



Spring 2022

SNIPPETS

News from the SD West River Spay/Neuter Coalition

Edited by: Donna Watson, Shari Rose
Layout: Donnette Thayer

KITTEN EXPLOSION!



Western South Dakota experienced a kitten explosion in the fall of 2021! For months every area animal shelter and rescue group overflowed with kittens. Covid related maybe? Whatever the reason, thousands of kittens were born in our area, and many wound up in shelters. Over the months heading into winter, most shelter kittens found loving homes, while adult cats watched and waited in their cages. Even now if you visit any pet shelter/website you'll see photos of beautiful adoptable adult cats abandoned by their people, whether through death or desertion. Through the long weeks of kitten season they waited. They're waiting still. So please, whether you have just one cat or several, consider adopting an adult cat (or two!) from any of our area shelters. And make sure to tell friends about the Coalition so we can prevent more kittens and cats from spending weeks and even months of their short lives in cages.

Contact us by mail or through our website or Facebook page

South Dakota West River Spay/Neuter Coalition
P.O. Box 286
Deadwood, SD 57732
605-593-5550
<http://spayneutercoalition.com/>



Like us on Facebook!
West River Spay Neuter
Coalition

"There's a good and a bad thing about rescuing cats. The good, we get to help them, the bad, we have to give them away."

*--Jonah Braning, 11, Son of trapper Michelle Braning and
Honorary Coalition Volunteer*

HAPPY TAILS



Yuki & Keesa: We received a call from a Rapid City woman in a mobile home court upset at witnessing young boys tossing a kitten back and forth like a ball. She watched as the kitten escaped and limped off under a mobile home, and wondered what to do. The Coalition volunteer persuaded the caller to take the homeless cat to a vet, with a volunteer agreeing to personally pay the cost. X-rays showed that her

bones were intact and she had no serious injuries. The caller, who didn't want the cat, released her back into the courtyard where she rejoined her sibling under a mobile home. A Coalition volunteer picked up both kittens to be fostered and fixed. Eventually the bonded pair found a home together.



out her basement window and see a cat in the window well. She realized he must have been there for three days because there were no paw prints in the snow. He gobbled food but would not allow her to touch him. She realized the cat was injured and probably feral, and began calling around for help. Shari, a Coalition volunteer, came to the rescue, threw a towel over the cat, picked him up and dropped him into a trap. The next morning at 7:30 a.m., Shari took him to All Creatures Veterinary Service, and we were so appreciative that Dr. Falcon worked Gilbert into his busy schedule. X-rays showed no broken bones, although the neutered cat was severely bruised and had trouble walking, which Dr. Falcon said was probably the result of being hit by a car. He also mentioned that x-rays showed several badly healed injuries and missing and broken teeth. Marty Miracle offered to keep Gilbert in a spare room while he recovered. After a month, she released him into her barn where he has food and shelter and never has to worry about cars. Here he is on his way to Marty's for recovery.



Ghost: Gayle and Tom feed outdoor cats and on June 2nd they spotted "Ghost" (named because they rarely see him), with a jar stuck on his head. They grabbed him but couldn't get the jar off and he took off. That evening a neighbor saw their dog run Ghost up a tree about 15 feet and watched in horror as he fell. He survived and somehow scurried off like a shot,



with the jar still on his head! The neighborhood was on the lookout for him and on June 7th a neighbor saw his dogs chase Ghost under their shed. After getting him in a carrier, they started calling around and someone suggested calling the Coalition. A volunteer advised them to take him to the Northern Hills Veterinary Clinic, and said the Coalition would help with expenses. Jenny Porter, DVM, and Jade, vet tech managed to remove the jar from the cat's head, treat the sores, give him antibiotics, but said chances weren't great. As it turned out, he did survive and occasionally Ghost is now seen on the trail cam when he comes for dinner.



Luna: Robin, who claims she's not a cat person, moved into the Rapid Valley area and heard tiny meowing in a wood pile for two days before finding Luna. She didn't know



what to do and called the Coalition. Our volunteer Shari picked up eye meds from Dr. Tom. Robin's sister adopted Luna, and recently Robin has called the Coalition for help with four more cats. A new recruit to the cause!

Church: Michelle and Mark rescued a sickly litter of four kittens from behind an abandoned church (one died). Michelle eventually placed two kittens but worried about Church, who had shallow breathing and trouble swallowing, and was



HAPPY TAILS

(continued)

getting worse. A kind donor paid the cost for surgery at Dakota Hills in Rapid City to remove a polyp in the cat's throat and nasal passages. Immediately after surgery Church could breath, eat and purr! Here he is a week later with his new friend. Michelle found Church a purrfect home.



