



Spring/Summer 2006

Mews & Views

Kitten Spay/Neuter A Tested Procedure Whose Time Has Come

“The veterinary profession has for decades made 6-8 months the recommended age for neutering.

There is no scientific reason for this age selection; it has simply become a tradition.”

— Dr. Jeffrey Young, Paws To Think, Winter 2005



The sterilization of cats began in the early 1950s as they started to move indoors with the invention of kitty litter. As the story goes, people would bring them to veterinarians when they reached sexual maturity — at 6-8 months old — complaining that the females were yowling or the males were spraying — making them difficult to live with. The vets had an easy remedy: spay and neuter them. Once sterilized, the cats settled in as good companions, free of the unsavory habits of intact cats. In the '50s, we weren't as concerned about the growing number of surplus cats — most were undomesticated (feral) living outdoors and any homeless companion cats were routinely euthanized.

Cat Sterilization for Population Control

Fast forward to the present where cats are now the number one indoor pet — about 85% of whom are sterilized. The pet cats that are not sterilized are typically in lower-income homes where the cost is prohibitive. They — together with the large number of feral cats — produce the many litters annually flooding our communities with more new cats than can be placed in homes.

We now know that euthanasia is an ineffective means of population control — as the cats left intact continue to reproduce. Fortunately we also know that sterilization is both a more humane and more effective alternative. Its application, however, is hampered by our waiting to sterilize cats until they are 6-8 months old. This is especially true for outdoor cats who can be sexually active at 5 months. *By the time they are “old enough” to be sterilized they are often in heat or pregnant which complicates or delays their surgery — or worse — have had their first litter.*

The outcome is no better for pet cats that are adopted out at 8 weeks, with the shelter or rescue relying on the guardian to get the cat sterilized later — when they're at least 6 months old. The

results are abysmal even if a sterilization fee is prepaid. People get busy and wait too long — or think it'll be okay for the cat to have one litter — never fully comprehending the results of their actions.

Advent of Kitten Spay/Neuter

In the late 1970s, borrowing a practice used with farm animals since the early 1900s, veterinarians at the larger animal shelters started sterilizing kittens prior to adoption. Through their efforts, we now know that this is indeed a safe procedure. *Follow-up tests and studies show essentially no health differences whether the surgery is performed at 7 weeks or 7 months.*

With this information in hand, the goal now is to get early-age spay/neuter into the mainstream — where most surgeries occur. Large shelters account for only a small percentage of kitten adoptions — most happen person-to-person or through small rescues that do not have a veterinarian on staff. Feral cat programs depend on local clinics for their surgeries too.

TLC Spay/Neuter Assistance

Healthy cat euthanasia — the #1 killer of cats — is a very preventable malady that can only be stopped by pro-active sterilization of *all* cats — indoors and outdoors — and the earlier the better. Our **TLC/for The Love of Cats** programs are dedicated to this mission. Locally we offer free spay/neuter assistance to both managed feral cats (regardless of caregiver income) and pet cats of families with limited incomes. Visit our web site for program details or call us for an application.

Cat News You Can Use

President Bush Signs Pet Microchip Bill.

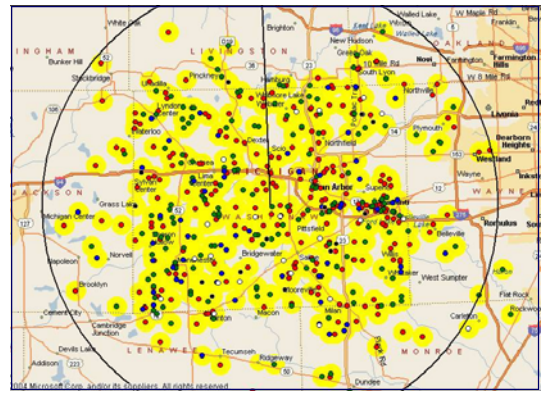
The 2006 *Agriculture Appropriations Bill* (HR 2744) mandates the establishment of a universal encoding standard for pet microchips. This would ensure that any lost pet can have its ID implant read and be identified through a national database. The provision was spearheaded by the **Coalition for Reuniting Pets and Families** formed by the major animal organizations including the *American Veterinary Medical Association*, *ASPCA*, *American Humane* and *HSUS*. The Coalition supports industry-wide adoption of open technology microchipping as used in Canada, Europe and parts of Asia where the universal 134 kHz International Standards Organization (ISO) system is used.

