



Maintaining a Feral Cat Colony

Maintaining a feral cat colony is a very commendable and important thing to do for the community and for the cats that you are caring for. Before taking this task on we ask you to read this material so that you make an educated decision.

Maintaining a feral cat colony can be very rewarding but it is definitely an every day responsibility. The cat's health and well-being will be your job and they will be counting on you. Lollypop Farm would like to thank you for your efforts on behalf of cats in our community.

FOOD

Thinking about where you are going to put the food is the first step in maintaining your colony. The best location is one that is away from the public where the cats can eat in peace. This will be better for them and will help to keep good community relations. Also, try not to place it too close to their shelter and where they eliminate. It is also helpful to keep the food covered somehow to protect it from the weather. If you are not feeding them in your garage or under an awning you can create a "feeding station".

On average one cat will eat one small can of wet food and two ounces of dry food a day. In the winter, you may want to provide more dry food because wet food will freeze not long after being put out. If it seems as though all of the food is eaten quickly you may want to offer more, if food is being left behind then you can probably feed less. Be sure to keep the area clean and do not leave food out overnight. You don't want to inadvertently invite other wildlife to eat and this will help keep away flies/ants etc. Dinnertime- food for your kitty!

To protect food and water from the elements, place them in a covered shelter that will also protect the cats as they eat or drink. A stand with a sloping roof partially cover to keep out the snow, may be all that is needed for several cats to eat together. Cats need extra calories in the winter to maintain their energy levels, so expect to provide your cat with extra rations. Use a good quality dry food in the winter. Check the food label to see that a protein product, **not** corn or rice is the first item listed. You may want to mix in a little kitten food for extra protein and fat. Dry food takes longer to freeze, and therefore is a good option.

Check your feeding area at least twice a day to be sure food and water is available. Your feral cat has a good internal clock and will get used to its feeding time. Be sure to bring in uneaten food at night to prevent wildlife from loitering in the area

WATER

Although cats don't need a lot of water they do still need to have access to fresh water every day. In the winter they will need more water because you will likely be feeding more dry food. In wintertime, a common problem for caretakers is keeping the cats' water from freezing. The cats need water, especially when dry food is the predominant food provided, which is often the case in winter when wet food itself can quickly freeze. Below is a list of different solutions.

If you are feeding at your home and have an outlet that is accessible, there are electrically heated water bowls. These are available through local pet stores and are about \$30 each. The water will evaporate relatively quickly, so the bowl needs to be filled with a gallon of water in order to last 24 hours. The bowl also can be used for wet food, though it will dry out quickly

A 5 quart dish with 6 foot protected cord is available for \$24 from KV Vet Supply (item #86041) - www.kvvet.com, or call 1-800-423-8211. Ask about their other heated bowls.

The Pet Solar Sipper (model no. 10011) uses solar energy to keep the water from freezing and is available for \$29.95 (including shipping). It functions at 18 degrees F. and above. To learn more and order:
http://solarsippers.com/animalsipper_std.html

You can put the water in a small Styrofoam cooler. Cut a hole in the side and place the water bowls within. The insulation will help slow the freezing process. Be sure to use a small cooler otherwise the cats may use it as a shelter.

Another tactic is using a thick, deep bowl. The water will take longer to freeze in a bowl like this versus a bowl that is shallow and made of thinner plastic.

A product called "Snuggle Safe", may be an option. It's a disk about the size of a Frisbee intended to keep pets' bedding warm. Under normal indoor conditions, you put it in the microwave for 5 minutes and it stays hot for 12 hours. For outdoor use, it has been reported that the discs can be safely heated up to 8 minutes in a 1,000 watt microwave to last as long as possible outdoors. Depending on the microwave, the discs can conceivably melt so you have to do a little trial and error to see how hot you can go. The discs are just the right size to fit inside the under rim of some large dinner plates and water bowls. In the frigid outdoors their heat lasts 2-3

hours. If you can afford it, it's convenient. You may want to have two sets of discs - that way you can heat and bring one set to the colony, and pickup and bring back the set used the last time you were feeding.

Another method is to place the water bowl inside a Styrofoam cooler, one of the cheap white ones used for soda and the like. Cut a hole for the cats to enter on one end of the cooler and put the bowl at the other end. The Styrofoam's insulation will slow down the freezing process, somewhat.

Use a thick plastic, thermal-type of water dish. It's amazing how long it takes for water to freeze in one of these. You may use the bottom of a Tupperware container - it's shaped like a large cup and is made of very thick plastic. Wider and deeper is better for the water dish than narrow and shallow. This keeps the surface water from freezing longer.

SHELTER

Your cats must have a warm, dry place to sleep. Without this they will be more susceptible to illness and may get frost bite on their paws, nose and ears, or succumb to hypothermia. There are many different types of shelters available. Please be sure to line your shelter with straw for warmth and check for cleanliness every 2-3 weeks.

