

projectpurr

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nonprofit volunteer feral cat advocate organization

Project Purr Board Members: Margaret Rinner, Director; Lynne Achterberg;
E.V. Sharp, DVM; Suzanne Haberman; Sheri Benkosky; Lucinda Swan

Project Purr is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit volunteer organization dedicated to humanely decreasing the feral cat population by providing funds towards our lowcost feral cat/kitten spay/neuter program in Santa Cruz County, California. Project Purr advocates Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) as the preferred method of feral cat population control as opposed to Trap and Kill.

Moving Towards a No-Kill Nation...

From Best Friends Animal Society/Spring Newsletter 2007:

"Fifteen years ago, more than 15 million homeless pets were being killed in shelters every year. For thousands of caring people, the situation was intolerable. Vigorous new spay/neuter, adoption, and sanctuary programs took the place of the failed policies of an old era. By the end of the 1990's, the number of homeless pets being killed in shelters had dropped to below 5 million a year. The progress was huge. But then it hit a plateau. Spay/neuter and adoption programs are holding the line, *and they are critically important*. But dogs and cats continue to pour into shelters for three specific reasons...which means there are three final challenges to reaching our goal of a no-kill nation."

Three Final Challenges

Expose the criminal breeders and irresponsible owners who turn dogs into weapons of violence, and whose cast-offs crowd our shelters.

Shut down the unscrupulous puppy mills that supply sick, helpless pets to pet stores.

Build feral cat care programs into every neighborhood in the country!

Caring for feral cats with Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) has been Project Purr's fundamental premise and method for over 19 years. Through TNR, the number of feral cats will decrease naturally and they will have the best life possible in their own familiar territory.

Now, thankfully, Best Friends and many other national groups are making it a priority to replace inhumane and ineffective trap-and-kill programs with TNR programs! They recognize that catching and killing feral cats simply doesn't solve the animal overpopulation problem. Feral cats and feral kittens are the largest number of animals euthanized at shelters. Killing healthy cats while leaving the survivors to breed more litters just doesn't make sense.

Spaying and neutering feral/stray cats is the key to the pet overpopulation problem. (Remember, Project Purr has already been doing this for 19 years!). It is estimated that 90% of adoptable kittens are taken from stray/feral moms and socialized. If feral cats weren't continually breeding, and people weren't always finding tiny kittens under the bushes, then more shelter cats and kittens would be adopted into forever —but finite in number —homes.

Project Purr created and funds a county-wide low-cost spay/neuter program for ferals so that everyone will financially be able to afford to trap and fix the momcat and tomcat...insuring that the breeding stops.



One of Project Purr's biggest challenges is to help our community understand that fighting pet overpopulation and the resulting high euthanasia rates without aggressive feral/stray cat spay/neuter is like bailing out a sinking boat without first plugging the hole!

Please join us ... Fix a Feral!

Spay a Stray Today!

Spay Neuter Saves Lives!



Spay/Neuter Programs for Santa Cruz County

It is a common misconception that Santa Cruz operates a no-kill animal shelter. Unfortunately, this is untrue. During the height of kitten season, and sometimes throughout the year, young kittens are euthanized at the shelter because there are simply not enough fosters or homes. Kittens everywhere face this because people do not spay and neuter their own cats OR the stray and feral cats they are feeding. The only solution is to spay and neuter ALL cats to humanely lower the population.

Fortunately, there are several **great programs which can help spay/neuter cats...**

Residents of Watsonville/Freedom who can show proof of residency (and do NOT need to be low-income) may have **unlimited feral cats/kittens spayed/neutered FREE!** Businesses may participate in this program too! Please call 454-7303 x7 for assistance from FOWAS, the Friends of Watsonville Animal Shelter. Watsonville/Freedom residents who can show proof of residency *and* low-income status may have **3 DOMESTIC cats/kittens (or dogs!)** spayed/neutered **FREE!** Please call 454-7303 x7 for assistance from FOWAS, the Friends of Watsonville Animal Shelter.