Rosie: Every now and again someone contacts us for advice on how to capture an injured feral cat. (And yes, it can sometimes mean euthanasia.)

We received a call on Thanksgiving Day about a cat the caller had seen for the past month or two with a severely broken front leg. Jennifer took the caller a trap and gave instructions on how to use it. Not until two weeks later did the poor cat go into the trap. As it turned out, the cat's owner had left Rosie behind when they'd moved several months earlier. The next day, Dr. Vicki Acosta, Cook Vet Clinic, amputated the cat's leg. Jennifer found Rosie a foster home. The foster found Rosie to be a sweet, loving girl despite being in excruciating pain. A fundraiser enabled us to cover Rosie's expenses. A woman experienced with disabled cats adopted Rosie who now lives indoors in luxury.

Homer: Holly cares for a small feral Rapid City colony. She trapped him for TNR, but noting the condition of his eye, called the Coalition asking what do. The volunteer called around for a vet who could see him ASAP. Holly drove an hour to get Homer to the Belle Fourche Veterinary Clinic. She then ran a fundraiser that covered the cost of having his eye removed, pain meds, etc. After two days rest and recovery from eye surgery at the vet's, Homer was neutered. Holly took him home and released him back into his colony. Holly provides shelter and food for cats in her neighborhood, and reports that she sees Homer from time to time, doing quite well!



Old Man: We caught Old Man during our big June TNR event. Missing an eye and with limited vision in the other eye, the poor guy was just trying to fend for himself in his senior years. After being treated and altered, Old Man went home with a wonderful adopter who has provided him with

an indoor/ outdoor catio where he can live out his days in

leisure with a feral buddy.

Ralph: Ralph has a sad story (we think it's funny) to share. He found a great place to live, hunt, bottomless food dish, etc, BUT took off in search of the ladies before his voucher could be used. Toms will travel up to two miles looking for a mate. He THOUGHT he found a honeypot of a colony to hit up, not realizing the colony was currently being TNR'd. In the meantime, his guardians were devastated as a month had passed and he really is a sweet cuddly guy they were missing. Anyway, he returned home - with a tipped ear (we all know what that means). He's tired and a little embarrassed, but his guardians are thrilled. Now that he's neutered, his #1 priority is food and shelter. ♦



THANK YOU RIGHT BACK

We help a lot of people and the cats they care for, who are often not even their own. We understand that TNR takes time they probably don't have, so we are always pleased when someone takes a moment to write us a thank-you note. Here is one example:

"We want to thank you so much. These last group of cats that we are catching have been 13 females and four males so far. All of these were homeless because the lady feeding them was in a terrible accident. The cats were running all over eating whatever they could find. I talked to the lady's relatives and they had absolutely no interest in feeding them. The kitties would've had a most miserable winter. And even worse than that, if they would have lived through the winter and each of those 13 females had only four babies each in the spring, that would've been 52 baby kittens!!! And then there would've been more in the fall, and those kitties that are born in the fall always seem to be sick and miserable and most of them die. It is a very nice gift that you give to the cats. (and to us) Thank you so much."

Thank you right back for helping save cats' lives through spay and neuter, whether it's yesterday, today or tomorrow!

We are proud to be an all-volunteer nonprofit organization. Over 95% of your donations directly fund spay/neuter surgeries.

NOTES FROM A TRAPPER

by Michelle Braning



What does TNR mean to me? It's compassion, action, an array of emotions, education, and awareness, and finally sharing. Sharing my new learned knowledge with others and helping another person who is where I was a year ago. Seeing a need, seeking out a solution and following through. Giving each other the support we need. And sometimes just someone to listen, lend a shoulder to cry on.

For several years my children and I noticed the increasing number of cats living in an alley. They loved adding a drive down the alley on our route doing errands. Seeing the different breeds, the new kittens, and their antics. And then we started noticing some were acting sick, eyes swollen, bum legs, and some were terribly skinny. I reached out to a friend and cat lover, Lori Tetreault (a cat rescue rock star), and she pointed me in the direction of WRSNC for financial help and encouragement. Lori lent me some traps, showed me how to work them and shared her tried and tested techniques. I became addicted right out of the gate. It was the thrill of the hunt, but not to kill, to save. I quickly learned that some cats aren't as gullible as the others. This was going to take time, patience, and creativity.

