

STRAY CATS & WINTER CAT SHELTERS



Fall is here and winter is fast approaching. This is the time of year we receive a high volume of calls regarding finding that neighbourhood stray cat a home. While there are many kind people who feed cats in their neighbourhood, what they're not sure of is what to do with the kitties in winter, or how to prevent the problem in the future.

First, if you have many stray cats living in your area we should consider the overpopulation problem. This problem will never go away if these cats don't get spayed and neutered, and can only escalate and you will be feeding and trying to find homes for more cats year after year—cats that have nowhere to go and may end up freezing, getting killed, trapped, then euthanized. To bring this into perspective, here are some facts on how fast cats reproduce:

- The average number of litters a fertile cat can produce in one year: 3.
- The average number of kittens in a feline litter: 4-6.
- A female cat can get pregnant while nursing a litter of kittens.
- In seven years, one female cat and one male cat and their offspring can produce up to 420,000 kittens!

These numbers are obviously extremely high so you can imagine the significant impact you can have by getting only one or two stray cats spayed or neutered in your area. This would prevent a large cat population without homes, and there truly is no need to allow cats to breed when they have nowhere to go. There are programs run by the Winnipeg Humane Society such as the trap-neuter-release (TNR) programs that can help with this problem. You can find out more about these programs at: <http://www.winnipeghumanesociety.ca/tnr>

Essentially, the idea is to trap the cats, using humane traps, and get them into the WHS to be spayed or neutered. The WHS has traps to rent, as do we, if they are unavailable from the WHS. You can find information from the Feral Cat Coalition regarding safe trapping procedures and some tricks and tips to make your trap a success: <http://www.feralcat.com/trapinst.html#A1.1>

After being spayed or neutered, the cats are returned to the environment from which they came. Feral cats are of course basically wild and have the best chance of survival being released back where they know their food and shelter sources and have survived thus far on their own. Once released you should continue to feed the cats if you can and have been prior to trapping. In the winter, it is nice to provide a heated water dish to ensure access to fresh water as well. You can find these at most pet/farm stores, even Princess Auto sells very inexpensive heated bowls. It is also important if you are feeding the cats to

provide a winter shelter and keep an eye on the colony for any signs of distress or illness etc.

Building a cat shelter for winter will greatly increase their chance of survival in the truly cold and miserable days. There are several ways to build inexpensive shelters for cats, or they can be ordered through us for no more than the cost of building materials. You can also check out the following link to find plans to build your own out of simple storage containers, wood or Styrofoam:

<http://www.spayandstay.org/wintershelter.htm>

Although we used to run TNR programs, our new location prevents us from properly managing traps in a safe manner. We are simply just too far away now and cannot leave our own friends alone for long periods of time. If you are willing, or know of anyone that would like to volunteer to monitor traps in a TNR program, please let us know.

Helping the feral cat population in your area survive a harsh Manitoba winter, while at the same time working to decrease their numbers, is the kindest thing we can do to help these cats.