is high
Set up your superhighway

• Predicted outcome and length of stay (LOS) determines housing
  – High clean-ability for RTF/fast track adoption versus high enrichment for longer stays
• Prioritize accessible/presentable housing for cats on adoption track
• Consider proximity to services
  – E.g. surgery, treatment, foster pickup
Keep traffic flowing

- Make sure housing numbers are aligned with pathway size
- Manage capacity separately for each major lane of your highway
- Consider service (e.g. surgery) capacity as well housing
- E.g. prioritize foster kitten return prior to weekends, RTF candidates aligned with staffing for return
Still a work in progress

Tell us what you think!
Info@millioncatchallenge.org
and/or post in the Maddies Million Cat Forum