

Group Fights Feline Misery

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The North Chesapeake Module cat-feeding site, located near Fenwick Library at George Mason University, is one of several feeding sites on the Fairfax campus. Mason, unknown to many students and teachers, is home to more than 50 stray and feral cats.

The Mason Cat Coalition, a volunteer group of Mason faculty, staff, alumni and students, was founded in 1994. MCC works to help stray and feral cats on campus. MCC's founder, Joan Ziemba, said the cat population at Mason has decreased because of the coalition.

"Our guess is that we have between 50 and 75 cats on campus now, down from about 300 in 1994," said Ziemba.

MCC manages the feeding sites and uses the trap-neuter-release (TNR) program to monitor the status of the cats on campus. The coalition bases its operations on the Stanford Cat Network's TNR program.

The Stanford Cat Network, founded in 1989, implemented the TNR program, which involves trapping feral cats, providing medical treatment, neutering or spaying the cats and then releasing them back into their environment.

TNR allows feral cats to be healthy and provides a humane approach to controlling cat overpopulation.

"We've trapped more than 350 cats, have had them spayed or neutered, tested for feline leukemia and feline AIDS and given them their rabies shots,"

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Mason Cat Coalition Manages Strays

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said Ziemba. "If the cats appeared to be at all socialized or we thought they could be, we found them homes."

According to the Humane Society of the United States, a feral cat is a cat that has lived with little or no human contact and is not socialized. Feral cats typically cannot be re-socialized.

Cat owners, unable or unwilling to keep their cats, have abandoned their animals on Mason's forested property for many years. These cats, usually unaltered, then have kittens.

"The number of stray cats in the Mason area is almost entirely because of students who 'temporarily' have a cat for a pet, but then when they leave the area, the cat stays here," said Vicki Kirby, president of the Humane Society of Fairfax County.

Mason Assistant Registrar for Student System Conversion and MCC organizer Colleen Bauer said that students are responsible for the majority of stray cats on campus.

"Students, faced with no place to keep their pet, will sometimes resort to releasing the pet on campus," Bauer said.

According to the Office of Housing and Residential Life's policies, "pets are prohibited in residence areas." The "no pet" policy, however, seems to have gone unnoticed. Students hide cats and other pets during the school year in their dorms.

"Students keep pets on campus. Walk by the apartments and dorms, and you'll eventually see a cat peering out of the windows," Bauer said.

Clare Tumulty, a senior communication major, said that she knows many people with pets on campus. Tumulty's friend in Liberty Square keeps a cat.

"She just thought it would be fun to have a pet at school," Tumulty said.

Associate Director of Housing Kyle Robin said that students caught with animals on campus are held responsible and must correct the problem.

"We ask the students to

resolve the issue, and administrative action may be taken against them," Robin said.

Confused and often without resources, the students abandon the animal, thinking it will be fine on campus.

"Students leave for the holidays and find out the animal isn't welcome at home," Bauer said. "Every year when school lets out, we get a whole new crop of cats."

With the addition of new Mason housing, Bauer said, there will be more cats on campus.

"Unfortunately, there are students who won't respect the rules and make unwise and frankly selfish decisions to bring pets on campus," Bauer said. "It's inevitable that some will escape or be turned loose,

and the problem will continue."

College students maintain a hectic schedule. Students often do not have the time, money and resources to own and care for a pet.

"Be responsible, and be loving. Abandoning an animal is not only unconscionable, it's a crime."

"Find other ways to spend time with animals rather than bringing a pet illegally into campus housing," Bauer said. "One good way is to

volunteer time at area shelters or with rescue organizations such as ours."

Students with pets on campus not only violate school policy but also risk the life of their pet.

"Don't risk having a pet that could get out and get lost, then get sick or injured or pregnant," Bauer said. "If you do

have a pet now, please make sure it goes to a good home, like to a friend who lives off campus or an animal rescue group."

"Be responsible, and be loving," Bauer said. "Abandoning an animal is not only unconscionable, it's a crime."

MCC will continue to work with administration and students in hopes of reducing the cat population at Mason until only a few feral cats remain.

Residential students with pets should contact the Humane Society of Fairfax County at (703) 385-PETS to find them homes. The Homeless Animals Rescue Team, a non-profit organization located in Fairfax Station, also takes in cats and dogs. Students should contact HART at (703) 691-HART. Contact Bauer at cbauer@gmu.edu with questions about MCC.