

Felines fixed, fed by Friends of Ferals

By Jeanne Whitehead
DIGBY COURIER
NovaNewsNow.com

Gloria Reid says it was a trip to Bermuda back in 1998 that gave her the idea. The stray cats that roamed that island's waterfront were robustly healthy because they were fed daily.

In the winter of 2000 as she strolled Digby's snow-covered streets, Reid came across seven scrawny kittens foraging in a dumpster. She returned to trap the kittens, and the following day trapped their mother. She had them all spayed and neutered, and ensured that they continued to be sheltered and fed.

Reid and a few like-minded friends have been taking care of Digby's stray cats since then, and in 2003 officially formed the group, Friends of Ferals. Their action plan is modeled on that of Alley Cat Allies, an American group that traps, sterilizes, releases and feeds stray cats.

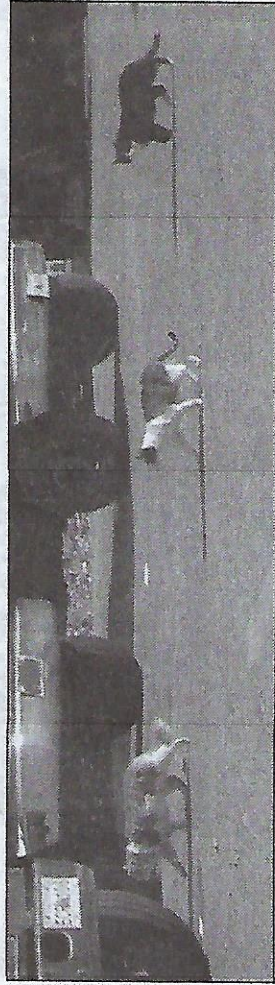
Reid points out that spaying and neutering is essential. The gestation period

for a cat is roughly 63 days. A pair of cats whose kittens have kittens could conceivably produce 20,000 cats in five years.

At their annual general meeting Saturday, Digby's Friends of Ferals noted that they trapped, neutered and released 60 strays in 2007. The number includes cats in Digby, Weymouth, Sandy Cove and Cornwallis.

Some feral cats, like those on Digby's waterfront, live in colonies. There are 14 cats in the wharf group, recognizable by the fact that the tips of their ears were clipped at the same time they were spayed or neutered. The cats hunt, but are also fed daily by the Friends of Ferals.

There are other strays throughout the Municipality and the Friends of Ferals often receives calls from people who don't mind feeding the cats, but don't want them reproducing. In this case, the caller is shown how to humanely trap the animals, and a Friends of Feral member ensures the cats are sterilized, and then released in familiar surroundings.



Three members of Digby wharf's feral cat colony head to their feeding station. Friends of Ferals has spayed and neutered the 14 cats in the colony, and feeds them daily. Jeanne Whitehead photo.

Releasing is almost always part of the plan since feral cats can seldom be domesticated.

Cats, of course, are widely regarded as Mother Nature's rodent control plan, and Digby wharf's rat patrol is highly effective. According to deputy mayor Sherri Lewis, this is one of the reasons town council has made financial contributions to Friends of Ferals over the years. The Municipality of Digby has also supported the group.

With annual expenses of approximate-

ly \$7,000, Friends of Ferals has also done a great deal of fundraising in the past, and plans to do so in the future. Locals businesses donate money, cat food, and items for raffles.

At Evangeline Mall from September to May and at community events like Scallop Days, the group sells baked goods, crafts, and small donated items. Their visibility as these events not only results in much needed revenue, but reminds local people that the Friends of Ferals program exists in their community.