

Animal Overpopulation by Justin Tong

Most of us probably would never dream of abandoning our pets, but then why are there approximately 70 million stray dogs and cats living in the U.S.? There are 4,000-6,000 U.S. animal shelters doing their part to solve this problem, but they can take in only 6-8 million each year, meaning there are still countless more animals out there.¹

This huge number of stray animals comes in part from litters born to pets, and are then abandoned as the owner is not willing or able to take care of the offspring. Another part is when owners give up their pets because they are no longer able to care for the animals or do not want to keep their pets.³ In fact, 70% of owners ended up giving their pets away, simply abandoning them, or taking them to shelters. Out of the 6-8 million animals living in shelters in the U.S., 90% of them are adoptable. However, half of that number is euthanized because the shelters simply cannot afford to keep them, a completely needless and avoidable loss of life that costs an estimated \$2 billion annually. In fact, it's estimated 3.7 million animals were euthanized in 2008. The majority of those animals tend to be cats, by at least 20%. The reality is probably worse than what we know because there are few statistics on the matter, the most recent ones from the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy being from 1997.² The challenge society faces is to reduce the number of animals put in shelters in the first place and thus the reason why Paws In Need was created.

The biggest tool in this effort is spaying and neutering pets to prevent them from breeding, but this has other benefits as well. For female pets, this means there will be a smaller chance of uterine infections or breast cancer, and they will not go into heat, curtailing its effects. However, this is much more dramatic with males, who won't have incentives to mark out their territory, confront other males, won't want to wander outside of their owners' homes, and will generally be less aggressive. Neutering/spaying also has its financial benefits, since that way, there won't be any litters to take care of, or far fewer chances that animals will be injured and the owners will have to pay for medical treatment.⁴ Most importantly, there will be no unwanted litters that are abandoned by their owners. That will reduce the number of unwanted animals that ultimately find themselves in shelters, in turn lessening the number of animals that have to be put down.

Stray animal overpopulation is a situation that will continue to worsen if action is not taken. With over 70 million strays living in shelters and on the streets, we can no longer afford to ignore the plight of these animals. Pet owners need to learn the responsibilities that owning a pet entails spaying and neutering when necessary and that ownership of an animal is a long-lasting commitment. In addition, we need to spay and neuter the strays in existence today so they don't continue to reproduce. Taking these steps will help ensure the animals have proper care and will not contribute to the problem of overpopulation.

Works Cited

1. "Animal Overpopulation." Oxfordpets.com. Oxford-Lafayette Human Society. Web. 09 June 2014. <http://www.oxfordpets.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=61>
2. "Animal Shelter Euthanasia." Animalhumane.org. American Humane Association. Web. 09 June 2014. <<http://www.americanhumane.org/animals/adoption-pet-care/issues-information/pet->

overpopulation.html>

3. "Pet Overpopulation." Animalhumane.org. American Humane Association. Web. 09 June 2014. <<http://www.americanhumane.org/animals/adoption-pet-care/issues-information/pet-overpopulation.html>>

4. "Top 10 Reasons to Spay or Neuter Your Pet." ASPCA. American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Web. 09 June 2014. <<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/top-10-reasons-spay-or-neuter-your-pet>>