

Society for the Friends of Ferals on a mission

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Brad was born with a condition called cerebellar hypoplasia. He is one of Linda Titus' foster kittens and will soon be flying to his forever home in British Columbia. (Angela McMullen)

The Society for the Friends of Ferals is a group of individuals who care about the welfare of cats. The focus of their work is to reduce colony populations and then to maintain the health and well-being of the feral cats within the colonies of the Digby County region.

Feral cats have had no human contact, establish themselves in outdoor living populations known as colonies and are fearful of humans. They are vulnerable to weather, disease and predators.

"Friends of Ferals was established in 2002 when some cat-loving residents of Digby noticed there was a sizable population of homeless and feral cats along the waterfront. Kittens that were young enough were adopted out and feral adults were returned to where they were trapped," says Christine Callaghan, current chair and long-time volunteer.

Kittens can possibly be homed if they are rescued within six to eight weeks after birth, but adult cats must remain in the colony.

"If we catch them young enough, they can make great pets," she says.

Since the establishment of the society, more than 900 cats have been spayed and neutered.

Volunteer Linda Titus has been fostering kittens and cats for nearly four decades.

"This is my passion. This is what I do," she says. A room in her home is fully equipped with cat cages, beds, blankets, toys, perches and a whole lot of love. "They just come to me."

For Titus, the joy is endless.

"You get to have kittens year round. We have fostered for years and we love it."

According to Titus, a colony consists of 30 to 40 cats within an approximate 300-yard area.

"They're not indoor cats," she says. "They are not socialized."

The organization follows a Trap Neuter Return program, whereby cats are trapped and removed from the colony, taken to the vet, spayed or neutered and then returned to the colony.

“This is their home. They don’t wander,” says Titus.

Colony care involves supplying feeding stations, constructing winter shelters and transporting sick and injured cats to the vet.

“Every colony will have one to three caretakers,” explains Titus.

“The people who manage the colony know the colony. They know what cats are supposed to be there. They know their cats,” says Titus. Frequently, domestic cats are abandoned at colonies and will seek human contact. “Don’t dump kitties, ever,” she advises.

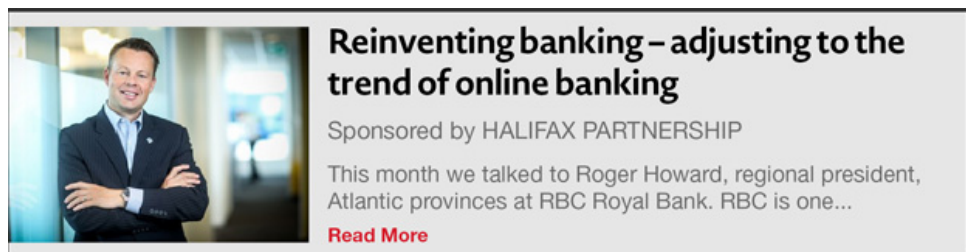
Callaghan and Titus agree that individuals need to be responsible when it comes to pet ownership and that when a pet needs to be rehomed, dropping it off to a feral cat colony is not an option.

Despite the ongoing activities of the Society for the Friends of Ferals, Titus feels that more can be done to protect and reduce colony populations.

“We need to expand our reach,” she says. “We sometimes need people to trap, and donate bags of food.”

“In the past year, we have added a few new energetic members with fresh ideas and different experience, and we hope to gain some more this year,” says Callaghan. “There are many, many happy endings as well as many tragedies that go unrecognized. It’s why we do what we do,” she says.

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