

Notes taken from a speech by Dr. Kate Horne

By Elizabeth Oliver



One of the major sources of complaints in urban areas throughout Japan is the number of feral cats. Of course the cats are not really wild but originate from the irresponsibility of people who dump them in the first place. Since most of them are not neutered, they breed quickly and their progeny creates a cat population explosion. These



colonies increase especially if people feed them. Many colonies get infected by contagious diseases which sweep through the colony killing many of the cats. For a time the numbers drop but as new animals get dumped the cycle begins again. People who feed stray cats should also take on the responsibility for neutering them.

There are many individuals in Japan who work hard trying to neuter

feral cats at their own expense. But it is a losing battle since the kittens by the time they have been caught may already have litters themselves. A kitten can come into season and get pregnant by the time it is five months old. It is therefore imperative to neuter kittens as early as possible. In our Autumn newsletter (No.31) we focussed on the importance of early neutering to control pet overpopulation. However the co-operation of veterinarians is crucial if programmes to reduce feral cat populations are to succeed. Not only do we need reduced neutering costs but also their willingness to neuter young animals.

Dr. Horne pioneered a neutering programme for stray cats in London, called SNIP, the Society for Neutering Islington's Pussies. SNIP expanded its area of operation to other cities in the UK and in 1996 formed SNIP International to develop programmes for neutering stray cats in other countries.

SNIP started in the densely populated London Borough of Islington with one cat. This tortoiseshell cat lived outside Dr. Horne's office and kept having kittens which grew up semi-wild, and which were taken away by the RSPCA to be euthanized. A friend suggested it would be kinder to trap the cat and get her neutered, so this was done and afterwards she was returned to the same place where she lived happily for many years. Dr. Horne realized through this experience that the most humane way to control feral cat populations was to trap, neuter and return the cats to their original place.

SNIP is a registered charity and supported by a large number of animal lovers who raise funds. The organization is run entirely by volunteers; there are no paid staff and no facilities for keeping cats. After the cats are neutered they are



kept at volunteers' homes to recuperate until they can be released. Any cats which are found to have life-threatening illnesses or injuries are euthanized. Tame cats and small kittens are often found good homes while the remainder of the adult cats are returned to the place they were found and released. While these cats are under anaesthetic, the tip of their left ear is cut off so that they can be easily identified after release to avoid trapping them again. If the original place they came from is too dangerous or unsuitable, the cats are taken to a farm sanctuary in the countryside, held in an enclosure for a few weeks to adjust and then released onto the farm where they can lead a semi-wild existence with food supplied.

Dr. Horne points out that in order to run a successful stray cat neutering programme certain basic requirements must be met.

- * A base of reliable and hard-working volunteers
 - * Management framework/ people to organize
 - * Transport and Drivers
 - * Sympathetic veterinary surgeons who will provide reduced prices
- The average cost SNIP has to pay for neutering a female cat in London is quite high, £20 (¥4000) whereas in countries in Eastern Europe is half that.
- * Rooms in volunteers' houses to convalesce and foster animals
 - * Equipment: such as special cages for trapping and carrying cats
 - * Funding
 - * Liaison with local authorities and also with people living in the neighbourhood.

Part 3 Neutering Feral Cats