

From ANIMAL PEOPLE, July/August 2007:

U.S. shelter killing toll drops to 3.7 million dogs & cats

U.S. animal shelters as of mid-2007 are killing fewer dogs and cats than at any time in at least the past 37 years, according to the 15th annual ANIMAL PEOPLE evaluation of the most recent available shelter data.

The rate of shelter killing per 1,000 Americans, now at 12.5, is the lowest since data collected by John Marbanks in 1947-1950 suggested a rate of about 13.5--at a time when animal control in much of the U.S. was still handled by private contractors, who often simply killed strays or sold them to laboratories instead of taking them to shelters, and unwanted puppies and kittens were frequently drowned.

The ANIMAL PEOPLE projection each year is based on compilations of the tolls from every open admission shelter handling significant numbers of animals in specific cities, counties, or states. The sample base each year is proportionately weighted to ensure regional balance. Only data from the preceding three fiscal years is included.

Using a three-year rolling projection tends to level out flukes that might result from including different cities, counties, and states each year, but has the disadvantage of sometimes not showing significant changes in trends until a year or two after they start. Thus the effects of the post-2001 slump in funding for dog and cat sterilization programs only became evident in 2004.

Comparably, trends involving Internet-assisted adoption, adoption transport, feral cats and pit bull terriers that were just gathering momentum in 2004 are major influences on the 2007 findings.

As of 2004, about a third of all U.S. dog and cat adoptions were believed to be Internet-assisted, via web sites where animals' photographs and descriptions are posted. Anecdotally, at least two thirds of adoptions are Internet-assisted today, with dogs benefiting most, since dog adopters are more likely to be seeking a specific breed or mix, who may be readily found only through web-searching.

Adoption transport also chiefly benefits dogs, since cats are still abundant in all parts of the U.S., but small dogs, puppies, and purebreds are relatively scarce in shelters along both coasts and in the northern Midwest.

Soaring shelter receipts of pit bull terriers in 2001-2004 outraced progress in sterilizing feral cats, causing total shelter killing to soar by the end of 2004 to the highest level since 1997.

For the first and only time since ANIMAL PEOPLE began quantifying shelter killing, more dogs were killed in 2004 than cats. The 1997 toll was 53% cats, 47% dogs, about the same balance as had

prevailed since the mid-1980s, but the 2004 toll was reversed, at 47% cats, 53% dogs.

About half of the dogs who were killed in 2004 were pit bull terriers, ANIMAL PEOPLE confirmed by surveying shelter directors in 23 representative metropolitan areas.

Salathia Bryant of the Houston Chronicle was shocked in February 2007 to discover that local shelter intakes of pit bulls had increased from 5% of all dogs in 2000 to 15% in 2002 and 27% in 2006. Actually this was right on the national norms found by ANIMAL PEOPLE nearly two years earlier.

Los Angeles residents were shocked in June 2007 when Department of Animal Regulation chief Ed Boks lamented that 40% of the dogs who were killed in the city shelters during the preceding year were pit bulls. Yet as many as 70% of the dogs killed in some other major cities are pit bulls--who are reportedly 65% of the animal control dog intake in Milwaukee, and may account for more than two-thirds of the dog intake in Detroit and Philadelphia. While pit bull intake has not slowed down since 2004, and appears to be still rising, the total canine death toll in U.S. shelters has fallen by more than 750,000 since 2004, with pit bulls the main beneficiaries.

Increasing use of standardized temperament tests to determine whether dogs are safe for adoption appears to be driving the change. Traditionally, behavioral suitability for adoption tended to be judged from anecdotal assessments by animal control officers, kennel workers, and people who surrendered animals to shelters. Relatively few shelters ever categorically refused to adopt out pit bulls and other breeds of dog who are considered high-risk, though some did and still do, but the breeds of dogs tended to weigh heavily, if not always consciously, in the judgments.

When most shelters were killing a relatively high percentage of the dogs received, and no one breed predominated, this was not an issue. As pit bulls came to disproportionately fill shelters, however, concern about "breed discrimination" on the one hand and soaring liability insurance costs on the other caused shelter directors to seek ways to support their decisions. Standardized temperament tests offer shelters a way to explain in relatively objective terms why a particular dog may be unsuitable for adoption, and to adopt out some pit bulls with confidence that the adoptions will succeed.

Whether temperament tests really prevent dog attacks and liability is still a matter of debate, with several relevant court cases pending. ANIMAL PEOPLE in January/February 2002 published data suggesting that the breed-specific patterns of fatal and disfiguring attacks among dogs who have cleared behavioral screening are the same as among all dogs.

However, though pit bulls tend to flunk the most popular standardized behavioral tests more often than any other breed, enough pit bulls pass that they have become the breed most often

adopted in New York City and Los Angeles. Despite several high-profile failures of pit bull adoption programs in the 1990s, many other cities are now trying similar approaches, based on checklists of behavior that can be taken into a courtroom more persuasively than the intuitive and subjective opinions of animal handlers.