For **domestic** cats (and dogs and rabbits too)

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Fostering Mango for Project Purr

By Nancy Serigstad



It was a Wednesday afternoon when I got the call from Lynne of Project Purr. She wanted to know if my husband and I were available and willing to foster a new young cat. A mother cat and four kittens were rescued from where they had been living under a building in Watsonville. During the trapping, the Project Purr rescuer realized that the cats never saw the light of day, huddled in a tiny crawl space, and only ventured out from their hiding place to feed at night. The rescuer persisted until she had caught all of the kittens and the mother.

The kittens were in poor shape, covered with fleas and matted hair, thin and emaciated. Once they were cleaned up, defleaded, wormed and treated with antibiotics, eating regularly and gaining weight, it seemed that one of the kittens was from a different litter. The other kittens huddled together in a pile, but they kept him separate. He had longer hair, and was the friendliest to people. Even at his young age, he seemed to be a domestic cat that had

been dumped and somehow found his way to the feeding area where the mom and kittens were eking out their existence. During his time on the streets, he had adopted the important survival skills of duck and cover, so when approached, he would look for a place to hide. He had obviously been handled but if he was to become a regular adoptable kitten, he would need some rehabilitation.

Kittens only have a very narrow window in which to be socialized or else they will always be feral. Project Purr thought it would be wonderful to give this kitten a chance to "turn" and adapt, get over his fears and learn to trust and function as a regular domestic cat. That's when they called me.

I said yes, and a short time after meeting Mango, Project Purr loaded up my car with a hutch, toys, a bed, and other supplies. It was obvious upon meeting him, and especially once his health issues were addressed, that he was very playful and wanted human contact. The other kittens from the litter shrank back from the toys and games as if they were foreign. I knew we only had a short time to see if we could get Mango socialized.

My husband and I had recently moved and renovated our house, and during that time felt that our living situation would not be a good environment to get a cat. Now we were past that, and the opportunity to give this cat a loving temporary home was made possible by the fostering experience. It would be a test for him and for us, both exciting and nerve-wracking!

When he first arrived, he stayed in his hutch and huddled in the litter box. We clipped the door of the hutch open and let him venture out at his own pace, mindful of the many changes he had recently endured. The first 24 hours he just seemed exhausted. Soon I moved his food out of the hutch to encourage him to come out for short periods of time. I was still mixing antibiotics in his food. The hutch was in the living room and I found myself down on the floor, talking to him, petting him, and wiggling my fingers underneath his blankets. He slept on a heated disk that radiated warmth. Play enticed him and he was very curious. He was starting to relate to me, his ears no longer back.

That night I went to bed and left the bedroom door open. At about 2 am, I heard the pitter patter of his feet as he took a walkabout, exploring the condo. The next day, I wiped him down with a warm wet wash cloth, grooming and bonding like a momma cat would, as Lynne of Project Purr had suggested, and he loved it!

Project Purr provided everything he needed. They set up the vet appointment, explained his medication, gave me support and called to check in. That freed me to just interact with him.

I loved hearing that first motorlike purr, knowing we were building trust. If he wasn't finished playing, he would wrap his legs



Project Purr Budget Summary 2006

EXPENSES

Veterinary Expenditures include:

Adobe Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Program, Kitten Early-Age	
S/N, Domestic Medical Care	\$41,309.00
Feline Leukemia/FIV Test Kits	4,577.35
Food, Litter, Supplies/Equipment	13,763.10
Office Expenses	
Advertising, Phone, Printing, Mailings	6,115.89
Traps Donated to Shelters	720.00
Feral Cat Colony Maintenance	2,535.00
Project Coordination/Technical Assistance	2,000.00
Insurance	900.00
Fundraiser Expenses	2,218.00
Vehicle Expenses:	
Gasoline Allowance/\$50./month	600.00
Insurance/Vehicle Registration	1,134.94
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$75,873.28

