

2011 The Year of the Cat

“Two things are aesthetically perfect in the world – the clock and the cat,” wrote Emile-Auguste Chartier and in June of 1997 National Geographic featured an article which states, “the cat is one animal that nature pretty much got right the first time around.” If cats are one thing, they are beautiful creatures.

Cats were amongst the first animals domesticated by the human race. Although recent findings have suggested that cats have been domesticated for much longer than previously believed, there is much evidence that shows domesticated cats in Ancient Egypt over 4000 years ago. Cats provided a valuable service of controlling vermin and other pests to protect stores of food. In return, the Egyptians provided the cat with additional food. Cats were revered as hunters and worshiped as gods and goddesses. Ancient Egypt imposed the death penalty for killing cats, and honoured cats by mummifying them before being buried.

Although many cat owners still regard their precious companion with worship like devotion, they seem to be in the minority. In today’s reality, many people regard the cat as “independent” which often leads to the cat being a disposable pet. Cats and kittens are often sent outside on their own to “play,” leaving them in the vulnerable position of having to fend for themselves. In times of hardship the illusion of cats being independent leads many owners to simply turn their pet out onto the street in the belief that they will be able to take care of themselves. A cat on its own is up against a myriad of hazardous foes including cars, dogs, urban coyotes, cruel humans, winter conditions, and lack of food, water and shelter. After thousands of years of domestication, kitty simply isn’t meant to cope with these conditions anymore.

For the cats that do survive the adverse conditions of living on their own, they often go on to contribute to the ongoing and ever increasing feral cat problem. According to Wikipedia, “a feral cat is a descendant of a domesticated cat that has returned to the wild. It is distinguished from a stray cat, which is a pet cat that has been lost or abandon, while feral cats are born in the wild.” This man-made problem is persistent across the world. Many studies have been conducted to find out the effects that ferals have on local wildlife, and the prognosis is not good. Feral cats resort to hunting wildlife such as many species of birds. Their ever-growing numbers also become concern as natural ecosystems struggle to maintain balance.

Due to human neglect, strays are forced to live as wild animals. As domesticated cats are not equipped to live this way, strays and ferals have a life expectancy of 2-3 years. For those who are not spayed or neutered, they leave their legacy by producing feral offspring. One unaltered female cat can produce litters approximately 3 times a year, of 4-6 kittens each on average. Although estimates of the feral cat population are guesses at best, an article from National Geographic in 2004 mentions cat experts putting the estimated number of feral cats in the United States alone at 70 million individuals.

In speaking to Marjorie Hervey of The Hervey Foundation for Cats, her wish for the year of the cat is that all cats should be loved and cared for. This includes food, water, shelter, regular veterinarian care, safety, spaying and neutering. The Hervey Foundation for Cats and other rescue organizations around Edmonton see a large number of cats come in each year.

Unfortunately, these are just a small percentage of cats that are given up for adoption or turned out onto the street. Although every attempt is made to find a place for healthy stray cats, when there is no room at the shelters these individuals are euthanised. "Above all else, the cat needs to be respected," remarked an emotional Hervey when asked what her dream world for cats would be like.

Louise Reinich, Show Producer of Edmonton Pet Expo, encourages the public to come and celebrate the richness and joy that animals bring, "and in particular let's make the year of the cat have meaning!" Together, we as a society can make a change to our attitude towards cat and find a solution to the problems we have created. As the great Immanuel Kant said, "He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals."

The Edmonton Pet Expo, presented by The City of Edmonton, will feature a silent auction in support of the Hervey Foundation For Cats, as well as one for the Animal Cancer Therapy Subsidization Society.

For more information, or to book an interview, please call:

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**The City of Edmonton
Presents Pet Expo**

Event:	Edmonton Pet Expo	Tickets:	General Admission	\$10.00
Location:	Edmonton EXPO Centre, Hall A		Children (5-11)	\$8.00
Dates:	January 22 nd & 23 rd , 2011		Under 5 years of age	Free
Hours:	Saturday 10:00 am - 6:00 pm		Family Pass*	\$25.00
	Sunday 10:00 am - 5:00 pm		(*2 adults and up to 2 children)	
		Pre-purchase tickets online to save		