

AUSTRALIAN PET WELFARE FOUNDATION

Community Cat Program

2024 Update

For further information,
please email
info@petwelfare.org.au



COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAM
Protecting people, cats & wildlife



A Word From Our Director

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is with a sense of pride and optimism that I share the latest developments from our Community Cat Program with you.

This past year, despite the hurdles we faced, including a scarcity of vaccines and limitations in desexing capacity, I am heartened to share the encouraging results achieved in target areas.

We have also made significant headway in the realm of research, publishing a paper from the data we've meticulously gathered, and will publish two to three more later this year. These forthcoming publications will shed light on the rapid impact our community cat programs have had in reducing shelter intake and euthanasia rates. Most rapid progress is particularly evident in country towns, associated with greater community engagement of stakeholders, including animal management officers and veterinarians.

I look forward to sustaining this momentum and seeing the tangible benefits of our initiatives. As we continue to learn how best to efficiently implement community cat programs, we will share with you our learnings to enhance the welfare of cats and the people who care for them.

JACQUIE RAND

Jacquie Rand



Executive Director & Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation
Emeritus Professor, School of Veterinary Science, The University Of Qld

Real Impact

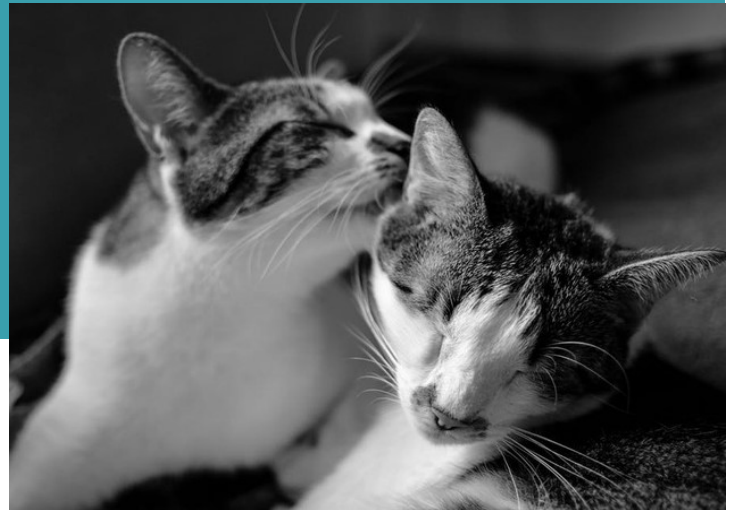
-  Desexed **2,750 cats** in target QLD suburbs by April 2024.
-  Achieved goal of **greater than 30% reduction in cat intake & 50% less euthanasia** in target areas.
-  Published **6 papers, 4 upcoming in 2024.**
-  Engaged in **4 conferences, 7 talks, and 1 radio** interview.
-  Responded to draft Feral Cat Threat Abatement Plan with **3 submissions.**
-  Made **13 additional submissions** to State & Federal governments advocacy for Community Cat Programs.

About the Community Cat Program

The **Australian Pet Welfare Foundation** is leading an ambitious initiative in the City of Ipswich, Queensland, as part of the broader **Australian Community Cat Program**. This program aims to address the challenges posed by cat overpopulation through a strategic, research-driven approach. By focusing on **high-intensity, targeted cat desexing**, coupled with a robust ecological perspective, the program seeks to revolutionise current practices and establish a sustainable model for urban cat management.

Traditionally, the management of urban cat populations has been reactive, with shelters and pounds overwhelmed by the **influx of kittens and poorly socialised adult cats**. This approach not only leads to distressing euthanasia rates but also imposes significant financial burdens on communities. Moreover, the **reactive nature of these measures fails to address the root cause of the problem**, perpetuating a cycle of overpopulation and associated issues.