As we caught more, I remember thinking this is okay, I can do this: catch them, a night at the vet to be spay/neutered and back out to freedom. Then the reality hit me hard: what do I do with the sick/injured ones? The tame ones? The kittens? The vet won't alter the sick ones, which meant I had to care for them and get them better so I could continue with my simple plan. How do I give meds to a feral cat?! What about the ones too sick to help, is it up to me to decide their fate? Then there are the ones that show how much they appreciate you rescuing them by giving

you snuggles. How could I just release a tame cat that has already felt the abandonment of their human. Oh boy, then come the kittens. Too young to be altered and young enough to have a chance to be loved and protected by a human. I had so many questions -- who had the answers? Mostly what I heard was "It's up to you." I didn't want this job, I just wanted to TNR!

Then I realized that I had become the guardian of a cat colony. I loved the feeling of having a moment in their lives, one that would change theirs forever. No one told me I would be faced with the full responsibility of making these decisions. Or that I would choose their food, meds, and medical care over my bills. No one told me I would fall in love with them. No one warned me I would have my heart broken. I let my heart guide me, to show me the way. It doesn't always feel good, it hurts, aches at times even. But I can't forget who this is about and why. Them - the ones that were born wild, the ones that are fighting to live daily. The ones that have been left behind and forgotten. The sick and injured. The catnapped and dumped.

What my family has done to help these cats is nothing compared to what they have given and allowed my family to feel, learn and experience. While helping others to trap, I have made several friends and learned new things like canning foods (Janelle)! They have become a part of my life. My children can recognize the moment to feel sympathetic and show compassion towards others even if they are the fuzzy kind. They know to respond, to act, and not just to keep driving down the alley like a tourist. We have seen the difference our efforts have made, maybe not in the world but in our world, our community, our colony. ●

BEFORE & AFTER

Making a difference in the lives of cats and the people who care



Apple: Michelle found this female while trapping in the Newell Alley Cat Colony. She was undernourished, sickly, had ring worm and took two months for her to recover. Janet adopted her and named her after her favorite childhood doll.



Looker: Michelle also found this kitty, not sure how she could see to get around, but take a look at what happens with a little compassion and eye meds. When she went for her spay, though, the vet noticed that she was a boy! Neutered and happy, and looking good.

Sure, these Happy Tails and Before and After stories show a lot of kitty lives saved, a lot of pain relieved, but with your help we can bring that number down even more. You don't have to be an active trapper or a colony caretaker or spend hours volunteering for an animal rescue group. What you can do – as a person who cares – is simply reach out and help any abandoned, stray or starving animal that crosses your path. And if you have time to volunteer – hey! We'd sure like to hear from you!

SOME INTERESTING TNR EFFORTS

Belle Fourche – Neighborhood Angels. Belle Fourche neighbors Anita Ulrich and Shelley Stetter started seeing a lot of cats scrounging for food and found they came from the abandoned home of a recently deceased neighbor. The retired women sprang into action, took home the tamest cats and contacted the Coalition to borrow traps, get instructions on trapping, and financial help with the cost of fixing all the cats. Over a month's time they rescued, altered and placed 16 cats! Kudos to these amazing women for their Herculean rescue effort! And thanks also to Crystal Sowell, who provided food and necessary supplies, and to Darla Raber and Lori Tetreault for calling daily and offering help. Our heartfelt thanks to the Belle Fourche Veterinary Clinic for fixing them all.

Newell – Town Colonies. May 2021, Michelle Braning from Nisland decided to do something about an ever-increasing number of cats in the neighboring town of Newell (see her "Notes From a Trapper" article above). With help from the Coalition, Michelle trapped 54 cats from three separate colonies. She also raised funds to cover tests and medicine for ear mites, ringworm and FeLV testing and she and Mark cleaned up a back alley area and built a feeding station. She found homes for tame adults and kittens, and released the feral cats back into the colony she feeds and monitors. Kudos to Michelle and Mark, and our gratitude to the Belle Fourche Animal Clinic for altering and providing medical care for the cats.

Spearfish – Mobile Home Park. Lori Tetreault completed another productive two years of TNR, responsible for fixing a total of 113 cats! Of these, 45 were from the Walnut Park Mobile Home Park in 2020, 69 from that park in 2021, 12 from an apartment complex in Sturgis and four from random locations in the Whitewood area. Only eighteen of the trapped cats were tame, and Lori found them homes along with several litters of kittens. Sadly, two cats had to be euthanized due to severe injuries and one kitten died. Lori estimates that many more unaltered tame and feral cats survive under mobile homes in Walnut Park. Thanks goes out to the Spearfish Animal Hospital for their vital help with this enormous project.