Currently, U.S. shelters kill about 1.4 million dogs per year, including about 750,000 pit bulls and close mixes of pit bull. While fewer pit bulls are dying in U.S. shelters, the cat toll is rising again for the first time since neuter/return feral cat control caught on in 1991-1992. Across the U.S., the shelter toll is now 63% cats, 37% dogs--the most lopsided that it has ever been.

Tweety & Sylvester

The 2006 projected total of 2.3 million cats killed in shelters represents an increase of about 300,000 from the level of the preceding several years,

Yet this is not because there are more cats at large.

Repeatedly applying various different yardsticks to measure the U.S. feral cat population, including shelter data, roadkill counts, and surveys of cat feeders, ANIMAL PEOPLE has found since 2003 that the projections consistently converge on estimates of about six million feral cats at large in the dead of winter, with about twice that many after the early summer peak of "kitten season." This is down by more than 75% from the feral cat population of circa 1990, which was up by about a third from the total indicated in the studies done by John Marbanks in 1947-1950.

Data collected for the National Council on Pet Population Study indicates that the U.S. pet cat population has not reproduced in excess of self-replacement since approximately 1994. The marked increase in the U.S. pet cat population over this time, from just over 60 million to about 90 million, has been driven by adoptions of feral cats--mostly feral-born kittens. Kitten removals from the feral population, together with neuter/return, has reduced feral cat reproductive capacity to substantially less than replacement. Taking feral cats' places are other mid-sized predators including growing populations of urban and suburban coyotes, foxes, bobcats, hawks, owls, and eagles.

But intolerance of free-roaming cats, especially feral cats, is the longtime official policy of all U.S. federal government agencies, as well as many state agencies responsible for managing property where feral cats formerly dwelled. Under intense pressure from birders and conservationists trying to save endangered species of birds and small mammals, federal and state agencies have intensified efforts to extirpate feral cats.

Organized opposition to neuter/return feral cat management before 2003 came chiefly from the Humane Society of the U.S. and PETA, which held that feral cats were suffering and should therefore

be killed to end their misery, and the American Bird Conservancy, a relatively small organization that originated as a project of the World Wildlife Fund. Soon thereafter, HSUS adopted policies favoring carefully managed neuter/return--but in April 2003 the National Wildlife Federation membership magazine National Wildlife came out strongly against neuter/return. Only The Nature Conservancy, whose policy is to extirpate all nonnative species from their land holdings if possible, has more influence among U.S. wildlife policymakers.

Feral cat colony caretakers have often not helped their cause by maintaining colonies near sensitive wildlife habitats, and by not sterilizing enough cats, fast enough, to reduce the visible population to none within the three-to-five-year average lifespan of a feral cat who survives kittenhood.

Cape May, New Jersey, for example, has an active neuter/return network since 1992, encouraged by animal control chief John Queenan. ANIMAL PEOPLE mentioned the Cape May project as a model for other communities in 1993. But Cape May is perhaps the most frequented resting and feeding area for migratory birds along the entire Atlantic flyway. Many visiting species are in decline, including the tiny red knot, which flies each year all the way from the Antarctic to the Arctic and back. Cape May is also among the nesting habitats of the endangered piping plover.

The Cape May economy is driven by birders' visits. When Cape May still had an estimated 500 feral cats in 2003, ten years into the neuter/return program, the city allowed neuter/return advocates to maintain 10 cat feeding stations and weather shelters, but the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service began demanding that feral cat feeding be ended.

Many cats were removed from sensitive areas and housed in two trailers, one belonging to Cape May Animal Control and the other to Animal Outreach of Cape May County, the primary local cat rescue group since 1995. On May 19, 2007, however, the trailers caught fire, killing 37 cats.

Cape May is currently considering withdrawing support for neuter/return and prohibiting feeding cats outdoors.

A similar situation may have a happier outcome on Big Pine Key, Florida, home of the endangered Hefner rabbit, *Sylvilagus palustris hefneri*. The rabbit was named for Playboy magazine founder Hugh Hefner after he funded the study that put it on the U.S. endangered species list more than 20 years ago. Blaming feral cats for a catastrophic collapse in rabbit numbers at the National Key Deer Refuge, refuge manager Anne Morkill in June 2007 announced that the cats would be trapped and taken to animal control shelters, where they would probably be killed. Hefner then donated \$5,000 to Stand Up For Animals, whose founder, Linda Gottwald, told Stephanie Garry of the St. Petersburg Times that she would use the funding to sterilize and relocate as many of the cats as possible. Among the regional variations of note in the 2007 ANIMAL

PEOPLE roundup of shelter killing data are that the dog/cat balance is 72/28 in the Northeast, 65/35 in the Midwest, 63/35 in the Mid-Atlantic region, and 60/40 along the West Coast, but is 54/46 in the South, where intakes and killing of both dogs and cats are highest. Among the possible explanations are that Southern animal control agencies may put more emphasis on picking up dogs, and that communities with more dogs at large tend to have fewer feral cats. Virginia and Florida data, however, more resembles the data from the rest of the U.S., reflecting the demographic influences of Washington D.C. and migration to Florida from other parts of the country.