The overarching goal of the **Australian Community Cat Program** is to demonstrate the efficacy of a **proactive approach to curbing cat overpopulation**. By preventing the birth of kittens through **targeted desexing efforts**, the program seeks to achieve long-term solutions that prioritise the welfare of animals, humans, and the environment. Rather than simply reacting to the consequences of overpopulation, the **program aims to intervene at a systemic level**, thereby mitigating the need for euthanasia and reducing the financial strain on local authorities.



Target Suburb Review & Statistics

Target suburbs for the Community Cat Program are Rosewood, Goodna and Redbank Plains, Ipswich QLD. These suburbs were chosen **due to their high cat intake and euthanasia at local shelters**. Shelter intake (of cats) is typically highest in areas that are considered **low socioeconomic** and can sometimes be more than 10 times higher than more advantaged areas. Due to high costs related to cat care, these areas also see higher numbers of stray, or semi-owned cats.

Since the program's implementation, there have been significant reductions in both intake and euthanasia across all three suburbs. Overall, in 2023/24, target suburbs saw a **63% reduction in intake** and **70% reduction in euthanasia**.



“ [I’m] relieved because I know they can’t have babies anymore... ”

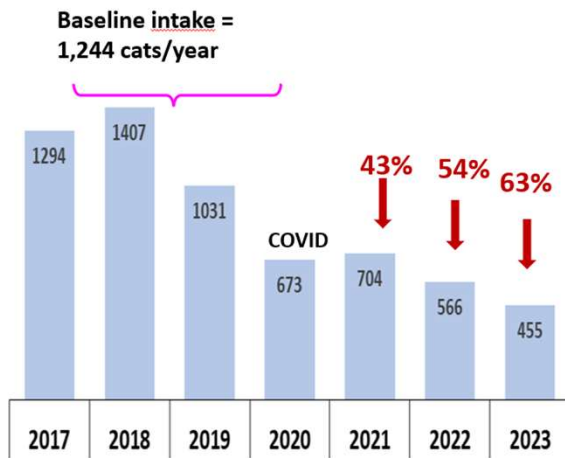