1880 Town: Concerned employee, Lisa Osborn at 1880 Town, called for help with altering a small colony at that tourist location. We found a vet in the relatively nearby town of Milesville willing to accept a reduced rate for spay/neuter. Lisa did TNR on all eight cats, returned six ferals and placed two tame cats in indoor homes. (Golden Veterinary Service)

Newcastle WY – Area Colonies. For several years Ginger Field has been rescuing cats and doing TNR on colonies in the border counties of Dewey (SD) and Weston (WY). Due to a lack of funds, she would release trapped males

and only take in the females to be altered. After being referred by our new veterinarian partners from Salt Creek Vet Services, Ginger called us for help. Her first colony of 11 cats belonged to an elderly woman living in dire conditions (no running water). The second colony was at a junk yard where 10 cats receive good care, but were not altered. The third colony of 15 cats, located near SD Highway 85, had an elderly caretaker who had been hospitalized and could not return home. Ginger placed the feral cats from the 1st and 3rd colonies into vetted barn homes and adopted out the kittens and friendly cats. Currently she is doing TNR in a downtown Newcastle alley. (Salt Creek Veterinary Clinic)

Caputa – Abandoned Barn Cats. Kristi Howie moved to a farm near Caputa and found the previous owners had left twelve cats in the barn. (Unfortunately, this happens frequently). Kristi took responsibility and with financial help from the Coalition, trapped, transported and paid a portion of the cost to alter all of the abandoned cats. (Northern Hills Veterinary Clinic)

Rapid City – Campground off Hwy. 16. Libby cares for a small stabilized colony in a campground near her home, always keeping an eye out for newcomer cats. When that happens, she calls the Coalition for help. During 2020 and 2021, Libby TNR'd eight more cats. She provides food and shelter for all. (LFC Veterinary Service)

Rapid City - Country Road Colonies. A major TNR spay/neuter event took place simultaneously in June, 2021 at two locations: a junk yard off Country Road and a mobile home park off East North Street. Volunteers Heidi Herren and Jennifer Cramer organized the event. Operation Pets provided veterinarians for the surgeries. The Coalition covered the cost of surgeries and Coalition volunteers assisted with the TNR event. Volunteers set 50 traps and caught 42 cats. In one trap they found a sad old feral guy and wondered what to do with him. (see Old Man's story, this issue.) By the end of the year, volunteers had trapped 24 more cats from these two colonies. During this time Jennifer pulled out several kittens that were fostered, domesticated, fixed and adopted. (Operation Pets)

Hill City – Town Cats. Kiki has been trapping homeless cats in and around Hill City for several years. During 2020 and 2021, she did TNR on 53 cats! When someone threatened to remove and destroy all of the cats in one of her controlled colonies, Kiki re-trapped them and took them home to a temporary enclosure she built. The ones she couldn't find suitable homes for she integrated into the colony she cares for and continues to monitor traditional Hill City cat dumpsites. (LFC Veterinary Service)

Philip – Abandoned Barn Cats. Late last year Emily Gittings from Philip contacted the Coalition about a colony of

TNR EFFORTS

(continued)

15-20 cats left behind in the barn after previous residents moved. With our Black Hills vets so far away, we contacted the Milesville vet who had helped with the 1880 town colony, and he agreed to honor a Coalition voucher. So far Emily has trapped four females and five males. (Golden Veterinary Service)

Custer – Rural Colony. When an elderly caretaker died, she left a large colony of unaltered cats. In a spirit of cooperation, neighbors and volunteers from Battle Mountain Humane Society, STARS and the Coalition orchestrated a huge TNR effort. They removed and altered 38 cats from this colony with the Coalition paying the cost. Volunteers relocated feral cats to barn homes and placed tame cats and kittens in foster homes. Neighbors keep a look out for any stragglers. A heartfelt thank you to the LFC Veterinary

Service in Custer (24 cats!) and the Salt Creek vets in Newcastle (11 cats!) for helping with this colony of abandoned cats.

These are just some of the colonies we've helped. We provide TNR assistance to many smaller colonies, in addition to providing financial help to country folks who step up when a pregnant cat or a cat with kittens shows up. These kind cat people are often willing to foster while finding the cat or kittens forever homes. They do the hard work. We do our best to help. ●

SPECIAL COALITION PROGRAMS & EVENTS

HAPPY NEU-ter YEAR SPECIAL: In December 2020 before kitten season got underway, we came up with this idea to bring in more male cats at a big discount since some people do not fix the males because "they don't get pregnant". Our vet partners jumped on this idea! Dr. Vicki Acosta at Cook Vet Clinic even decided to dedicate a clinic specifically for males - 30 neuters January 2021! Our other vet partners joined in and accepted vouchers. Our goal was 100 and we surpassed that with 122 males altered before the end of March!