The US market is controlled by two companies — AVID and Home Again/Schering Plough — neither is ISO-compliant nor compatible with each other. Less than 5% of the 164 million pet cats and dogs in the U.S. are microchipped, compared to 25% of those in countries where standardized chips are used. Opening the market brings down the price so more pet guardians can afford to microchip. Microchipping is safe, easy and the most effective way to identify lost pets.

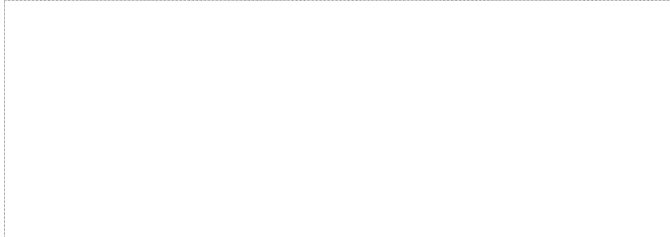


Zimmer Foundation
 PO Box 130944
 Ann Arbor MI 48113
 734.663.8000
 TLConline.org

TLC Spay/Neuter Service Area



The circle above defines our Spay/Neuter Service Area — all of Washtenaw County plus portions of the adjacent counties. The colored dots identify the 551 managed feral cat colonies we've helped through 2005. To learn more, visit our web site and click on Programs.



Maury & Robin



We were saddened to learn that long-time Saline resident Maury Robbins passed away this winter. We met him in 2002 when he found a feral cat (Robin) living in his backyard — eating food he put out for a fox. Because of Maury's advanced years — he was over 80 — and because of this resident fox — we offered to move Robin to our show-and-tell feral cat colony. But, Maury's commitment to Robin didn't end just

because we gave him a new home. Maury had bonded to him and continued to participate in his care. For over two years he visited our cat colony daily bringing food his wife Edna prepared and giving Robin love and attention. He came rain or shine never even missing the major holidays. It was only after his

health diminished that he discontinued these visits.

It's cats like Robin that motivate us to ensure all managed outdoor cats in our community get sterilized and vaccinated. There are so many and not all of them are as lucky as Robin. Sterilizing those with committed caregivers providing food, water and dry shelter, helps strengthen the cat-human bond while at the same time improves each cat's quality of life. And, as a bonus, they help us achieve our very important goal — *no more unplanned kittens!*

TLC Feline Spay/Neuter Program			
Service	2005	2001-2004	Total Program
Feral Cat Sterilizations	900	2,169	3,069
Low-Income Cat Sterilizations	177	94	271
Low-Income ID Microchips	91	29	120

In 2005, through 28 participating veterinary clinics, we sterilized and vaccinated 1,077 cats for 408 community residents. These cats would not have been sterilized otherwise. This year we expect to fix about 1,500 more. Our sincere thanks goes to the many individuals who donated money to our cause — together we've improved the lives of over 3,300 cats since our programs began.

Dear Friends,

We're pleased that Washington is getting involved in trying to clean up the current microchip uncertainties. With several incompatible encoding "standards" in use — and no "universal" scanner currently available — the effectiveness of microchips is much lower than it can — and SHOULD — be. The best solution would be a universal scanner — which exists and is being used in other countries — but can't be used here because of AVID's threat of patent litigation. The major animal organizations have been unable to change AVID's position — perhaps government can. We hope so.

If a lost cat shows up at a shelter or veterinarian without a microchip, their odds of them being returned to their home are less than 1 in 20 (with the odds plummeting the longer the cat has been lost). With a microchip, the odds are virtually certain (regardless of how long they've been lost) — IF the shelter or veterinarian has a scanner that will read the microchip. The objective of the current effort is to remove that "if".

Even with the current imperfect system, microchips are a lifesaving option for your pet. Next to sterilizing, it's the most important gift you can give your furry friend.

Kitty Zimmer