Intake

Target vs. Non-Target Suburbs

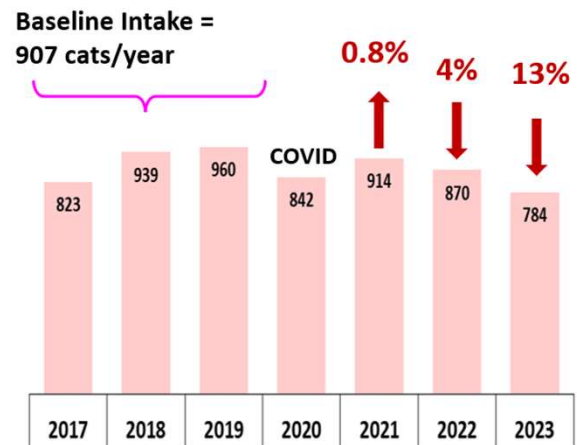
AUSTRALIAN PET WELFARE FOUNDATION

YEAR 2024

Target Suburbs



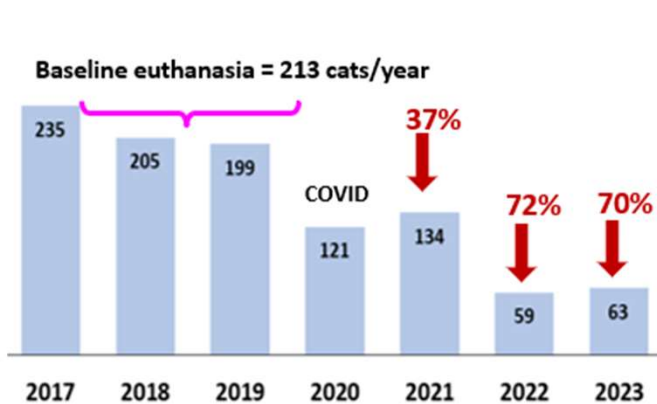
Non-Target Suburbs



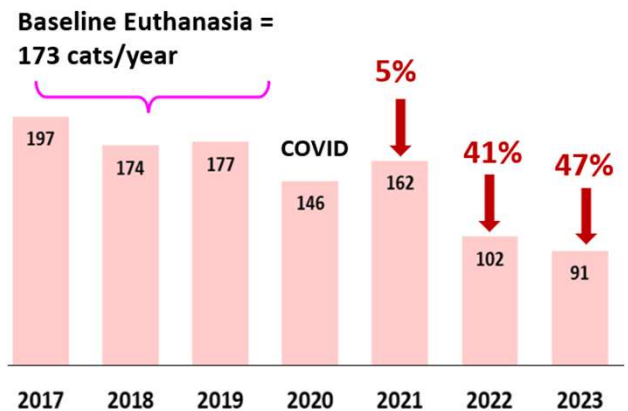
Euthanasia

Intake vs. Euthanasia

Target Suburbs



Non-Target Suburbs



Decreasing cat intake in target areas, especially of shy and timid cats which have longer lengths of stay in shelters and higher risk of euthanasia, frees up shelter resources to help other cats have shorter stays and better outcomes.

Learnings & reflections from past year

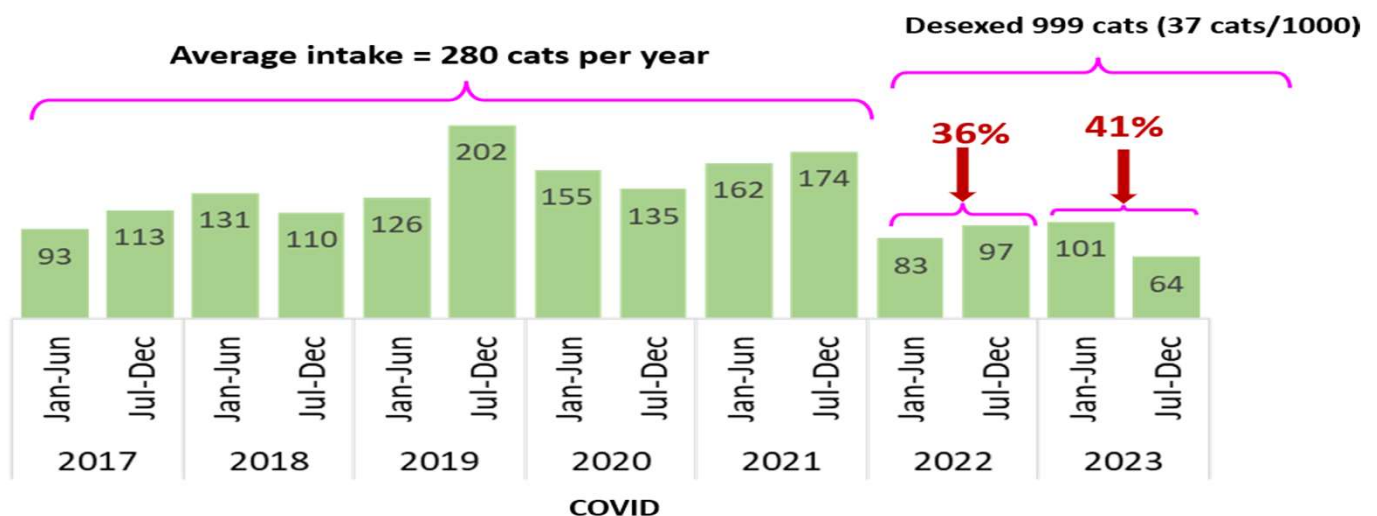
Of the 2750 cats desexed in the program, **80% were considered owned, 11% were considered semi-owned but became owned** by the carer when desexed (90% owned at desexing), **7% remained semi-owned** (considered “restricted matter” by DAF). These “restricted matter” cats were microchipped with APWF as the secondary contact on the microchip database and were also ear-tipped.

Of the approximately **200 “restricted matter” cats**, approximately **10 were return-to-field cats**. These cats were found as strays and were healthy adults but were too poorly socialized to be rehomed. After desexing, microchipping and ear-tipping, they were returned to where they were found on the **premise that someone was feeding them** because they were in good body condition and healthy.