Feral Fix Program: An arrangement with All Creatures allowed us to issue vouchers for feral cats through our Feral Fix Program. In 2020, Dr. Falcon altered 106 cats, and in 2021 he fixed 42 through this program.



Sex & The Kitty Spa(y) Day: Winter of 2020 we saw no one was trapping (too cold) and asked Dr. Falcon at All Creatures if he would consider accepting vouchers for this program for qualifying cat guardians (low income/confirmed rescuers). The Coalition helped with some of the cost depending on the situation. In 2021 Dr. Falcon spayed 33 females through this special program.

Cinco de Meow (2021): Donors raised approximately \$1,750 during this fun event sponsored by Christy Land's fabulous venue, the Wine Cellar in RC. Another fiesta is in the works for 2022. Ole!

Special Partnership: City of Belle Fourche. Ordinance Officer Clint Haffner has joined forces with the Coalition by using an umbrella Coalition voucher to help low-income folks in Belle Fourche with the cost of fixing their cats through the Belle Fourche Veterinary Clinic. We are delighted by this partnership! ●



Rapid City: Shari Rose, Jennifer Cramer, Heidi Herren

Lead: Donna Watson

Deadwood: Sarah McEvoy, Dianne Verba, Donnette Thayer

Belle Fourche: Carol Markeson, Sandy Kringen, Beth Morey, Karen Hofmann

Whitewood: Lori Tetreault

Nisland: Michelle, Mark, and Jonah Braning

Welcome, New Vets!

Our wonderful vets:	
All Creatures Veterinary Hospital	Rapid City, SD
Animal Medical Center	Gillette, WY
Belle Fourche Veterinary Clinic	Belle Fourche, SD
Cook Veterinary Clinic	Rapid City, SD
Country Cats	Lead, SD
Faith Veterinary Clinic	Faith, SD
LFC Veterinary Service	Custer, SD
Northern Hills Veterinary Clinic	Sturgis, SD
Salt Creek Veterinary Clinic	Newcastle, WY
Spearfish Animal Hospital	Spearfish, SD
Spencer Veterinary Clinic	Spencer, NE
Milesville Veterinary Clinic	Milesville, SD

Salt Creek Veterinary Clinic, Newcastle WY. In August, 2021 Lindsey Marrotte-Sudbrink, DVM and her husband David Sudbrink, DVM joined forces with us to save cats' lives. Dr. Lindsey has extensive experience with high volume spay/neuter, and has agreed to alter cats from large (5+) colonies.

Spencer Veterinary Service, Spencer, NE. In November 2021 we received a call from Corey Finnegan, DVM, in Spencer, Nebraska. He had fixed several barn cats for a senior client who still had many (20+) intact cats left to be done, and wondered if the Coalition could help her with the cost of altering them. Of course we could! We greatly appreciate Dr. Corey reaching out to us.

Milesville Veterinary Clinic, Milesville, SD. Early in 2020, James Stangle, DVM, agreed to a reduced spay/neuter cost to alter cats living at the 1880 town (above). So now thanks to Dr. Stangle, if you go to the tourist site you will see a colony of happy fixed "town" kitties! In the past year, Dr. Stangle has altered cats in two other small feral colonies in that area.



Calling All Vets

At this time, we have only one veterinarian performing regular clinics in Rapid City, and none there that accept vouchers, so we send a lot of people to Custer, Sturgis, etc. If you're a veterinarian reading this, please, please, give some thought to helping us save cats' lives. Whether it's one cat spay or neuter a week or ten in a month or a reduced cost clinic once in awhile – we're not proud, we'll take anything! Those we help have limited incomes or are confirmed trappers who sometimes find cats in life-threatening situations. Thank you!!!

Yes, I want to help.

My gift amount is: _____

My gift is given (optional)

- In memory of (deceased - cats OK!): _____
- In honor of (living - cats OK!): _____
- I would like my gift to be anonymous.

Your name: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State, ZIP: _____

Please make your checks payable to **South Dakota West River Spay/Neuter Coalition**.
 Send to: **The Coalition, P.O. Box 286, Deadwood, SD 57732**
 Donate online at facebook.com/WestRiverSpayNeuterCoalition or spayneutercoalition.com