Midwest progress

The Midwest has made the most impressive recent gains, almost catching up to the West Coast in reduction of dog and cat overpopulation through high-volume low-cost sterilization. Many of the most ambitious dog-and-cat sterilization projects started within the past decade are in the Midwest, including Pets Are Worth Saving, founded by Paula Fasseas in Chicago, and the Foundation Against Companion Animal Euthanasia, founded by Scott Robinson, M.D., in Indianapolis.

A global veterinary shortage is especially acute in the Midwest, where organizations including the Michigan Humane Society, based in Detroit, and M'Shoogy's Animal Rescue, near Kansas City, have at times had to cut back services simply because they could not find vets to fill their open positions.

The same problem afflicts the Appalachian states, where progress achieved in the 1990s has largely been lost, most markedly in Knoxville. Handling both city and county animal control sheltering out of a World War II-vintage Quonset hut, and operating a major local dog and cat sterilization program, the Humane Society of the Tennessee Valley had reduced shelter killing to 24.5 dogs and cats per 1,000 humans by 1999--well above the then-national average of 16.6, but among the best records in the South.

A coalition of local no-kill rescue groups then convinced Knoxville officials that a city-and-county-run shelter working cooperatively with them could operate on less money and save more animals. ANIMAL PEOPLE warned at the time that Knoxville could not realistically try to achieve no-kill sheltering until the animal control intake volume fell by at least half. Instead of lowering the shelter toll, the first five years of animal control under the new agency saw shelter killing increase by 22%.

Regions quit counting

A frustrating aspect of the 2007 ANIMAL PEOPLE shelter toll analysis is that while we received enough data from both the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions to project reliable totals and

trends by comparison to past data, including the dog/cat balance, no individual or agency relayed complete enough new data from cities other than New York City and Philadelphia--the biggest cities in those regions--for us to list totals for any others.

This is markedly different from the first years of our annual updates, when the most complete counts we received were from the New England states, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland.

As shelter killing rates in those states have stabilized at very low levels, many of the agencies that formerly collected shelter tolls appear to have refocused on collecting information about adoption transport programs, a very small part of shelter activity 15 years ago, but now the source of half or more of the animals many shelters offer for adoption.

--Merritt Clifton

U.S. animal shelter data broken down by city, county, state, and region

	Animals killed per 1,000 people	YEAR	Animals killed	1,000s of people killed
New York City	2.0	2007	8,143	16,489
NORTHEAST (24%)	1.7		33,495	56,857
NEW JERSEY	4.7	2005	8,725	40,706
Philadelphia	19.9	2006	1,448	28,774
MID-ATLANTIC (33%)	7.3		30,759	225,116
Broward County	7.3	2006	1,788	13,000
Richmond, VA	8.3	2006	194	1,615
West Palm Beach	13.5	2005	1,216	16,411
Palm Beach County	15.5	2006	1,288	20,000
VIRGINIA	17.5	2005	7,568	132,400
Alachua Cty, FL	18.2	2006	224	4,071
Orlando/Orange Cty	18.6	2005	1,023	19,000
Tampa area	19.9	2006	2,489	49,557
Tallahassee	22.4	2004	239	5,350
Duval County	22.6	2006	826	18,672
Coweta Cty, GA	22.6	2004	101	2,288
NORTH CAROLINA	27.9	2005	8,683	242,935
Columbia, SC	37.0	2004	332	12,275
Polk County, FL	40.3	2005	511	20,566
Augusta, GA	45.3	2004	198	8,967
Orangeburg Cty, SC	49.5	2006	91	4,500

SO. ATLANTIC (56%) 22.3 47,368 1,021,048

Dallas 10.8 2005 2,306 25,000
Dallas/FtWorth rgn 14.2 2005 5,753 82,000
Austin/Travis Cty. 17.4 2005 888 15,411
Houston 22.2 2004 3,596 80,000
Birmingham 23.8 2005 818 19,438
Fort Worth 24.9 2005 603 15,000
Conroe area, TX 26.8 2006 378 10,120
Lafayette, LA 28.0 2004 195 5,439
Mobile 30.1 2005 401 12,071
Tuskaloosa, AL 30.1 2006 169 4,982
El Paso, TX 31.4 2004 700 22,000
Gulfport 31.8 2006 194 6,16
Baldwin County, AL 33.3 2006 163 5,432
Blount County, AL 38.6 2006 56 2,153
San Marcos 43.9 2004 43 1,888
Shreveport/Caddo 48.0 2005 250 12,000
Tupelo, MS 55.4 2006 78 4,320
Longview, TX 70.8 2005 114 8,070

