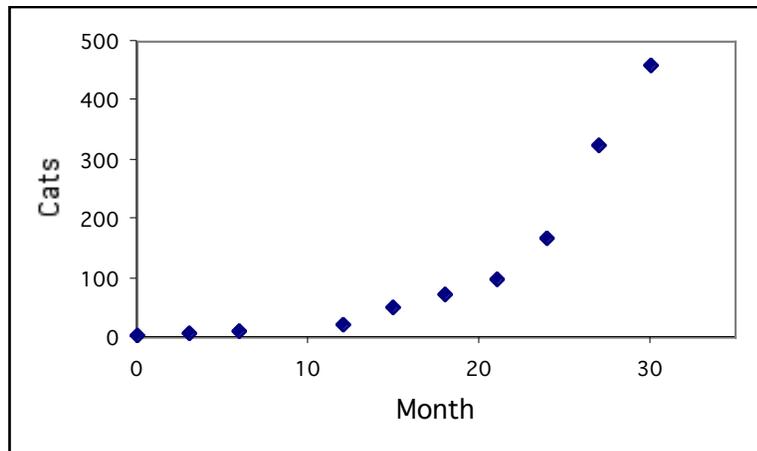


Other researchers have forecast kitten numbers well beyond the 2 years we predicted. At 7 years, kitten #781,250 is born. Even if one limits each cat to a single year of reproduction, you reach 174,760 cats at 7 years.



Feral cat populations are studied frequently, because cats have important impacts on human health and the environment. Human health effects are most notorious in the Middle East, where rabies is very common. A feral cat caught in Israel is generally a dead cat due to the fear of rabies. Where we live in the U.S., we worry most about toxoplasmosis (a parasitic disease cats can give

people) and cat scratch fever (a severe infection from cat bites and scratches that, while uncommon, can be fatal). Environmentally, free-roaming cats have been blamed for contributing to a recent decline in the United States songbird populations. Birds comprise approximately 20-30% of a free-roaming cat's diet. There is no accurate count of the number of feral cats in the U.S., but estimates range from 10 million to 50 million. If each cat eats 1 or 2 birds per day, you can do the math.

Our question regarding how long it takes to get to 187 cats assumes adequate food and no illness or mortality. How reasonable are these assumptions? On one hand, local cat colonies tend to stay much smaller than 187 cats. There simply isn't enough food to support that many cats in close proximity. As colonies get larger, cats get sick, starve, or leave and migrate to other areas. As anyone who has tried to catch and remove cats from a farm knows, if you get rid of the local cats new ones move in very quickly.

However, when there is sufficient food and migration is impossible, colonies can grow to much larger sizes. Scientists introduced 5 cats as pets to Marion Island in the Sub-Antarctic area of South Africa in 1949 (the island is about 10 miles long and approximately round in shape). In 1975, the cat population was estimated at 2,139 as a single colony. An unscientific report put the number at 3,400 in 1977. Such a high concentration of cats is an unpleasant thing. They fight over territory, they go hungry, and unvaccinated cats in close contact get **a lot** of illnesses.

A colony's territorial behavior can be exploited as a means of population control. As most farmers know, once a barn gets a few cats, they keep other cats away. If you can spay and neuter the cats on a farm, you get no new kittens. And because the adult cats aren't reproducing, they have lower food requirements. A stable population remains much healthier. One study showed that after a

“vaccinate-alter-and-release” program, 70% of the cats survived at the site of the study for up to 5 years.

So, spay and neuter your cats! Spayed female cats have a lower incidence of cancer. Decreasing the free-roaming cat population helps the environment, reduces public health risks, and also contributes to animal welfare. With between 5 million and 7 million cats euthanized in animal shelters in the US each year, we don't need more litters.

Bright Eyes & Bushy Tails is a housecall and full-service veterinary hospital serving the Iowa City area. Offering a full range of services from home visits to intensive care in the hospital (including overnight monitoring), we take pride in providing high-quality, personalized medical care for pets of all types. If you have questions about your pet's health, please don't hesitate to call us. We answer our telephone or pager 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For more information, please read the enclosed flyer or visit our web site at <http://www.BREBT.com>

Again, thank you for your participation in the Adoptathon!

Gratefully yours,

Allan L. Berger, DVM, PhD

Jennifer L. Berger, DVM

The Animal Shelter still has animals to adopt. If you need a pet (and who doesn't...), please call them!

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