INCOME

Yard Sales/Silent Auction	\$41,000.00
Adoptions	3,775.00
Donations	18,301.95
FOWAS..... (Friends of Watsonville Animal Shelter)	6,000.00
Memorial Gift Ivan Veriovin Estate	20,000.00
Bank Interest	501.70
TOTAL INCOME	\$89,578.65

CATS/KITTENS ASSISTED IN 2006 (Feral/Domestic)
TOTAL 378

GRAND TOTAL CATS/KITTENS Assisted - 1997-2006 4,631



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PROJECT PURR
FERAL CAT ADVOCATE ORGANIZATION
RUMMAGE SALE
FUNDRAISER 2007

SATURDAY JUNE 2 🐾 7AM - 4PM
and SUNDAY JUNE 3 🐾 8AM - 3PM
Corner of Thurber Lane and Soquel Drive

Help fund Spay/Neuter!

Friday, June 1st will be set-up day at the field
Many volunteer needed for set-up and closing

NO SALES ON FRIDAY!!

Donate your tax deductible quality household
items at the field on Friday

For more information
call 423-MEOW

www.projectpurr.org

PROJECT PURR IS A 501(c)(3) NONPROFIT VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO HUMANELY DECREASING THE FERAL CAT POPULATION BY PROVIDING FUNDS FOR OUR LOW-COST FERAL CAT/KITTEN SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAM IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, CALIFORNIA. PROJECT PURR ADVOCATES TRAP/NEUTER/RETURN (TNR) AS THE PREFERRED METHOD OF FERAL CAT POPULATION CONTROL AS OPPOSED TO TRAP AND KILL.



Fostering Mango

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around my leg, as if to say, stay and play with me. His antics made us laugh and every day we exposed him to new experiences, fascinated to watch him learn and explore. We decided he was a very special, unique and smart cat. We were smitten.

We retrieved kitten games from our memories: the walnut game, the toilet paper roll game, the crumpled paper game, the shoe attack game, and the feather on a string game. Mango loved them all and gained confidence daily. He quickly felt like part of our family. He now moved confidently around the whole condo and could be approached directly and picked up, which was the behavior we were looking for.

My husband and I had "the talk" about whether to keep him. He had wormed his way into our hearts and we loved him dearly. We knew just how special he was: his fine-boned beauty, long orange and white fur, those green eyes, overloud motor, and particularly his intelligent, playful and loving personality. Keeping him didn't really fit with our current plans so even though we cried, we created a flyer and soon someone from my work decided to adopt him. We cried some more, but felt he was going to a really good home.

The other night I had a dream and Mango was in it. I looked directly into his green eyes and felt that loving bond flowing between us. The dream felt so vivid, like real contact. Living with Mango was such a rich experience, a special bond, it changed us. We thought we were helping him, but he helped remind us that quality of life and living every day is most important. As soon as we can, we will have a cat living with us again.

Spay/Neuter Programs

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owned by low-income residents of Santa Cruz County there is the **NEW FREE** John S. Strauss voucher program sponsored by The Friends of Santa Cruz County Animals (FOSCCA) and administered through Santa Cruz County Animal Services. For more info, call 831/454-7303.

The Santa Cruz SPCA has low cost spay/neuter (\$25.00 co-pay) for low-income Santa Cruz residents for domestic cats only. 465-5000

Project Purr also makes it financially feasible for everyone to comply! Project Purr's low cost **feral** cat spay/neuter program at Adobe Animal Hospital has never shut down for lack of funds.... and is openly available to all county residents, regardless of income.

So, if you feed...PLEASE DON'T BREED! Together we really can make Santa Cruz no-kill! Thank you!

"How do we turn our love into action?"

—Terry Tempest Williams

Nobody's Cats

by Rose Moonwater, a volunteer

On the way home from a trip, I stopped at a truck stop to use the restroom. Shapes rustled in the bushes around the edges of the parking lot. What is that? Hey.... it looks like cats. When I came back out of the building, I counted eight of them. They looked like they were waiting for someone to come and feed them. I didn't have cat food in the car, so I went back inside the truck stop and bought some.

