

## Chain of Collars

By Peter Marsh

Nine summers ago, animal protection groups in New Hampshire made a paper collar for each animal who had been put to death in a shelter during the first seven months of the year: "Oswald: three month old tri-color kitten;" "F. cat--tortoiseshell--name unknown--about three years old;" "Scout--Lab X--loved Frisbee." Some of us kept a single collar as a remembrance. I still have mine. It reads "Black-Grey Tabby Cat--Four Months Old--#849."

On a huge lawn in front of the State Capitol we began stringing all the collars together one August afternoon for a candlelight vigil to be held that evening. Little by little, the buzz of friends working together on a project died down as, one by one, we began to realize how long the Chain of Collars was going to be. It stretched almost a mile!

Before this, no one spoke much in public about the tragic toll that pet overpopulation was taking in our state. If we did, people asked us not to, saying that they couldn't stand to hear about it. When a photo of a kitten silhouetted against the open door of a shelter's cremation furnace appeared in a local newspaper a few years before, the public outcry had been furious. Not against pet overpopulation or irresponsible pet caretakers, but against the paper for publishing the photo and a story about it. In their heart of hearts most people knew that the deaths of so many loyal and trusting companions were unspeakable. So they asked us to act accordingly.

After the Chain of Collars, though, we felt we had to talk about it. For years, we'd tried not involving the public, as people had asked. That hadn't worked. Nothing changed. It seemed like the killing would go on forever.

We decided we not only had to tell people about it, we had to get them to help. As the Activist Equation puts it "TALK - ACTION = 0." We came to admit to ourselves that we couldn't win the fight against pet overpopulation alone. And it was only fair that everyone should pitch in. Just because we've come forward to rescue animals from other people's failures is no reason why the job should fall to us alone. Pet overpopulation isn't a shelter problem; it's everyone's. Or should be. And everyone stands to gain by solving it.

So we got a demonstration permit and strung the Chain of Collars from 40 full size STOP signs along the streets that framed the Capitol grounds. Everyone entering the State House had to pass through it. That fall we put together a legislative campaign to get state-funded neutering assistance programs for low-income pet caretakers and people who adopt cats and dogs from shelters. I knew we were making progress during a legislative hearing when one of the legislators looked up at the ceiling while a shelter worker told about a sweet cat she had put to death that morning. Tears rolled down his cheek. Later he became one of our strongest supporters.

To many, the legislative campaign seemed like a luxury we couldn't afford. Who had the time? All of us were already working flat out in an adrenaline-driven panic, rushing from one crisis to the next.

It turns out it was the best investment we could have made.

More than nine thousand kittens and cats had died in our shelters the year we put the Chain of Collars together. Eight years later it's less than two thousand. Broken down more simply, every day twenty five fewer cats and dogs die in our shelters because our community has accepted its responsibility to end pet overpopulation. Even more simply, that four month old kitten whose collar I keep wouldn't have died today.

The lessons are unmistakable:

Effectively targeted neutering programs save lives

During the decade before the state-funded programs began, we'd hit a plateau. Year in and year out between 10,00 and 12,000 cats and dogs died in our shelters, despite several discount neutering programs that operated throughout the state.

This had happened in other parts of the country, too. One commentator has called it "hitting the wall." In California, for instance, the shelter death rate peaked in the mid 1970s and dropped steadily until the early '90s. It's leveled off since then. Recent research has shown why.

Discount or low-cost neutering programs and community education initiatives have achieved a remarkable increase in pet sterilization rates in middle- and upper-income households. In 1970, less than one out of every ten cats and dogs kept by Americans had been sterilized. Twenty years later, three out of every five dogs and four out every five household cats had been.

In low-income households, however, the pet sterilization rates remained much lower, because the lack of outside funding made it impossible to offer the subsidies needed to bring neutering within their reach. A discount program offering half-price surgeries is of no value to someone who still can't afford it. A 1994 study found that cats living in low-income households were more than twice as likely to be sexually intact as those living in middle- and upper-income households.

Our failure to develop affordable programs for low-income caretakers is what had put a brake on our progress, both in New Hampshire and other parts of the country. An increasing share of the victims of pet overpopulation came to be from poor communities. By 1995, the California shelter euthanasia rate in the 11 poorest counties was almost three times higher than that of the 12 richest counties. Three years later, the disparity in shelter deaths between rich and poor counties in New Jersey had become even greater.