Return to field (RTF), also called shelter-neuter-return, is life-saving for healthy, poorly socialized cats and protects the mental health of shelter workers.

Redbank Plains pop 27,000 in 2023 (20,000 in 2017)

Intake / 6 months



Although it's premature to assess **the impact of lack of vaccines** and subsequent **closure of desexing services** at RSPCA Wacol for disease control, the last six months of data from Redbank Plains were encouraging. Unfortunately, **only 12 cats were desexed over 4 months** since mid-December. How this will impact the financial year data is unknown.

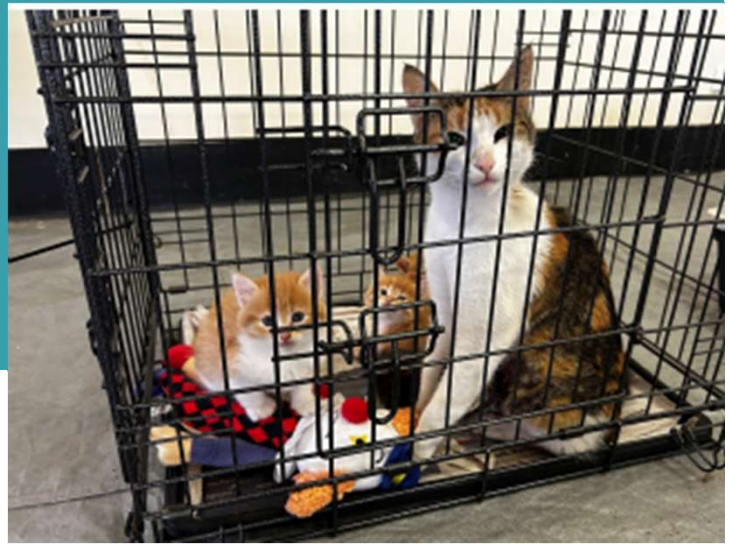
We are very **thankful to AWL Qld and Greencross Silkstone-Booval** for helping desex the most urgent cases to prevent surrender or impoundment.

Our **key takeaway** is the **critical importance** of engaging with Animal Management Officers (**AMOs**) and encouraging them to **embrace assistance-based rather than compliance-based cat management**. This is essential for making CCPs successful and more efficient.

Transporting cats for desexing rather than for impoundment, and possible euthanasia, is more effective long-term, and leads to **improved job satisfaction for AMOs**.



Keeping Cats Safe At Home



“ *Complaints have reduced dramatically since this program of desexing began. Clearly the program has had a significant impact on unwanted litters and roaming cats in Walgett* ”

Paul Flint,
Regulatory Officer

“ *Working with, instead of against people has achieved this result. Community feedback indicates an enormous appreciation and praise for the program and effort provided by all stakeholders that have been involved.* ”

Allison Knowles,
Weddin Shire Council

In partnership with the **NSW Government**, the **RSPCA NSW** embarked on a four-year project aimed at **changing human behaviour and reducing domestic cat impact** on the environment by **encouraging cat caregivers to desex, and register their cats, while also preventing them from roaming.**

Through social media marketing campaigns, information resources, school education, and targeted desexing and microchipping programs, **Keeping Cats Safe at Home** has been a great success. In Paramatta alone, there was a **reduction in the intake of cats and kittens** to the RSPCA Sydney shelter of **46%**, **cat-related nuisance complaints to council of 49%** and **cats arriving at the council pound of 41%**.

The project has also contributed to research efforts, with **three articles published** in 2023 utilising the data collected.