GULF COAST (41%) 21.3 34,863 742,582

Mission Viejo, CA 1.0 2005 166 113
San Francisco 2.2 2005 744 1,646
Snohomish Cty, WA 4.7 2005 639 3,000
Santa Barbara 5.0 2004 403 2,002
San Diego 5.9 2004 2,931 17,421
Tehama County, CA 6.8 2006 62 421
Los Angeles 7.2 2006 9,948 71,357
Portland/Multnomah 7.2 2005 673 4,841
Silicon Valley 8.5 2005 1,668 14,097
OREGON 8.9 2005 3,641 32,235
Eugene, OR 10.1 2005 336 3,378
WASHINGTON [prjtd] 11.1 2005 6,132 68,054
Merced Cty, CA 12.2 2006 246 3,011
Lodi, CA 13.9 2005 57 788
Monterey County, CA 14.4 2006 412 5,912
Lindsay/Porterville 14.6 2005 56 817
Visalia, CA 15.5 2006 420 6,521
Santa Cruz Cty, CA 20.0 2005 251 5,000
Kern County, CA 20.4 2006 780 15,922
Douglas County 24.0 2005 104 2,519
Valley Oak, CA 25.4 2005 210 5,336
Bakersfield, CA 26.2 2005 644 16,904

Kings County, CA	27.2	2005	147	4,013
Clovis, CA	27.5	2005	90	2,471
Modesto	30.5	2004	489	14,903
Madera County, CA	35.2	2005	144	5,071
Tulare Cty, CA	40.3	2005	154	6,203
Fresno, CA	42.3	2005	787	33,255

PACIFIC (64%) 11.0 48,000 528,000

Terre Haute	4.6	2005	169	780
Milwaukee	4.8	2005	1,700	8,162
Chicago	6.9	2005	2,869	19,706
MICHIGAN	11.7	2006	10,096	117,919
Indianapolis	18.5	2005	783	14,444
Winnebago Cty, IL	19.2	2004	284	5,449
Kansas City, KS	21.6	2004	158	3,412
Oklahoma City	22.2	2004	677	15,000
Fort Wayne, IN	28.6	2004	340	9,724
Athens, OH	46.6	2004	64	3,000

MIDWEST (27%) 11.5 63,810 733,815

Nashville, TN	18.9	2004	511	9,647
Chattanooga	22.5	2004	307	6,918
Knoxville	29.9	2006	405	12,090
Spartanburg TN	32.8	2004	261	8,562
Louisville	42.9	2005	700	30,000

APPALACHIA (17%) 30.1 12,915 388,742

Salt Lake City	6.0	2005	1,016	6,094
Weld County, CO	8.5	2005	211	1,800
Larimer Count, CO	11.6	2005	267	3,093
Billings	14.6	2004	133	1,941
UTAH	14.4	2005	2,352	33,854
Phoenix/Maricopa	16.3	2006	3,636	59,093
Albuquerque	26.9	2004	581	15,600
Santa Fe, NM	38.2	2005	130	5,000

WEST (41%) 17.3 17,721 306,573

U.S. TOTAL 12.5 296,410 3,696,160

(The regional and national totals appearing in bold are not tallies of the data used to produce them, but are rather estimates)

proportionately weighted to reflect demography. The percentage figure in parenthesis is the percentage of the human population encompassed within the shelter service areas from which the totals were derived. The stated U.S. population is the median 2004-2007, not the 2007 total.)

U.S. progress vs. shelter killing

Year	Millions of dogs & cats killed	Killed per 1,000 humans
1970	23.4	115.0
1985	17.8	74.8
1997	4.9	21.1
1998	4.9	19.4
1999	4.5	16.6
2000	4.5	16.8
2001	4.4	15.7
2002	4.2	15.3
2003	4.5	14.8
2004	4.9	17.4
2005	4.4	14.8
2006	3.7	12.5

--

Merritt Clifton
Editor, ANIMAL PEOPLE
P.O. Box 960
Clinton, WA 98236

Telephone: 360-579-2505

Fax: 360-579-2575

E-mail: anmlpepl@whidbey.com

Web: www.animalpeoplenews.org

[ANIMAL PEOPLE is the leading independent newspaper providing original investigative coverage of animal protection worldwide, founded in 1992. Our readership of 30,000-plus includes the decision-makers at more than 10,000 animal protection organizations. We have no alignment or affiliation with any other entity. \$24/year; for free sample, send address.]