What would you do?

Stray. Wild. Feral. Dumped. Abandoned. Homeless. Belonging to no one. They slink around at dusk, run up the driveway, disappear into shrubbery. They skulk around the dumpster, haunt the fringes of habitation, searching for sources of food. They hide in the bushes, eat garbage, dart through clearings, attuned to every sound. Prey animals, they avoid touch and are expert readers of body language. Fearful, they scatter as soon as I glance in their direction.

Not my responsibility, right? But... they need help. You can see that. Living out on the streets is tough. They show up, sometimes wounded, limping. They fight over the food. The most that people will do, is sometimes feed them. Yet, if you only feed, and do nothing else, you have actually added to the problem.

Disease and breeding multiply a cycle of suffering. If you care, what *should* you do?

This is how people find out about Project Purr. A cat in need has crossed my path, and I want to help. Now what do I do?

That is what happened to me. I stumbled upon these cats — a LOT of cats. I got them some food and went on my way. The location was far from home. But somehow,

that brief encounter lodged itself in my mind, and I worried over these cats. I contacted other animal rescuers and tried to find someone who lived closer to the gas station who could help.

Let someone else take care of it. Isn't that what we all want? Why does it have to be me?

The truck stop was located out in the boonies and I couldn't find any closer help. I contacted the gas station employees and management. Were they taking care of and feeding the cats? "The wild cats? No way. Those cats have been there for at least a year."

Nobody's cats. Even if I try to forget about them, they won't go away. They will be there, scavenging a living off whatever they can find.

When I lay in bed in the quiet of night and early morning, my conscience demanded, "What are you going to do to help them?" This is how I came to be driving back, every weekend, to that remote truck stop.

Not easy. Even if you decide to help, it may be outside what you know. I had never trapped a feral cat before. Luckily, I had Project Purr to guide me.

I set up a feeder in a trashed-out empty lot next to the parking lot. Each weekend, I set out traps, and after trapping, replenished the feeder.

I had written the gas station management a letter, describing what I was trying to do: trap/neuter/return, and how important it is to feed the managed colony; how in the trapping process, kittens who can be socialized are removed; how all the cats are tested for disease and only returned if they are healthy; how I was basically taking care of a problem for them. But... then they removed all the equipment, actually threw it away! They said it created a health hazard—in an already trashed out parking lot.

The cats are just trying to live their lives. They are treated as pests, vermin, their lives not valued. If you feed them, affiliate with them, you, too, can be viewed as a public nuisance.

Someone who worked at the truck stop told me they overheard the head of maintenance say they were going to get rid of the cats. That totally freaked me out. I was already attached to these cats. They had become familiar and individual to me: the



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Franny's Story

left eyelid should be reconstructed with a skin graft. These surgeries would cost \$1,600.00!! The doctor said the surgery shouldn't be done until Franny was 6 months old. A kind person said they would pay \$800 of the bill if we could come up with the other \$800.00 in donations. I put out a plea for donations on the Project Purr website telling Franny's story and asking for monetary help from web visitors and our supporters.

Franny was about 3 1/2 weeks old when she and her brother (Mack) were found huddled in a shed on one of those coldest winter days last December. It was obvious, after carefully soaking her crusted eyes open with a warm wash cloth, that she had serious eye problems. Franny's right eye was badly damaged and her left eye had a deformed lid that doesn't completely cover her eye and hair grows into the eyeball causing much irritation.

I took her to a veterinary ophthalmologist and got the bad news that the right eye is so damaged that it needs to be removed and, though she can see with her left eye, the lid is deformed and her



Franny's Update

Thank's to all the kind and generous people that donated to Franny's surgery fund! We have met the goal of \$800.00 and have a matching fund of \$800.00 taking us to the grand total of the \$1600.00 needed to pay for Franny's eye surgery. She is now about 6 months old but because of her petite size the vet has suggested we wait another month to give her a little more time to mature and put on a bit more size before surgery. The right eye will be removed and the left eye will have reconstructive surgery, with a graft on the upper eyelid removing the hair that grows directly into the eye and in so doing, allow the eye to close completely.

