

**NOVA SCOTIA SPCA
WHITE PAPER
PUBLICATION DATE: SEPTEMBER 1, 2010
UPDATED: N/A
INTAKE OF CATS AND KITTENS**

BACKGROUND

The Nova Scotia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty (Nova Scotia SPCA): Protecting animals from cruelty since 1877, the Nova Scotia SPCA is a registered charity, comprised of 11 Branches, which relies primarily on volunteers and donations to fund animal protection; care and rehabilitation; advocacy; and humane education. The Animal Cruelty Prevention Act mandates the Society to enforce animal cruelty laws, making the Nova Scotia SPCA unique among animal welfare organizations in the province. For more information, visit www.spcans.ca.

This document outlines the considerations undertaken by the SPCA with respect to the intake of cats and kittens, especially in months where the population and need is in excess of the resources of the Society.

OVERVIEW

Each spring, thousands of cats have thousands of litters throughout Nova Scotia. In the many communities, there are an abundance of stray, feral and free roaming unaltered cats. Rescues, TNR (trap, neuter and return), shelters and other animal welfare groups attempt to address this issue with available donated and volunteer resources, but the problem continues to outrun the efforts.

SPAY/NEUTER

Spay and neuter is the only non-lethal, long term solution available to address stray and feral populations. It is also the only way to ensure that owned animals do not produced unexpected litters that may end up on the streets or in shelters.

SPCA MANDATE

The SPCA, whose mandate is to protect animals from cruelty, is regrettably limited in the support that can be offered through rescue, but does have a number of shelter and foster-based Branches that seek to re-home abandoned and surrendered animals, in addition to supporting the SPCA's required service of providing space for those suffering from neglect, abuse and cruelty as dictated by provincial legislation. Our efforts are triaged to ensure we can provide assistance to the most vulnerable and at risk.

Owner surrendered animals, strays and feral cats that are not the subject of a cruelty complaint do not fall within the legislated mandate of the SPCA. Our charitable mission, however, seeks to provide as much assistance as resources permit.

The only solution to the dilemma of cats in Nova Scotia is a comprehensive one that relies on cooperation between government, veterinarians and animal welfare groups.

FAQ

How many animals does the SPCA help?

The SPCA takes in approximately 8,000 animals each year and the majority are cats. In the height of kitten season, our intake and adoption rates close to double to keep up with the unprecedented demand. We continually push to enhance our capacity, while being mindful of the safety and health of all animals in our care. Each year is more challenging than the last. The SPCA, the Provincial Animal Shelter and our Branches throughout the community receive thousands of calls in the spring and summer months related to cats and kittens in need.

Why can't the SPCA be open admission for all owner-surrender and abandoned cats and kittens?

Some shelters are open admission, but their kill rates are generally very high. In North America it is very common for shelters and municipal run pounds to have kill rates as high as 90% for cats.

The SPCA is striving to be an open-admission, No Killⁱ animal welfare organization. We will not compromise live release rates to be open admission. In other words, the SPCA will not kill healthy, adoptable animals for space. We aim to place all healthy animals and those with treatable, manageable conditions. We only euthanize for reason of mercy or aggression.

Regrettably that means there may not always be room at the SPCA, at its Branch shelters or through its foster network for all of the animals in need. On the rare occasions where capacity and resources require us to reduce intake, the SPCA prioritizes the most vulnerable and provides assistance to the extent possible.

Does the SPCA receive any funding from the government that would assist with spay neuter programs or animal control?

No, the SPCA receives no funding for animal care. As an example, the Provincial Animal Shelter in Dartmouth has an annual operating budget of \$515,000 per year and revenues are received by way of donations and adoption fees. Adoption fees cover approximately 50% of the costs related to providing shelter and veterinary care. The other Branch shelters have similar budgets and constraints.

The Provincial Office that supports cruelty investigations for the entire province has an annual operating budget of \$561,000 of which \$3,000 comes from the Province (Department of Agriculture). The remaining required funds are procured through donations. The budget supports three cruelty provincial officers who respond to more than 1,500 complaints annually.