With a little ingenuity, you can provide the added security and warmth that your cat needs, by constructing a homemade shelter. A shelter may provide warmth for two, three or more cats, depending on their size and the sociability of your cat(s). Feral felines who compete for food at other times of the year may find they are willing to overlook their differences when temperatures drop.

The reason for these alliances is a practical one. A cat's body temperature is about 101 degrees F. When cats "cuddle" they form a warm furry bundle which acts to provide heat to the entire group.

Alley Cat Allies recommends that a shelter be at least two feet by three feet long and 18 inches high. It should have an opening small enough to prevent dogs or other large animals from entering and a flap or L-shaped entryway to keep the cold air from blowing in. If a cat can fit its head in the entranceway it can also get its body through. By the way, cats love a "canopy" over their door!

Bigger shelters are not necessarily better. In a large shelter the body heat generated by the cats huddling inside tends to disperse, leaving the interior of the shelter as cold as the weather outside. One cat needs a small enough space that all its body heat is not dissipated.

Shelters can be built of wood, plastic (with insulation), or heavy cardboard insulated box (such as computer box) and may be covered by several layers of

plastic, to make the shelter water proof, prevent wind from entering, and prevent the box from “decaying”. (See below). Lollypop Farm also maintains a limited number of shelters available for purchase. Inquire by calling the feral cat hotline at 223-1330 ext 300.

There are a number of other options, some are listed below.

Two large plastic bins may be “nested” one in the other with foam board insulation between them. A small hole can be cut (away from the center) of one of the “long sides” for an entrance. A canopy may make it more attractive. More specific information on construction may be found by consulting one of the websites below. Make sure the entrance is small (about 5” tall by 5” wide) and preferably place to one side of the center of the box. This allows the cat to keep out of the wind. If you can create a small canopy, that would be a plus!

Another option is to use milk crates wired together and covered with suitable insulation and plastic. For those who have no construction skills, doghouses that are winterized with plastic coverings or insulation make convenient cat shelters. Reduce the size of the original doorway, and install a flap on the opening to keep out cold air and wind, some companies provide a plastic entry. Use the smallest dog-house available and insulate it well. Even the smallest of insulated dog house may be too big to retain the body heat of one or two cats.

Below you will find some websites for either building or purchasing an outdoor shelter for your feral cats.

<http://www.indyferal.org>

<http://www.feralcat.com/shelter.html>

<http://www.pacthumanesociety.org/core/WinterShelter.htm>

<http://seefido.com/html/outdoor-cat-shelter.htm>

http://www.cozycatfurniture.com/cat_houses.html

<http://www.cedarwoodfurniture.com/cathouse.html>

<http://spayandstay.org/howtobuild.htm>

http://www.alleycat.org/pdf/feral_cat_shelter.pdf

Keeping warm- insulation

Use your imagination for insulating the feral cat’s home. Mylar (“bubble blanket”) is a silver sheeting material which retains body heat. This may be purchased by the foot or in “blankets” from a home store or where camping products are sold. You may cover it with shelving paper to discourage scratching. You may also line the inside of the box with untreated foam board insulation (also covered with inexpensive shelf liner, to prevent scratching). Do not use fiberglass insulation, the cat may ingest it and may die.

Keeping dry- bedding

Use straw (not hay) or 100% wool or other suitable synthetic insulating material inside as bedding. Never ever use cotton towels, sheets, blankets or newspaper or other absorbent material which freezes when wet, as bedding. Feral cats can tolerate very low temperature but will die, or may lose an ear tip or limb due to hypothermia, if their bedding gets wet and freezes the cats body temperature may lower quickly. Straw (not hay) is ideal as it dries quickly after the cat leaves the shelter. Be generous! Your cat will burrow itself into its straw nest and thereby preserve its body heat. The straw can be changed once during the winter season. You also may use hardwood shavings (no cedar or pine).

Location, location, location- where to place the shelter

Once the box is finished, throw leaves over it, or place the house near a woody area so that they'll remain out of sight (see below). Be sure you can either shovel or "walk a path" from the shelter to the cats feeding area.

A shelter should sit a few inches off the ground on bricks, cinder blocks or pallets (wooden platforms used for unloading boxed goods) to keep it from becoming waterlogged. Shipping firms or hardware/ home stores may have disposable pallets, farm or pet stores may also be able to provide discarded pallets or offer advice on where to obtain them. . During snowstorms, dig out a pathway from the shelter so the cats can get in and out. Although some areas of the country have relatively mild winters, providing shelter to protect the cats from the elements is still important.

HEALTH

It is important to keep an eye on the cats you are feeding. If there are any signs of injury or illness you should contact your veterinarian immediately. Signs to look for are; change in eating habits, runny/crusty eyes, discharge from the nose, lethargy, dull coat, open wound, limping. If the cat(s) are spayed/neutered at Lollypop Farm we will handle any complications related to the surgery. However, ongoing medical care is your responsibility.

It can be very beneficial to keep records of the cats in your care. This can make veterinary contact easier and you will be able to keep track of vaccinations, illness etc. If you are interested in a log Lollypop Farm can provide that for you.