Keep Franny in your thoughts and I will give an update on our website of her progress after surgery that will occur around the end of May.

Franny is doing well and loving life. She gets her lubricating eye meds twice a day. She has made friends with, and loves my lazy cats and kind dogs. It never crosses her mind she has any disability. She has a lack of depth perception that she is learning to make allowances for. She is very outgoing and social but will need an inside only home with gentle animal friends and people to be her companions.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Her foster mother Lucinda, and Project Purr!

Kids With Cats Are Less Likely to Become Allergic

By Marcella Durand

Cats get blamed for a lot of things, including sneezing and itchy eyes (not to mention how your favorite pen always ends up under the couch), but a new study conducted at the Asthma and Allergic Diseases Center at the University of Virginia indicates that asthma shouldn't be one of them.

Interestingly enough, children in the study who were exposed to mite allergens (mites are those nasty little bugs that live in pillows, laundry piles and other such places) showed increasing sensitivity to them, while, in contrast, exposure to cat allergens was associated with decreased sensitivity. "Thus, among children with high exposure, the odds of sensitization to mite rather than cat was 4-0," says the study, published in The Lancet. The researchers concluded that "exposure to cat allergens can produce an IgG and IgG4 antibody response without sensitization or risk of asthma.... The results may explain the observation that animals in the house can decrease the risk of asthma."

So ditch the 12-year-old pillows and mattresses, wash your kids' clothes regularly and keep the cat.

Project Purr's Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Program for FERAL Cats At Adobe Animal Hospital

Feral cats are non-domesticated (non-social) unowned cats. All cats/kittens must come individual in humane traps for surgery. Do NOT use cat carriers or boxes. Cats/kittens in cat carriers or boxes will be refused services.

Adobe Animal Hospital is located at 1600 Soquel Drive (across from Dominican Hospital) Santa Cruz, CA 95065. Their hours are M-F 7:30AM-6PM and Sat 8AM-3PM NO! surgeries on Saturday / Closed on Sunday 831/475-6365

Humane traps are loaned from: Watsonville Animal Shelter, 580 Airport Blvd, Watsonville, CA 95076 831/454-7303 ext.7

Santa Cruz County Animal Services Authority, 27 Janis Way, Scotts Valley, CA 95066 831/454-7303

Plan ahead! Call Adobe Animal Hospital before trapping to determine when surgery times are available. Cats/kittens need to arrive before 8:30AM. Late arrivals or unscheduled cats may not be treated the same day. Adobe Animal Hospital will try to accommodate you.

The following items will be included: Anesthesia, FeLV/FIV test (cats/kittens testing positive will be humanely euthanized) Spay/Neuter, Vaccines (FVRCP and Rabies) and Mandatory Ear Tip!

(mandatory eartipping is the humane surgical removal of 1/4 inch of the top right ear. This serves as a permanent visual identification mark that shows that this cat has been tested for disease, spayed/neutered and vaccinated) Kittens must be at least 4 months old for surgery. You must bring each cat/kitten in an individual trap for surgery.

YOU pay only \$25.00 for each feral cat/kitten at Adobe Animal Hospital. Project Purr will pay your unpaid balance!

Surgery After-Care Instructions

Spayed/neutered cats/kittens must be picked up from Adobe after surgery by 5:30PM. Take the cat/kitten home and leave it in the completely covered trap in a safe WARM location overnight. Release the cat/kitten the next morning in the exact area where it was trapped. Over time the stitches will dissolve. Provide fresh water and quality dry food daily in the established feeding location. It is best to feed early in the day. Food should be eaten or removed by nightfall to avoid attracting nuisance nocturnal creatures such as skunks, raccoons, or predators. Continue daily feeding after release even though the cat may not return for several days. Congratulations!

