

TV shows like Game of Thrones and Duck Dynasty make for great costumes this year.



BARN CAT 101

Feeding barn cats does not stop them from hunting, which is an instinctive behaviour.

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY THE P.E.I. CAT ACTION TEAM

Proper care makes for happy, hardworking felines

Barn cats are hardy, hardworking members of the family farm. As such, they need and deserve proper care and attention to enable them to carry out their important role of minimizing the damage done by mice and rats.

As with any animal, barn cats require access to fresh water, adequate shelter from the elements and nutritional food. It is a myth that a well-fed cat will not hunt. In fact, a healthy cat is more inclined to hunt.

P.E.I. has long winters, and some days can be dangerously cold. Despite their fur coat, barn cats need protection from the cold and wet weather. An elevated safe place in the barn that is warm and dry is ideal. Straw is a much better insulator than hay

because it is hollow and makes for perfect bedding that cats can snuggle into. A large, sturdy box, such as an old computer box, filled with straw and placed in an out-of-the-way corner of the barn can be an inexpensive way of protecting barn cats. Additional straw insulation surrounding the box will make it even warmer and cozier. Additional inexpensive cat shelter ideas can be found on the Ally Cat Allies website (www.alleycat.org/Shelter-Gallery).

Although some barn cats are feral or semi-feral and are often leery of people, it is beneficial to socialize them through regular, gentle human contact. Such interaction will allow family members to learn the cats' habits and be better able to deal with any health issues.

Spaying and neutering barn cats will greatly improve their lives and overall health. In just two years, two female cats can

multiply into more than 50 cats. Spaying and neutering will also reduce unwanted behaviour such as fighting and spraying. Since spayed cats will no longer be preoccupied with raising kittens and neutered males will no longer feel the need to wander to find mates, they will be more likely to remain close to the barn where they can continue to do their job of rodent control.

Even one set of vaccinations at the time of the spaying or neutering will help to protect barn cats from common infectious diseases. Regular de-worming will also help to keep the cats healthy. Ensuring that poisons (i.e., anti-freeze, fertilizer, rat poison) are properly stored is also very important.

Barn cats, as well as other outdoor cats on Prince Edward Island, are under increased threat of falling prey to an expanding population of coyotes. Owls, eagles and hawks can also pose a

This is the perfect shelter for a barn cat — warm, dry and protected.

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY THE P.E.I. CAT ACTION TEAM

threat to outdoor cats. To help prevent barn cats from wandering at night, the cats can be fed at the end of the day and secured in a building for the night. Remove any uneaten food to help reduce raccoon and coyote activity.

Barn cats should also have easy access to the barn 24 hours a day; outside lighting from dusk to dawn may deter coyotes.

The Cat Action Team of Prince Edward Island (cats-pe.ca) has assisted many farmers with their barn cats. Once neutered, vaccinated and treated for parasites, the cats are returned to the barn, where they continue to work for

the farmers while leading healthier and happier lives.

Jane Thomas is a board member of SpayAid P.E.I., a member group of the P.E.I. Companion Animal Welfare Initiative (CAWI). Animal Talk is a monthly column in The Guardian produced by CAWI, the goal of which 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 P.E.I. Department of Agriculture and Forestry 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. Readers are invited to send questions related to the well-being of owned and unowned companion animals to cawipei@gmail.com.



Animal Talk

Jane Thomas

Happy endings



Bear, left, was one of a litter of eight Lab mix puppies adopted from the P.E.I. Humane Society by the MacDonald family in January. All of the puppies were adopted into new homes and Bear has now outgrown son Ashton Bradley. Bear is a gentle giant, and his family says he has brought much joy into their home.

PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY KIM MACMILLAN, SHANNA MACDONALD BRADLEY



AT A GLANCE

The P.E.I. Cat Action Team (C.A.T.)

- ▶ C.A.T. is an all-volunteer registered charitable organization working to care for and control the feral and stray cat population throughout the province. C.A.T. was founded in November 2000 in Charlottetown by a group of citizens who shared a concern for the well-being of stray and feral cats. A Summerside chapter was formed in the spring of 2002. The board of directors includes a veterinarian.
- ▶ Feral, stray, or barn cats are humanely trapped and brought to a veterinary clinic on P.E.I. where they are surgically spayed or neutered, vaccinated, treated for parasites and tattooed for later recognition. Once recovered, the cats are returned to their original location. Veterinary care is provided by private veterinary clinics and by volunteer veterinarians and students at the Atlantic Veterinary College.
- ▶ Since 2001, over 8,500 feral cats have been spayed/neutered at P.E.I. veterinary hospitals with funding from the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the Atlantic Veterinary College, the Pegasus Family Foundation, PetSmart Charities, and C.A.T. general fundraising. See cats-pe.ca for more information.

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