The SPCA Branches that do have Municipal contracts in the province for pound services are overextended, with the costs in excess of funds provided.

What about feral cat health? Wouldn't a feral cat do better in a shelter?

Feral cats are cats that are not socialized to humans. Once a feral cat is more than a couple months old, they are no longer able to be socialized and are not candidates for adoption. By their nature, they are content in the outdoors and benefit from TNR programs allowing them to stay in this familiar environment.. Many shelters in North America accept feral cats and they are immediately euthanized. This is contrary to the SPCA's mission and vision. The SPCA does not believe that it is humane to remove an animal from its natural environment, where it is healthy and content, for the purpose of euthanasia. Research supports assumptions that they do not pose a health risk to other cats or humans. In fact, feral cats are as statistically as healthy as pet cats, when cared for in a colony setting. For more information, visit www.alleycat.org.

How can the community help?

Every individual is a powerful advocate and can make a real difference in the lives of animals in every community in Nova Scotia. Here are some of the ways in which you can help:

Foster – Become part of our care network and expand our ability to support animals in need by providing a loving, safe environment for an animal in your home. We will provide all food and supplies required and cover all vet care costs.

Adopt – Every animal that is adopted makes room for another to come into our care. If adoption was everyone's first choice, there would be no displaced animals in need of loving homes. In a recent national survey, only 17% of cats were adopted from shelters. If you can't adopt from a shelter, consider adopting a stray and provide for their needs. Your local SPCA may be able to help.

Donate – Help us expand our capacity to offer care. Donations will directly go to enhancing our ability to help animals in need and towards offering low cost spay neuter to directly address and check the population, especially for low income individuals and families.

Support local rescue groups and TNR – Local rescues take in hundreds of animals each year and TNR (trap, neuter, return) groups work with feral populations to ensure that they do not reproduce and populations naturally decrease.

Call the media – Be heard and bring attention to the cause. The media is a valuable tool in broadening awareness of efforts on the ground and issues that need to be addressed.

Talk to your Municipal Councillor - Understand where your tax dollars go and advocate for stronger regulations and bylaws that are inclusive of the needs for cats in particular – stray and owned. Push for the expansion of services offered by animal control in your community and their contracted pounds. Make sure that these services are ethical and have a no kill mandate.

What would a SPCA solution look like?

The SPCA believes that the solution is community-based, but requires the cooperation and support of local and provincial government, veterinarians and all animal welfare groups alike. The key components would be:

1. Low cost, high volume spay/neuter services (referral based for low income, shelters and rescues).
2. Government funded provincial TNR programs for feral cat colony management.
3. Animal control by-laws that do not vary by municipality and include requirements for responding to stray and abandoned cats and providing shelter for said cats with a no kill mandate.
4. Non-punitive Animal Control enforcement based on humane education and responsible pet ownership whose fees/fines are directed back to support animal welfare initiatives.
5. A legislated adoption pact for all animal welfare organizations that mandates that animals facing euthanasia for space be offered to other animal welfare organizations that have space available.

ⁱ The vision of the Nova Scotia SPCA is that Nova Scotia be a No Kill province and a safe place for all animals with a zero tolerance for animal cruelty.

The guiding principles of the SPCA's No Kill model focuses on increasing live release rates with a commitment of attaining a record of 90% or higher. All healthy and medically treatable animals will be given every opportunity for adoption and euthanasia will be reserved only for reasons of mercy or aggression.

The model employs a strategy that focuses on increasing adoptions by removing barriers; opening admission so that as many animals as possible are helped; providing community support systems through collaboration and cooperation with government, veterinarians, rescue, TNR and other animal welfare organizations; increasing donor and volunteer support; adhering to high standards of animal care; being accountable and transparent; educating the public about misconceptions and humane and responsible pet ownership; and strong leadership committed to the model and creative solutions.