Nobody's Cats

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three young gray brothers; the white cat with gray splotches and a blaze on the nose; the big old tom with a scarred ear, etc.

At the beginning, Project Purr told me: "We only relocate feral cats as a last resort. They do much better if they stay in their known territory. It is very difficult to find places to relocate them to and it is a very time consuming process. We need to spend our money/time/energy on spay/neuter and help the highest number of cats possible."

But... at this point, with the cats under threat of poisoning, Project Purr told me, "Catch as many of them as possible and bring them in."

I agonized over removing them from familiar terrain and disrupting their family groups, though saving lives was the aim. There were so many unknowns. Where could I keep such a large number of cats, even temporarily? Project Purr and my personal veterinarian assured me they would help. It was time to leap, though not knowing where all of us would land.

It was extremely nerve-wracking to try and catch the cats without knowing where they could be relocated to. But... Project Purr advised me: "One step at a time. Catch them and bring them in."

One of Project Purr's founders told me her involvement began 19 years ago when the tuna fish sandwiches she'd packed for her husband's lunches were shared with cats, behind the place where he worked. She not only helped those cats at that location, grease-covered from eating off garbage trucks, but for 19 years she has been an incredible resource for this county.

Have you ever lived in a place which didn't have a "Project Purr"? Project Purr has already done the heavy lifting. They have a low-cost spay/neuter program in place, with testing and vaccinations included, for one low fee. They have the special equipment you need, will lend it to you, and the knowledge and expertise to advise you on how to use it. They will walk you through it. They lent me traps, explained how to bait them, how to cover the trapped ferals with towels to calm them, helped me set up vet appointments, and showed me how to care for the ferals after surgery.

The work you do, with Project Purr's help, also benefits our local shelters. A high percentage of animals brought to the shelters are feral cats—unsocialized, therefore, "not adoptable". At the shelter, they are euthanized. The best thing to do is take care of your own situation, the situation that crosses your path, whether it is at

home, or at work, or somewhere else along the way.

The first cat I was able to catch was a very sick kitten. So weak and wobbly, I picked her up right out of the unset trap where I was feeding. A friend graciously took her in and sat vigil over her, through terrible diarrhea. She named her "Stinky", and put in a lot of time, home cooked food, and special care nursing her back to health. She eventually grew into a very healthy and playful "Sophie" and lived as an indoor cat.

Next I caught five more cats over several weeks. Each one tested clean at the vets, and they were vaccinated, defleaded, spayed and neutered. They were recovering from their surgeries, and adjusting to being hatched. Being together gave them some comfort, while having to bear caretakers, standing closer than they would prefer, feeding them. We posted an ad and put up flyers, "Outdoor Cats Need New Home".

After some weeks, a couple who lived on 25 acres agreed to adopt the group of five. They had a tack room where we set up the imprinting hutches. Relocation is a long process. The cats are contained in hutches for weeks, as they get used to the sights/sounds/smells of their new territory, and learn to trust their new caretakers. A shelf above the tack room would eventually serve as a high, safe and sheltered place to eat and come in from the weather after the cats were released from their hutches. A few weekends later, I caught two more of the cats, and someone else who lived in Corralitos agreed to adopt them and have them live on her property.

When you relocate feral cats, you pay attention to all your senses and try to set things up to give them the best chance of sticking at the new location. You make sure they have good cover from the weather and predators, and access to food. Then... after release, they get to choose. They have their own lives. They may stay or they may leave. For a long while, the only sign that they are still around may be disappearing food.

I watch an adopter's face light up as she shares her latest update. "They are eating a lot of food. It is so fun to watch them. As the weather warms, the cats play, chase, zoom and fling their bodies through the air in the garden. They sit on the deck and walk the railings around the corral. They bask in the sun."

Bond. Affinity. Gratitude. Taking action to care for homeless animals links us to a network. We are strands in a braid of assistance, a shared responsibility, stronger in affiliation. We feel a stake in their future, giving them a second chance. "Nobody's cats" became "our cats".