Ending pet overpopulation, then, requires making neutering procedures as affordable and accessible for low-income pet caretakers as they are for everyone else. Once this gap is filled, the life-saving impact is dramatic. In New Hampshire the shelter death rate dropped 30% in the first year after we established an affordable low-income program. It has dropped even further every single year since then. Before that, New Hampshire's shelter death rate was the only the fourth lowest of the six New England states. Now it's not only the lowest of any state in the country, it could double and still be the lowest!

Effectively targeted neutering programs save money

To popularize neutering when pet sterilization rates were much lower, it was necessary to offer discount neutering programs to everyone. With the current high neutering rates, however, more than 75 cents of every dollar spent on untargeted subsidies is wasted to help pay for sterilizations that would have been done without them. Not only have open access neutering programs become prohibitively expensive, they can't offer high enough subsidies to reach those who contribute most to the problem. It's

the worst of both worlds. Not only are they wasteful, they're doomed to fail.

The reverse is true if subsidies are given only to those who truly need them. Targeted low-income programs save lives and money because every effective neuter (i.e. one that wouldn't have happened otherwise) prevents several impoundments over the next few years and almost every subsidy results in an effective neuter.

As a result, these programs are a good investment. They more than pay for themselves. During the first seven years after our neutering programs began, 37,210 fewer cats and dogs entered New Hampshire shelters than in the seven years before that. At an average cost of \$105 to impound and shelter each animal, the impoundment savings alone totaled \$3,907,050. To achieve this, the programs have spent only \$1,236,817. So every dollar spent on the programs its first seven years has saved \$3.15 in reduced impoundment costs so far.

Programs to end pet overpopulation are within the reach of every community

Targeted neutering subsidy programs offer assistance to such a limited group of pet caretakers that every community can afford them. The total yearly cost of the New Hampshire low-income program has been less than 15 cents per resident, including all administrative costs. Taking into account the low poverty rate here and the modest cost of living, comparable programs could be established in any part of the country for about 30 cents per person each year.

It shouldn't be hard to find this money. We already waste many times more than that on reactive programs that have no hope of ever reducing the problem. Animal control, impoundment and sheltering expenses cost taxpayers about \$3 a person every year, so a targeted neutering program could be established by increasing the local animal control budget about ten per cent or by reallocating a small fraction of the money now spent to impound and shelter the victims of overpopulation. The full cost of a low-income program could also be paid for by a \$10 increase in the differential license fee for intact pets. That way, those who won't have their companion animals neutered at least help those who can't.

Often ethics and economics point in confusingly different directions. Recycled products cost more. Cleaner air and water come only with a

price tag. Here the decision is a no-brainer. Effective neutering programs save money while saving lives. Everyone benefits, most of all the companions who have come to be our best friends on this small planet.

Peter Marsh  
Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets  
24 Montgomery Street  
Concord, N.H. 03301  
Phone: (603) 224-1877  
e-mail: pmarshlaw@hotmail.com  
October 12, 2001  
No More Homeless Pets

## Chain of Collars

By Peter Marsh

Nine summers ago, animal protection groups in New Hampshire made a paper collar for each animal who had been put to death in a shelter during the first seven months of the year: "Oswald: three month old tri-color kitten;" "F. cat--tortoiseshell--name unknown--about three years old;" "Scout--Lab X--loved Frisbee." Some of us kept a single collar as a remembrance. I still have mine. It reads "Black-Grey Tabby Cat--Four Months Old--#849."

On a huge lawn in front of the State Capitol we began stringing all the collars together one August afternoon for a candlelight vigil to be held that evening. Little by little, the buzz of friends working together on a project died down as, one by one, we began to realize how long the Chain of Collars was going to be. It stretched almost a mile!

Before this, no one spoke much in public about the tragic toll that pet overpopulation was taking in our state. If we did, people asked us not to, saying that they couldn't stand to hear about it. When a photo of a kitten silhouetted against the open door of a shelter's cremation furnace appeared in a local newspaper a few years before, the public outcry had been furious. Not against pet overpopulation or irresponsible pet caretakers, but against the paper for publishing the photo and a story about it. In their heart of hearts most people knew that the deaths of so many loyal and trusting companions were unspeakable. So they asked us to act accordingly.

After the Chain of Collars, though, we felt we had to talk about it. For years, we'd tried not involving the public, as people had asked. That hadn't worked. Nothing changed. It seemed like the killing would go on forever.

