



*Shaping the future for birds*

September 26, 2013

The Honorable Richard J. Berry  
Office of the Mayor  
P.O. Box 1293  
Albuquerque, NM 87103

Dear Mayor Berry:

On behalf of American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and wildlife enthusiasts across the country, I am writing to voice support for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's recent letter calling for the discontinuation of Albuquerque's Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR) program and to offer ABC's guidance to effectively and humanely remove cats from the landscape.

The presence of feral cats throughout Albuquerque is a tragedy for cats, native wildlife, and the city's residents. Certainly, the issue of roaming feral cats needs to be addressed, but TNR (also called Trap, Neuter, *Re-abandon*) is not the answer. In addition to maintaining cats in an inhumane lifestyle, sacrificing local wildlife, and endangering the health and welfare of Albuquerque's citizens, TNR simply does not work.

Numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies have concluded that TNR is not an effective method to help control the population of feral cats and may actually lead to an increase in the number of cats.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Behavioral changes associated with spaying and neutering and the supplemental feeding of feral cat colonies under TNR "management" has been shown to attract stray cats and lead to the increased abandonment of pets by irresponsible owners. One long-term study of TNR efforts in Rome concluded that TNR was a waste of "money, time, and energy."<sup>2</sup>

TNR also keeps cats on the streets where they lead harsh and traumatic lives. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has estimated that feral cats have an average lifespan of only 2 years, whereas owned cats average 10 years.<sup>4</sup> Reasons for this reduced life expectancy include attacks by dogs and other feral cats, predation, being hit by cars, ingestion of poison,

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<sup>1</sup> Castillo D. and A. L. Clarke. 2003. Trap/Neuter/Release methods ineffective in controlling domestic cat "colonies" on public lands. *Natural Areas Journal* 23: 247-253.

<sup>2</sup> Natoli E., L. Maragliano, G. Cariola, A. Faini, R. Bonnani, S. Cafazzo, and C. Fantini. 2006. Management of feral domestic cats in the urban environment of Rome (Italy). *Preventive Veterinary Medicine* 77: 180-185.

<sup>3</sup> McCarthy R. J., S. H. Levine, and J. M. Reed. 2013. Estimation of effectiveness of three methods of feral cat population control by use of a simulation model. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 243: 502-511.

<sup>4</sup> American Veterinary Medical Association. 2003. Position on Abandoned and Feral Cats *In* 2003 AVMA directory and resource manual. Schaumburg, IL.

disease, and more. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals also vigorously opposes TNR, taking the position that it is inhumane for the cats as well as the wildlife they hunt, injure, and/or kill.<sup>5</sup>

TNR is a death sentence for wildlife. Domestic cats are a non-native species in the United States and efficient, instinctive predators. Contrary to claims by TNR practitioners, the feeding of feral cat colonies does not eliminate the killing of wildlife by cats. Scientific studies have repeatedly shown that even well fed cats will hunt and kill.<sup>6,7</sup> Research by scientists from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently estimated that cats are responsible for the deaths of 1.4-3.7 billion birds and 6.9-20.7 billion mammals in the United States every year.<sup>8</sup> Even the mere presence of cats in the environment has been shown to reduce bird reproductive output and survivorship.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, permitting feral cats to continue to roam outdoors through TNR is a threat to public health and safety. According to scientists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cats are consistently the number one carrier of rabies among domestic animals and pose a “disproportionate risk for potential human exposure.”<sup>10</sup> Domestic cats are also the necessary host for the parasite that causes toxoplasmosis to complete its life cycle and may shed hundreds of millions of the infectious parasite in its feces.<sup>11</sup> In people, toxoplasmosis has been linked to schizophrenia, Alzheimer’s, obsessive compulsive disorder, and other neuro-degenerative diseases and can cause sudden abortion and fetal abnormalities in pregnant mothers. Furthermore, cats may also harbor the plague, which has been confirmed in 70 cats in New Mexico since 2004.<sup>12</sup>

Although some “humane” organizations seek to maintain cats outdoors, numerous state agencies, professional societies, and non-profit organizations understand that doing so is detrimental to cats, wildlife, and people. For example, the AVMA’s Committee on Environmental Issues has stated that “managed cat colonies do not solve the problems of cat overpopulation and suffering, wildlife predation, or zoonotic disease transmission.” Consequently, the committee “strongly

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<sup>5</sup> People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. 2013. The Great Outdoors? Not for Cats! <http://www.peta.org/issues/companion-animals/the-great-outdoors-not-for-cats.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> Adamec R. E. 1976. The interaction of hunger and preying in the domestic cat (*Felis catus*): an adaptive hierarchy? Behavioral Biology 18: 263-272.

<sup>7</sup> Loyd, K. A. T., S. M. Hernandez, J. P. Carroll, K. J. Abernathy, and G. J. Marshall. 2013. Quantifying free-roaming domestic cat predation using animal-borne video cameras. Biological Conservation 160: 183-189.

<sup>8</sup> Loss S. R., T. Will, and P. P. Marra. 2013. The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States. Nature Communications 4:1396.

<sup>9</sup> Bonnington C., K. J. Gaston, and K. L. Evans. 2013. Fearing the feline: domestic cats reduce avian fecundity through trait-mediated indirect effects that increase nest predation by other species. Journal of Applied Ecology 50: 15-24.

<sup>10</sup> Roebing A. D., D. Johnson, J. D. Blanton, M. Levin, D. Slate, G. Fenwick, and C. E. Rupprecht. 2013. Rabies prevention and management of cats in the context of Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release programmes. Zoonoses and Public Health doi: 10.1111/zph.12070.

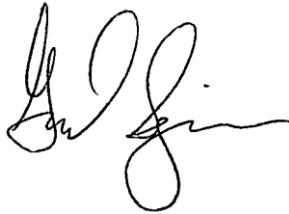
<sup>11</sup> Torrey E. F. and R. H. Yolken. 2013. Toxoplasma oocysts as a public health problem. Trends in Parasitology 29: 380-384.

<sup>12</sup> New Mexico Department of Health. Confirmed Pet Plague, New Mexico, 2004-2012. [http://nmhealth.org/ERD/HealthData/documents/ConfirmedPetCases\\_NM\\_2004\\_2012.pdf](http://nmhealth.org/ERD/HealthData/documents/ConfirmedPetCases_NM_2004_2012.pdf) (accessed 9/23/2013).

supports and encourages humane elimination of feral cat colonies” and “opposes passage of local or state ordinances that legalize the maintenance of managed (i.e., TNR) cat colonies.”<sup>4</sup>

Based on the overwhelming evidence that invariably indicates the failure of TNR, I urge the City of Albuquerque to follow the advice of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and to immediately and permanently discontinue the practice of TNR. I also strongly encourage the city to enact laws that treat cats like dogs and to require the Animal Welfare Department to actively control the feral cat population, beginning with offering recourse to aggrieved residents by trapping nuisance cats. American Bird Conservancy stands ready to assist Albuquerque in its efforts to effectively and humanely remove roaming cats.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Sizemore', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Grant Sizemore  
Cats Indoors Program Officer