Overall, **Keeping Cats Safe at Home** has been a great success, and the results go a long way to show that **targeted desexing combined with education** can help **reduce nuisance calls, and cats impacts on the wider community and environment.**

For more information see
<https://www.rspcansw.org.au/blog/animal-care-information/impact-report-2/>

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Social Science Recently Published

DOI: [10.3390/ani13213423](https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13213423)

Article

Solutions-Based Approach to Urban Cat Management—Case Studies of a One Welfare Approach to Urban Cat Management

Caitlin Crawford ^{1,2,*}, Jacquie Rand ^{2,3}, Vanessa Rohlf ⁴, Rebekah Scotney ³ and Pauleen Bennett ⁴ 

Our Aim:

- To document how the Community Cat Program has impacted multi-cat carers (semi-owners) social and psychological well-being.

How we did it:

- We interviewed 11 **multi-cat carers** who had been assisted by the Community Cat Program to have the cats they cared for desexed, given preventative healthcare and microchipped.
- Questions focused on **cat carers' relationship with the cats, their mental and physical wellbeing before and after** they received assistance from the program, and their perception of support from different agencies such as the council and the Community Cat Program staff.

What we found:

- Multi-cat carers form a strong bond with the cats** they care for. This is consistent with the levels of attachment recently reported for cat caregivers (semi-owners) to the cats in their care, which were found to be nearly identical to those previously reported by cat owners (Neal 2023, A Cat Is a Cat: Attachment to Community Cats Transcends Ownership Status).
- The Community Cat Program's staff **created a positive relationship with the community** and were trusted by semi-owners to do what was right for them and the cats. This is essential for the success of cat management programs.
- We were also able to identify challenges and problems before carers were helped, and how the Community Cat Program benefited semi-owners, the cats and community engagement.
- Most cats were microchipped as community cats and ear-tipped**, with secondary contact details for Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF). This is permitted under a **research permit** provided by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to the University of Queensland and operated by the APWF.
- Legislative changes are required across Australia** to make it legal to effectively manage semi-owned cats in this way. These cats are often found at multi-cat sites, frequently on private property. As un-desexed cats, they are often a source of complaints and subsequent impoundment and are at high risk of euthanasia.

“ I wouldn't be without them. They are the reason I get up. ”

“ They are my babies. It's sort of like they are my kids. ”

Quotes from
Mutli-Cat Carers

Social Science – Pending Publication



Article

Impacts of a local government funded free cat sterilization program for owned and semi-owned cats.

Jennifer Cotterell ¹, Jacquie Rand^{1, 2}, Tamsin S. Barnes² and Rebekah Scotney ²

In 2013, the city of Banyule (VIC) funded a program offering free desexing, microchipping and registration, particularly targeted to three low-socioeconomic suburbs with the highest rate of cat-related complaints and impoundments. Over 8 years, **33 cats/1000 residents were sterilized in the target suburbs, and 6.5 cats/1000 residents city-wide.**

The program was **operated by the Animal Management Officers and microtargeted to locations of calls to council for cat-related complaints and found cats.**

Over the 8-year program, there was a city-wide **decrease in impoundments by 66%, euthanasia 82%, and cat related calls by 40%.** The council realised **cost savings of \$440,660** associated with **reduced costs for cat-related calls** to council (\$137,170) and **charges** from the contracted welfare agency (\$303,490), for an outlay of \$77,490 for desexing costs.

Read the Animals Journal end of May 2024 for the article

https://www.mdpi.com/journal/animals/special_issues/Advances_Sheltering

Pending submission

Cat Ownership, Semi-ownership, And Preferences For Stray Cat Management In An Australian Community



This study aims to increase understanding of factors and behaviours associated with cat ownership and semi-ownership. Additionally, it investigates the attitude within Australian communities regarding stray cats and **preferences for how stray cats should be managed and their predictors.**

When given no additional information regarding wellbeing benefits for humans, animals and the environment, the **majority of respondents preferred desexing (65%) as a means of stray-cat management, compared to 35% who preferred killing,** which aligns with previous research (Rand 2019, Kim 2023, Deak 2021).

Respondents indicated that for cat management programs, the greatest importance to them was to **stop kittens being born (94%) and to decrease killing of birds and small native animals (91%).** These outcomes should be incorporated into community messaging to increase support for community cat programs.