Great NEWS!

Project Purr received a \$10,000 grant from PetSmart Charities to increase its number of spay/neuter surgeries by 200 percent over the next year. For 19 years, Project Purr has sterilized hundreds of cats each year to help reduce pet overpopulation.

Project Purr is the *only* program offering low cost spay/neuter services for stray/feral cats residing anywhere in Santa Cruz County. Project Purr's goal is to promote spay/neuter as a simple, humane and effective way to end the tragedy of euthanizing homeless animals. Instead of placing a few hundred cats/kittens a year, we are preventing the births of thousands. While kittens are adorable, sadly, the fate of most of them is tragic. Spaying and neutering our pets and feral cats is the most ethical, effective and humane way to reduce the vast numbers of animals who are born only to die prematurely and without a family who loves them.

During February, March and April 2007, Project Purr offered FREE spay/neuter for feral cats which included FeLV/FIV testing, FVRCP and rabies vaccines and eartipping. Project Purr completed a record number of surgeries in this time! Inspired by our results, an anonymous local animal lover has given \$1,000 to Project Purr along with a challenge to the community to match this gift with other gifts to our spay/neuter fund! She says "As an animal lover, this opportunity to invest in our community through spay/neuter is the best possible use of my money. I am impressed with the Project Purr program, which allows the highest number of cats to be fixed for the lowest cost. I believe others in the community might feel the same way I do, support this very successful and effective program, and help extend the PetSmart grant even further." Are there other animal lovers out there willing to donate *any amount* to Project Purr to help us reach our goal of another \$10,000 to accomplish more life-saving spay/neuter?

Spay/neuter is the single most important thing we all can do to help the animals! There simply are not enough homes for all the animals in Santa Cruz County - and you can never stem the tide of homeless animals if you ignore the least understood and in the greatest danger - feral cats and kittens!

Remember that your gift is tax deductible. Donations may be mailed to Project Purr, P.O. Box 891, Santa Cruz, CA. 95061 or use Networkforgood.org for direct, secure on-line donations. Please indicate that it is for the "Spay/Neuter Challenge."

Fix a Feral! Ferals Are Our Friends! Spay/Neuter Saves Lives!

“Beautiful But Untouchable”



Several messages had been left with Project Purr. Tiger Rose had lived with her owner, an older gentleman and his wife. As various relatives gave their reports of what they knew or thought they had heard, her story shifted and changed. “She was 13 years old. She was 9 years old. She came in and out of the house. No, she stayed outside only. She was huge, probably weighed 20 pounds.” It was thought that she had received vet care, but no one really knew—especially once we heard the kicker: “No one can touch her, except her owner.” Now it was Friday afternoon, and the daughter-in-law, from out of town, was desperately seeking “no-kill” placement for an untouchable, outdoor cat! The daughter-in-law was flying home in the morning, so in addition to the confusion, there was a huge sense of urgency.

Project Purr pieced the story together. Tiger Rose had bonded with her owner, an elderly man, and had stayed right by his side through three long years of illness, including hospice care. As caregivers came and went, Tiger Rose would jump from her usual place by his side and run under the bed. Even his wife, whom Tiger Rose had lived with for many years, could not touch her. Her owner had finally died and his wife was now being moved to assisted living.

Tiger Rose had lost her owner, the only person she trusted, and now was losing her home. There really were no good placement options for a cat like her. Project Purr wrestled with whether or not to accept her, but did, as the family’s last resort.

When we (Lynne and Margaret, of Project Purr) arrived to pick up the “outside feral cat”, confounding expectations, Tiger Rose was inside the house and stuffed into a cat carrier. A large Maine Coon cat, gray and white, with longhair, her beauty was overshadowed by her aggressive demeanor. We transferred her to a hutch outdoors without touching her, and she eventually passed all her vet tests. She growled and hissed in the hutch, expressing her distress and unhappiness. We used a dowel to test her reaction to being touched, which she easily snapped in two, the deep bite marks a testament to her ferocity. At least she was in a safe place, eating and using her litter box—both good signs. She was grieving the loss of everything she knew and loved and so, we just let her be.