We decided we not only had to tell people about it, we had to get them to help. As the Activist Equation puts it "TALK - ACTION = 0." We came to admit to ourselves that we couldn't win the fight against pet overpopulation alone. And it was only fair that everyone should pitch in. Just because we've come forward to rescue animals from other people's failures is no reason why the job should fall to us alone. Pet overpopulation isn't a shelter problem; it's everyone's. Or should be. And everyone stands to gain by solving it.

So we got a demonstration permit and strung the Chain of Collars from 40 full size STOP signs along the streets that framed the Capitol grounds. Everyone entering the State House had to pass through it. That fall we put together a legislative campaign to get state-funded neutering assistance programs for low-income pet caretakers and people who adopt cats and dogs from shelters. I knew we were making progress during a legislative hearing when one of the legislators looked up at the ceiling while a shelter worker told about a sweet cat she had put to death that morning. Tears rolled down his cheek. Later he became one of our strongest supporters.

To many, the legislative campaign seemed like a luxury we couldn't afford. Who had the time? All of us were already working flat out in an adrenaline-driven panic, rushing from one crisis to the next.

It turns out it was the best investment we could have made.

More than nine thousand kittens and cats had died in our shelters the year we put the Chain of Collars together. Eight years later it's less than two thousand. Broken down more simply, every day twenty five fewer cats and dogs die in our shelters because our community has accepted its responsibility to end pet overpopulation. Even more simply, that four month old kitten whose collar I keep wouldn't have died today.

The lessons are unmistakable:

## Effectively targeted neutering programs save lives

During the decade before the state-funded programs began, we'd hit a plateau. Year in and year out between 10,00 and 12,000 cats and dogs died in our shelters, despite several discount neutering programs that operated throughout the state.

This had happened in other parts of the country, too. One commentator has called it "hitting the wall." In California, for instance, the shelter death rate peaked in the mid 1970s and dropped steadily until the early '90s. It's leveled off since then. Recent research has shown why.

Discount or low-cost neutering programs and community education initiatives have achieved a remarkable increase in pet sterilization rates in middle- and upper-income households. In 1970, less than one out of every ten cats and dogs kept by Americans had been sterilized. Twenty years later, three out of every five dogs and four out every five household cats had been.

In low-income households, however, the pet sterilization rates remained much lower, because the lack of outside funding made it impossible to offer the subsidies needed to bring neutering within their reach. A discount program offering half-price surgeries is of no value to someone who still can't afford it. A 1994 study found that cats living in low-income households were more than twice as likely to be sexually intact as those living in middle- and upper-income households.

Our failure to develop affordable programs for low-income caretakers is what had put a brake on our progress, both in New Hampshire and other parts of the country. An increasing share of the victims of pet overpopulation came to be from poor communities. By 1995, the California shelter euthanasia rate in the 11 poorest counties was almost three times higher than that of the 12 richest counties. Three years later, the disparity in shelter deaths between rich and poor counties in New Jersey had become even greater.

Ending pet overpopulation, then, requires making neutering procedures as affordable and accessible for low-income pet caretakers as they are for everyone else. Once this gap is filled, the life-saving impact is dramatic. In New Hampshire the shelter death rate dropped 30% in the first year

after we established an affordable low-income program. It has dropped even further every single year since then. Before that, New Hampshire's shelter death rate was the only the fourth lowest of the six New England states. Now it's not only the lowest of any state in the country, it could double and still be the lowest!

Effectively targeted neutering programs save money

To popularize neutering when pet sterilization rates were much lower, it was necessary to offer discount neutering programs to everyone. With the current high neutering rates, however, more than 75 cents of every dollar spent on untargeted subsidies is wasted to help pay for sterilizations that would have been done without them. Not only have open access neutering programs become prohibitively expensive, they can't offer high enough subsidies to reach those who contribute most to the problem. It's the worst of both worlds. Not only are they wasteful, they're doomed to fail.

The reverse is true if subsidies are given only to those who truly need them. Targeted low-income programs save lives and money because every effective neuter (i.e. one that wouldn't have happened otherwise) prevents several impoundments over the next few years and almost every subsidy results in an effective neuter.

As a result, these programs are a good investment. They more than pay for themselves. During the first seven years after our neutering programs began, 37,210 fewer cats and dogs entered New Hampshire shelters than in the seven years before that. At an average cost of \$105 to impound and shelter each animal, the impoundment savings alone totaled \$3,907,050. To achieve this, the programs have spent only \$1,236,817. So every dollar spent on the programs its first seven years has saved \$3.15 in reduced impoundment costs so far.

