

Trap program hopes to catch some help

By Jonathan Riley
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The cat population at the end of Birch Street in Digby has exploded recently, with members of the Friends of Feral Society counting at least 18 unneutered or unspayed cats.

"If we don't get this under control quick, there could be hundreds down here in no time," says Sue Dexter-White.

But even with help from a local veterinarian, controlling the problem doesn't come cheap.

The Friends of Feral Society last year neutered or spayed 40 cats and euthanized seven. The group, which raises money with a small sales table at the mall and through donations, spent \$7,800 on veterinarian services, \$1,500 on food and litter and another \$600 on administrative items.

The group has requested an unspecified amount of financial assistance from Digby town and municipal councils. Both councils deferred a decision until their budgetary discussions later in the spring.

"If we were to trap them all and put them all down, more would move into the area or someone would abandon their cats here," says Dexter-White. "Having an established, healthy and neutered colony is the only way to keep the population under control. And, besides, the fish plants like having them around for rodent control."

She and Lynda Griggs have been running the 'trap-neuter-release' program again in an attempt to get the feral cat population within manageable limits.

Dexter-White and Griggs usually trap on Mondays and they are hoping people who feed the cats on Birch Street will hold off on Mondays as long as the trap program is in progress.

"If they're good and hungry when we set out the traps then we have a much better chance of luring them in," she said.

The women usually put a half can of wet cat food inside a live trap. When the

cat walks on a trigger on the way to the food, the cage door shuts. The women then cover the cage with a blanket to calm the cat.

Digby veterinarian Neil Pothier gives the cats a general check up, neuters or spays them and then treats them to kill off parasites like mites and fleas. Pothier also removes a tip of a cat's ear so the Friends of Feral can easily identify which animals have already been taken care of.

After a day or two to recuperate, the cats are released back into the wild.

"You kind of feel sorry for them," said Dexter-White, "but these are wild animals and you can't take them home."

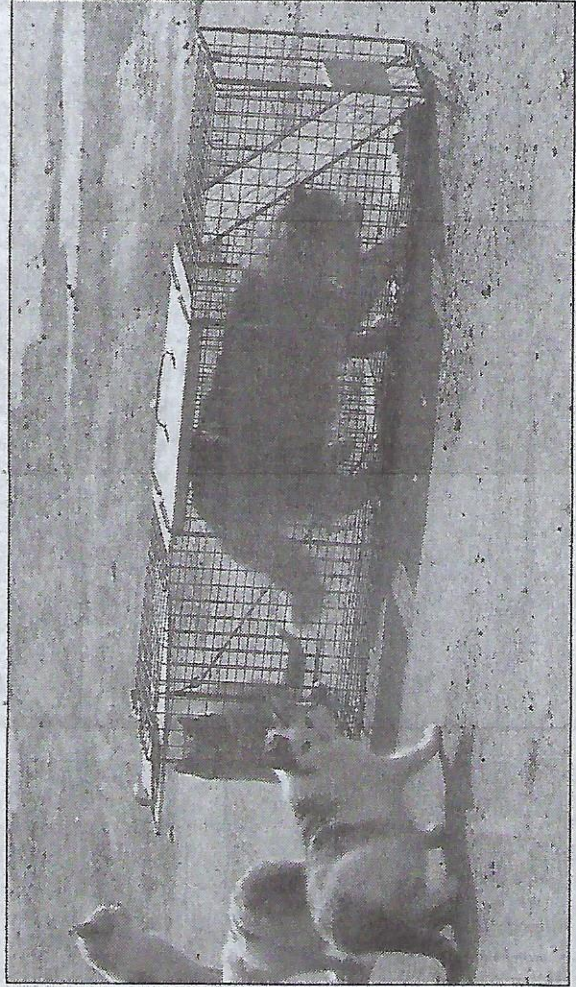
The Friends of Feral also manage colonies in Weymouth, Plympton, Sandy Cove and has assisted in Smith's Cove, Bear River and Cornwallis Park. The society also helps people on an individual basis when needed.

A similar colony at the head of the Digby wharf has about a dozen cats, but most are neutered or spayed.

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Sue Dexter-White checks on their first capture who is calming down with a blanket over the cage. Jonathan Riley photo



A large cat slyly steps over the trigger mechanism and enjoys a free lunch. Jonathan Riley photo