We then sorted through mental lists of everyone we knew in the community, and placed an ad whose headline read “Beautiful but Untouchable”. We’ve had tough cats like this before who miraculously had found special homes. People who were basically angels had been willing to take on a cat that otherwise would have no home. Feral or semi-feral cats are fuzzy, but not warm. They react to people as predators. Who knows why they allow certain people inside that barrier, to bond with them?

We ran down our lists to see if anyone might have an opening for such a challenging cat. We made calls, tried every avenue, but none panned out. Cats should not be left in a hutch for too long, or they start to shut down. We needed to locate a permanent home for Tiger Rose.

Finally, we thought of Jimmie, who called himself “an old grump”, but had a soft spot for animals that had had a rough start. He had adopted a cat that bit him the first time they met, and an annoying yappy dog that his daughter found in the mountains. The cat had ultimately bonded with him, and now slept on Jimmie’s bed. Would Jimmie possibly be willing to take on Tiger Rose? He agreed to give it a try, with the option of backing out if things didn’t work. With a lot of questions in all of our minds, we loaded up Tiger Rose in her hutch and moved her to Jimmie’s place.



The plan was to keep Tiger Rose hatched inside for a week, and then move her hutch out to the front porch for a second week, before releasing her. Though Jimmie had heard Tiger Rose would be tough, he was surprised at just how aggressive she acted, in her fear. If she felt challenged, she would launch herself at the cage wire. She was hissing and fretting and obviously unhappy. We set her hutch by the window, near where Jimmie’s other cat had an opening to go in and out. The dog, for the time being, was kept separate, in another room.

With some guilt and trepidation, we left Tiger Rose at Jimmie’s. There was no feeling of relief at that time, as it felt like we had just transferred our problem to Jimmie’s house. It was safe, there were no children living there, her previous bond was with a male, and Jimmie was willing, so it was worth a try.

The week passed with reports of small steps that sounded positive. Jimmie’s other cat was lying on top of the hutch, comfortable and interested in Tiger Rose. Jimmie sat by Tiger Rose’s hutch and spoke quietly to her, and she gave him some encouragement by blinking at him. Feral cats who are very frightened do not feel safe enough to let predators out of their sight for a moment, even to blink, or to eat without keeping their eyes on the predator. Tiger Rose had settled down and seemed to be adjusting to the sights, smells and sounds of her new home. So far, so good, but was it too good to be true?

We arranged to come up and move the hutch out to the porch. Jimmie was expecting us, but if he wasn’t there, we had permission to go in and move her. When we arrived, Jimmie wasn’t there so we went in and took a look. Tiger Rose had food and water, her litter box was clean. She was obviously well cared for. Everything looked good, but Tiger Rose seemed quite put out at seeing us. She emitted a low continuous growl. We decided not to add insult to injury and just left her inside.

Jimmie left a message wondering what we had done to upset his cat, Tiger Rose?? Jimmie said it took Tiger Rose a long time to settle down after we had visited. He said he had petted her to help her calm down!? Well, that was unbelievable. We wanted to see if Jimmie STILL HAD ALL TEN FINGERS? Apparently he did.

Soon it was time to release Tiger Rose. She staked out a corner of the living room as her spot, and slept on a futon in the back bedroom. She couldn’t jump high enough to use the cat window, but went in and out through the door. She was twice as big as the dog, who wisely steered clear of her. Tiger Rose sometimes brushed against Jimmie’s legs. As long as he approached her slowly, she let him pet her. He figured her grumpiness was kind of a match for his own. Jimmie told Lynne things were evolving, and they would continue to work out the kinks. Jimmie had a strange little smile on his face when he said “I don’t know whether to thank you or shoot you for bringing me Tiger Rose.”



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