Social Science -Current & Future Projects

A One Welfare Approach To Rural Cat Management: Exploring The Lived Experiences Of Farmers Managing Multiple Farm Cats

- Our previous research indicated that farmers have a different relationship with farm cats, indicating that they view them more as **valuable working animals** than as pets.
- The aim of this study is to document the **impact** of assistive-centered cat management, based on **cat desexing**, on those who live and work on farms, and to explore the perceived impact on the welfare of the cats. We also are also investigating **farmers' opinions and potential impacts for them of the Australian Tax Office classifying cats on farms as working cats**, allowing their care, including desexing costs, to be tax deductible.
- Initial findings are that diary farmers indicated that **cats save money** and are a **necessity on diary farms to prevent costly and disruptive rodent damage to electrical wiring** and to **avoid** having to use **toxic rodent baits**.
- Some farmers mentioned that **their cats do more work than their working dogs**.
- Their **working dogs and rodent poisons are tax deductible**, so farmers questioned **why aren't cats?**
- They said it would provide an **incentive to desex the cats** and provide more care, **improving their welfare**, reducing nuisance issues and **benefit wildlife**.

Shifting Towards An Assistive-centered Urban Cat Management Strategy: The Impacts On Animal Management Officers

- The aim of this study is to explore the impact of assistive-centered cat management, based on desexing, **on the animal management officers who are implementing it**.
- We aim to interview animal management officers who have **previously used enforcement-centered cat management** but have started **implementing assistive-centered cat management based on desexing**. We hope to document the impact the new management strategy has had on animal management officers' **wellbeing, job satisfaction and relationship with the community**.

If you are interested in supporting these or other future projects, please contact info@petwelfare.org.au for more information



“ I have no problems because I know the Program is going to do what's best for the cat and what's best for me, and I trust them. ”

Ecology Research Update

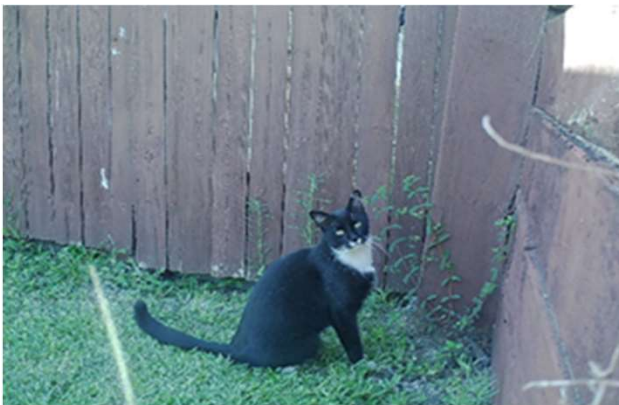
- The Community Cat Program **aims to sustainably reduce stray cat populations** through desexing cats in urban areas with high free-roaming cat densities, targeting overpopulation and euthanasia reduction. As of April 2024, 2750 cats have been desexed, helping control population growth and support wildlife coexistence.

Aims of Ecology Research

- The aim of our ecology research is to determine if the **numbers of free-roaming cats** decrease over 5 years **after implementing a community cat program**, and how cats and land-use influence wildlife numbers.
- Combining targeted cat desexing with rigorous monitoring, the program is committed to **evidence-based practices to manage urban cat population overpopulation while promoting coexistence with native wildlife.**

Methods of Ecology Research

- We are using **motion-detecting cameras (camera traps)** in **3 target suburbs** (Rosewood, Goodna, and Redbank Plains) where the community cat program began in 2020 -21. With the help of staff and volunteers, we are gathering data for longitudinally quantifying the **urban free-roaming cat population and understanding the dynamics between urban cats and wildlife.**
- Despite theoretic calculations of alarming numbers of native animals killed by cats, the few Australian studies published to date have **not demonstrated any measurable effect of the presence of cats in urban areas on populations of birds and small native mammals.** However, it is **critical more population studies are performed** in other locations (none are from Queensland). Factors such as housing density, distance from bushland, and vegetation characteristics were demonstrated to play crucial roles in determining wildlife abundance and diversity.
- We are incorporating landscape use patterns into the analysis to **discern the factors influencing wildlife** presence in urban areas, **thereby informing effective management strategies benefiting both cats and wildlife.**



Left – typical day-time image of cat on camera trap (night images are grey & white).

