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University of Nebraska Is Wrong About Feral Cats

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After our 20 years of raising awareness about feral cats and Trap-Neuter-Return in America, it's rare in this day and age that we come across a publication that is as backwards and poorly researched as "Feral Cats and Their Management," a recent report from The University of Nebraska. This publication not only makes egregiously inhumane, inaccurate, and inflammatory assertions about cats, but it also promotes illegal animal cruelty by recommending shooting cats as an acceptable approach for feral cats.

Let us set the record straight:

It is illegal to intentionally kill a cat—any cat—in all states, including Nebraska.

Domestic cats—which encompass all members of the *felis catus* species, feral cats included—are protected under Nebraska's animal anti-cruelty law, which states that it is a crime for a person to "knowingly and intentionally kill, maim, disfigure, torture... or otherwise inflict harm on any animal."¹ Anti-cruelty laws protect cats in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, making the recommendations made in this report not only cruel and unethical, but entirely illegal.

The entire report is based on a compilation of flawed research.

Many figures in this report, such as "a single cat can produce 400,000 cats" have been debunked or refuted.² Other numbers have even been disavowed by the original authors. Dr. Stanley Temple, one of the authors of the Wisconsin study referenced in the University of Nebraska Report, was quoted in the *Sonoma County Independent* article "The Accused" (March 1994) saying, "Those figures were from our proposal. They aren't actual data; that was just our projection to show how bad it *might* be" (Emphasis in original).

Other data is similarly skewed. Statements that cats can have "up to five litters per year" of "2-10 kittens" grossly distort scientific understanding of cat reproductive biology. A 2004 study of 625 female free-roaming cats in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* found the average litter size to be just three kittens with a mean of 1.4 litters per year.³

Trap-Neuter-Return is the humane, effective approach for feral cats.

In claiming, erroneously, that TNR doesn't work, the report entirely ignores the [existing body of research](#) which proves that Trap-Neuter-Return is an effective method of stabilizing and reducing feral cat populations—including [studies of TNR programs on college campuses](#). Not surprisingly, the report says nothing of the additional benefits of TNR: improving the cats' lives and improving their relationships with the people who live near them.

Within the school's own community, people already recognize the effectiveness of Trap-Neuter-Return. The University of Nebraska is home to an award-winning volunteer feral cat caregiving group that has been lauded by the university:

“Husker Cats’ volunteers have successfully developed a program for caring and feeding UNL’s feral cat population... A healthy feral cat population is important for the campus,” said Chris Jackson, vice chancellor for business and finance.”

People are the number one threat to birds.

The report drags out retired data from the bogus cat-versus-bird debate—such as the predation numbers from the discredited Wisconsin study—to justify illegally shooting cats. Yet it ignores the number one threat to birds: humans. Experts agree that habitat loss, pollution, collisions with buildings and cars, and other human-led activities account for far more bird deaths than cat predation.

To even suggest that killing birds is a reason to kill another animal goes against the humane ethic of most Americans, 81% of whom believe that leaving a stray cat outside to live out her life is more humane than having her caught and killed.

The public looks to our educational institutions for accurate, well-researched information. For a University to publish and disseminate blatantly wrong and illegal recommendations is extremely dangerous and irresponsible. The public expects more from the University of Nebraska—they expect the truth.

[1] *Neb. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 28-1008 – 28-1009 (2010)*

[2] *Wall Street Journal* article “Trying to Herd a Cat Stat,” Bialik 10/12/2006. Additionally, the Humane Society of the United States—which advocates Trap-Neuter-Return as an effective and humane approach to feral cats—no longer uses this figure.

[3] Nutter F.B., J. F. Levine, and M. K. Stoskopf. Reproductive capacity of free-roaming domestic cats and kitten survival rate. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (2004) 225:1399-1402.

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