Programs to end pet overpopulation are within the reach of every community

Targeted neutering subsidy programs offer assistance to such a limited group of pet caretakers that every community can afford them. The total yearly cost of the New Hampshire low-income program has been less than 15 cents per resident, including all administrative costs. Taking into account the low poverty rate here and the modest cost of living, comparable programs could be established in any part of the country for about 30 cents per person each year.

It shouldn't be hard to find this money. We already waste many times more than that on reactive programs that have no hope of ever reducing the problem. Animal control, impoundment and sheltering expenses cost taxpayers about \$3 a person every year, so a targeted neutering program could be established by increasing the local animal control budget about ten per cent or by reallocating a small fraction of the money now spent to impound and shelter the victims of overpopulation. The full cost of a low-income program could also be paid for by a \$10 increase in the differential license fee for intact pets. That way, those who won't have their companion animals neutered at least help those who can't.

Often ethics and economics point in confusingly different directions. Recycled products cost more. Cleaner air and water come only with a price tag. Here the decision is a no-brainer. Effective neutering programs save money while saving lives. Everyone benefits, most of all the companions who have come to be our best friends on this small planet.

Peter Marsh  
Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets  
24 Montgomery Street  
Concord, N.H. 03301  
Phone: (603) 224-1877  
e-mail: pmarshlaw@hotmail.com  
October 12, 2001  
No More Homeless Pets

Chain of Collars

By Peter Marsh

Nine summers ago, animal protection groups in New Hampshire made a paper collar for each animal who had been put to death in a shelter during the first seven months of the year: "Oswald: three month old tri-color kitten;" "F. cat--tortoiseshell--name unknown--about three years old;" "Scout--Lab X--loved Frisbee." Some of us kept a single collar as a remembrance. I still have mine. It reads "Black-Grey Tabby Cat--Four Months Old--#849."

On a huge lawn in front of the State Capitol we began stringing all the collars together one August afternoon for a candlelight vigil to be held that evening. Little by little, the buzz of friends working together on a

project died down as, one by one, we began to realize how long the Chain of Collars was going to be. It stretched almost a mile!

Before this, no one spoke much in public about the tragic toll that pet overpopulation was taking in our state. If we did, people asked us not to, saying that they couldn't stand to hear about it. When a photo of a kitten silhouetted against the open door of a shelter's cremation furnace appeared in a local newspaper a few years before, the public outcry had been furious. Not against pet overpopulation or irresponsible pet caretakers, but against the paper for publishing the photo and a story about it. In their heart of hearts most people knew that the deaths of so many loyal and trusting companions were unspeakable. So they asked us to act accordingly.

After the Chain of Collars, though, we felt we had to talk about it. For years, we'd tried not involving the public, as people had asked. That hadn't worked. Nothing changed. It seemed like the killing would go on forever.

We decided we not only had to tell people about it, we had to get them to help. As the Activist Equation puts it "TALK - ACTION = 0." We came to admit to ourselves that we couldn't win the fight against pet overpopulation alone. And it was only fair that everyone should pitch in. Just because we've come forward to rescue animals from other people's failures is no reason why the job should fall to us alone. Pet overpopulation isn't a shelter problem; it's everyone's. Or should be. And everyone stands to gain by solving it.

So we got a demonstration permit and strung the Chain of Collars from 40 full size STOP signs along the streets that framed the Capitol grounds. Everyone entering the State House had to pass through it. That fall we put together a legislative campaign to get state-funded neutering assistance programs for low-income pet caretakers and people who adopt cats and dogs from shelters. I knew we were making progress during a legislative hearing when one of the legislators looked up at the ceiling while a shelter worker told about a sweet cat she had put to death that morning. Tears rolled down his cheek. Later he became one of our strongest supporters.

To many, the legislative campaign seemed like a luxury we couldn't afford. Who had the time? All of us were already working flat out in an adrenaline-driven panic, rushing from one crisis to the next.

It turns out it was the best investment we could have made.

More than nine thousand kittens and cats had died in our shelters the year we put the Chain of Collars together. Eight years later it's less than two thousand. Broken down more simply, every day twenty five fewer cats and dogs die in our shelters because our community has accepted its responsibility to end pet overpopulation. Even more simply, that four month old kitten whose collar I keep wouldn't have died today.