Right – Dr Kate Dutton-Register installing camera-trap.



Ecology Research Update (cont)

Progress to date

- Now in its **fourth year**, we are deploying 50 cameras biannually (during both summer and winter) per suburb, documenting activity. **Since 2000, 8 data rounds have been completed**, with the 9th beginning soon.
- Improvements in camera deployment have **optimised image capture and processing**, reducing setup times and image backlog, enhancing efficiency.
- These improvements have streamlined both the camera deployment process and image processing, **reducing the setup time from three to two days** and the number of images per round from 700,000 in the early rounds to approximately 175,000 in the latest round. This efficiency has **allowed for faster processing and reduced the backlog of images** needing review.

Data analysis

- For camera image processing, we have transitioned to using **'EcoAssist'**, This **software categorises images for quicker processing**, supporting volunteer identification efforts.
- Approximately **1.6 million images have been processed to date** and are currently investigating the scope of **AI tools for animal identification** at the individual level to further refine the process.
- Images for the baseline rounds (Round 1 and 2) are still in progress due to the large volume of images to be processed (~1.2 million). Previous date errors have now been fixed and Round 1 is approximately 60% processed. **Processing is complete for Rounds 3 - 6; Round 7 is 80% complete and Round 8 is currently in progress.**
- By leveraging **data-driven insights and collaborative partnerships**, the program strives to achieve **sustainable reductions in stray cat populations** and **create healthier environments for both animals and humans alike.**



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0010 051F 10C 07/07/2023

Top to Bottom – day-time image of bird on camera trap vs night images of cat.

“

[The Community Cat Program has] allowed us to make a difference and having that support has meant that I can now think of what else I can do in the community to help.

”

Team Spotlight

Dr Kate Dutton-Regester



Dr. Kate is our Ecology Research Officer. With a background in Wildlife Reproduction and Veterinary Epidemiology, Kate seamlessly integrates her expertise into our operations. Kate leads our Community Cat Program, overseeing camera monitoring and cat tracking initiatives. Her role involves data collection, analysis, and publication preparation, alongside coordinating our invaluable volunteers.

Kate shares her knowledge on Wildlife Reproduction and Veterinary Epidemiology as a lecture at The University of Queensland. Her passion for animal welfare and wildlife conservation drives her commitment to our research efforts, aiming for evidence-based improvements in stray cat management. Off duty, Kate enjoys motherhood with two children and shares her home with two ginger cats, embodying her dedication to family and feline welfare.

Kate completed her PhD in the reproductive biology of short-beaked echidnas.

Thanks To Our Partners

Core

AWL Qld, Bridgette Bardot Foundation, The Cat Protection Society (NSW), Cheltenham Cat Rescue, Greencross Vets (QLD), Ipswich City Council, Maneki Neko Cat Rescue, Microchips Australia, MSD Animal Health, Neighborhood Cats (USA), Pet Rescue, Petbarn Foundation, Pets Regardless Foundation, RSPCA (QLD), SPCAi, Sydney Dogs & Cats Home

National Network

AIAM, Animal Aid Victoria, Animals Australia, AWL NSW, Cat Haven, Cherished Pets Foundation, CANA, Department Of Agriculture And Fisheries (QLD), Four Paws, GAWS, G2Z, Just Cats, Meow & Friends Community Vet, Pets Medical Crisis, SCAR, Westside Community Desexing, WIRES (NSW)

International Network

Alley Cat Advocates (USA), Human Animal Support Services (HASS), International Cat Care (Icc), International Companion Animal Management (ICAM), SPCAi, Vier Pfoeten International

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COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAM
 Protecting people, cats & wildlife

