

Report finds more youth have access to the Internet on their smartphones and tablets.



Many people don't even realize they are out there on P.E.I.: thousands of free-ranging cats, living both in towns and in the countryside.



**Animal Talk**

Pat Srebnik

The cats occupy vacant lots, industrial areas, garbage dumps, farms, parks — anywhere

they can find shelter and a source of food (primarily small rodents).

These are feral cats — they have never learned to trust humans but that doesn't mean these cats should be regarded as wildlife. Feral cats are the offspring of domestic pets who have been lost or abandoned. Victims of human irresponsibility, they live together in colonies of from three to 20 or more cats each.

Unneutered cats reproduce at a rapid rate, and they suffer from disease, hunger, cold weather and predators, especially coyotes and eagles. They may carry diseases which are spread when the males fight among themselves, and which can be transmitted to pet cats.

In the past, some communities have attempted to eradicate feral colonies by killing as many of the cats as possible. This approach, however, has been a failure because a few unneutered cats always survive, ready to begin reproducing again. A female cat can give birth to as many as 18 kittens a year, who soon become parents themselves. And as long as the food source

# Looking out for feral cats

*Cat Action Team attempts to reduce the population, and the suffering of not-wild but also not-tame descendants of companion animals*

remains, new feral cats will move into the area.

On Prince Edward Island, the Cat Action Team (C.A.T.) attempts to reduce the population, and the suffering, of these not-wild but also not-tame descendants of companion animals. Founded in 2001, C.A.T. is a non-profit charity which depends upon the hard work of hundreds of unpaid volunteers. C.A.T. is financially supported by donations, grants and its own fundraising campaigns. Through the end of 2012, the Cat Action Team has neutered over 8,000 cats,

through the combined efforts of volunteers, donors and veterinarians.

C.A.T.'s primary work is trap, neuter, (vaccinate) and return (TNR). Whenever C.A.T. becomes aware of a feral colony, volunteers begin the task of humanely trapping the cats. The cats are taken to participating veterinary clinics where they are spayed or neutered, and vaccinated. Cats with minor medical problems are treated; seriously ill cats may be euthanized. The cats recover overnight before being returned to their colony.

TNR groups in warmer climates identify neutered cats by clipping off the tip of an ear. But in P.E.I., where feral cats may lose the tips of their ears to frostbite, the Cat Action Team tattoos the cats inside their left ears. The tattoo number also identifies the colony where the cat lives, which is important because a feral cat that ends up at the P.E.I. Humane Society is likely to be euthanized on the grounds that it is unadoptable.

But when staff members see that a cat is tattooed, they call C.A.T. to return the cat to its colony.

To stabilize or reduce the

population, it is important to neuter as many cats as possible in each colony. Sterilization through TNR also reduces fighting and associated injuries and disease, as well as roaming and noise. Some of the original colonies identified by the Cat Action Team in 2001 are by now occupied by only a few cats.

Trap-Neuter-Return is effective as well as humane: cat numbers diminish and the health of the cats improves. C.A.T. also provides some degree of after-care for cats that have passed through its clinics. The group gratefully accepts donations of food

Butter is a feral cat who was neutered at a Cat Action Team clinic. He has come to trust the C.A.T. volunteer who provides him with food, as long as she maintains a certain distance, but his home is clearly outdoors. PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY THE CAT ACTION TEAM

## QUICK QUESTIONS

### Can feral cats ever be tamed?

► Very young kittens can often be tamed if they are moved inside to have regular, daily contact with humans. However, kittens should not be taken from their mothers until they are about 6 weeks old. Cats over 10 to 12 weeks old become much more difficult to tame and should probably be left in their colonies.

### Where can I learn more about feral cats?

► Visit the Feral Cat Coalition website at [www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com) or Alley Cat Allies at [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)

to be distributed to the cats. Colony caregivers make sure the cats have fresh water, especially in winter. And C.A.T. volunteers have built wooden shelters for many of the colonies.

If you are aware of a feral cat or colony in your neighbourhood, contact one of the "clinic liaisons" listed on the C.A.T. website: <http://cats-pe.ca/contact-us/>. There you can also learn how to help the Cat Action Team as a volunteer or as a donor.

Pat Srebnik is education co-ordinator for the P.E.I. Cat Action Team. Animal Talk is a monthly feature put together by the P.E.I.

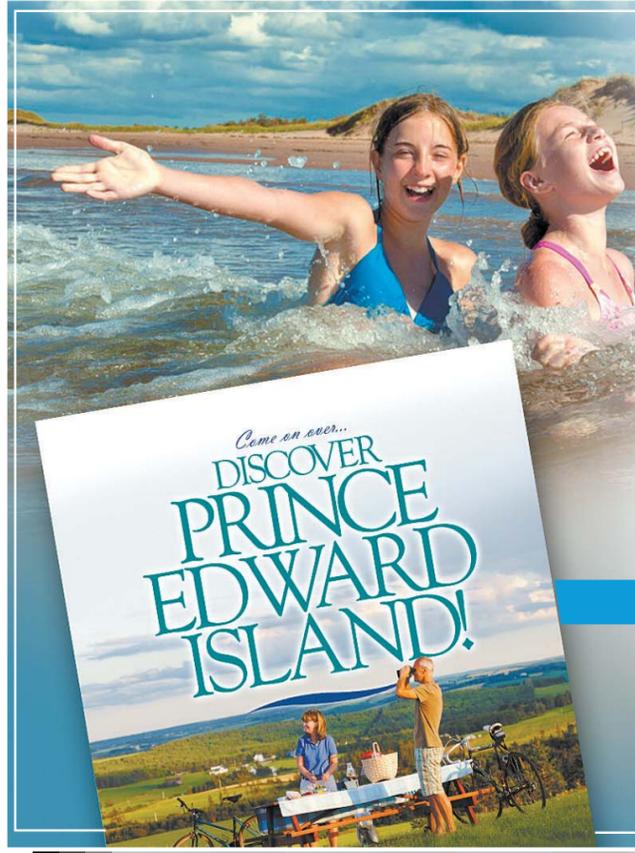
Companion Animal Welfare Initiative (CAWI), whose goal is to improve the welfare of owned and unowned companion animals on P.E.I. CAWI consists of the P.E.I. Humane Society, SpayAid, Cat Action Team, the P.E.I. Veterinary Medical Association, the Department of Agriculture and the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the Atlantic Veterinary College. Links to each of these groups are at [gov.pe.ca/agriculture/CAWI](http://gov.pe.ca/agriculture/CAWI). Readers are invited to send questions related to the well-being of owned and unowned companion animals to [cawipei@gmail.com](mailto:cawipei@gmail.com)

Pixie is shown sitting on her custom-built shelter in a colony in Queens County.

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY THE CAT ACTION TEAM



C.A.T. also helps with spay/neutering of barn cats on P.E.I. These cats live in Kings County. PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY THE CAT ACTION TEAM



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