The lessons are unmistakable:

Effectively targeted neutering programs save lives

During the decade before the state-funded programs began, we'd hit a plateau. Year in and year out between 10,00 and 12,000 cats and dogs died in our shelters, despite several discount neutering programs that operated throughout the state.

This had happened in other parts of the country, too. One commentator has called it "hitting the wall." In California, for instance, the shelter death rate peaked in the mid 1970s and dropped steadily until the early '90s. It's leveled off since then. Recent research has shown why.

Discount or low-cost neutering programs and community education initiatives have achieved a remarkable increase in pet sterilization rates in middle- and upper-income households. In 1970, less than one out of every ten cats and dogs kept by Americans had been sterilized. Twenty years later, three out of every five dogs and four out every five household cats had been.

In low-income households, however, the pet sterilization rates remained much lower, because the lack of outside funding made it impossible to offer the subsidies needed to bring neutering within their reach. A discount program offering half-price surgeries is of no value to someone who still can't afford it. A 1994 study found that cats living in low-

income households were more than twice as likely to be sexually intact as those living in middle- and upper-income households.

Our failure to develop affordable programs for low-income caretakers is what had put a brake on our progress, both in New Hampshire and other parts of the country. An increasing share of the victims of pet overpopulation came to be from poor communities. By 1995, the California shelter euthanasia rate in the 11 poorest counties was almost three times higher than that of the 12 richest counties. Three years later, the disparity in shelter deaths between rich and poor counties in New Jersey had become even greater.

Ending pet overpopulation, then, requires making neutering procedures as affordable and accessible for low-income pet caretakers as they are for everyone else. Once this gap is filled, the life-saving impact is dramatic. In New Hampshire the shelter death rate dropped 30% in the first year after we established an affordable low-income program. It has dropped even further every single year since then. Before that, New Hampshire's shelter death rate was the only the fourth lowest of the six New England states. Now it's not only the lowest of any state in the country, it could double and still be the lowest!

Effectively targeted neutering programs save money

To popularize neutering when pet sterilization rates were much lower, it was necessary to offer discount neutering programs to everyone. With the current high neutering rates, however, more than 75 cents of every dollar spent on untargeted subsidies is wasted to help pay for sterilizations that would have been done without them. Not only have open access neutering programs become prohibitively expensive, they can't offer high enough subsidies to reach those who contribute most to the problem. It's the worst of both worlds. Not only are they wasteful, they're doomed to fail.

The reverse is true if subsidies are given only to those who truly need them. Targeted low-income programs save lives and money because every effective neuter (i.e. one that wouldn't have happened otherwise) prevents several impoundments over the next few years and almost every subsidy results in an effective neuter.

As a result, these programs are a good investment. They more than pay for themselves. During the first seven years after our neutering programs

began, 37,210 fewer cats and dogs entered New Hampshire shelters than in the seven years before that. At an average cost of \$105 to impound and shelter each animal, the impoundment savings alone totaled \$3,907,050. To achieve this, the programs have spent only \$1,236,817. So every dollar spent on the programs its first seven years has saved \$3.15 in reduced impoundment costs so far.

Programs to end pet overpopulation are within the reach of every community

Targeted neutering subsidy programs offer assistance to such a limited group of pet caretakers that every community can afford them. The total yearly cost of the New Hampshire low-income program has been less than 15 cents per resident, including all administrative costs. Taking into account the low poverty rate here and the modest cost of living, comparable programs could be established in any part of the country for about 30 cents per person each year.

It shouldn't be hard to find this money. We already waste many times more than that on reactive programs that have no hope of ever reducing the problem. Animal control, impoundment and sheltering expenses cost taxpayers about \$3 a person every year, so a targeted neutering program could be established by increasing the local animal control budget about ten per cent or by reallocating a small fraction of the money now spent to impound and shelter the victims of overpopulation. The full cost of a low-income program could also be paid for by a \$10 increase in the differential license fee for intact pets. That way, those who won't have their companion animals neutered at least help those who can't.

Often ethics and economics point in confusingly different directions. Recycled products cost more. Cleaner air and water come only with a price tag. Here the decision is a no-brainer. Effective neutering programs save money while saving lives. Everyone benefits, most of all the companions who have come to be our best friends on this small planet.

Peter Marsh  
Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets  
24 Montgomery Street  
Concord, N.H. 03301  
Phone: (603) 224-1877  
e-mail: pmarshlaw@hotmail.com  
October 12, 2001  
No More Homeless Pets

