

University group manages stray cats

By Laura Camper

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About 150 to 200 stray cats prowl the University of West Georgia, feasting on the mice and birds as well as food remnants left by students, and since October 2007 CampusCATS has been working to keep the population healthy and manageable.

The cats, which live in drain pipes and hidden burrows throughout the campus, were coming out during the breaks when students weren't occupying the campus and leaving more evidence of their presence in public areas.

"The ferals were coming out more, because they didn't have access I guess to the food Dumpsters that they normally had," said Ineke Abunawass, who works in the environmental safety and health office. "We were kind of curious as to what to do for them." The university considered calling animal control to pick up the animals, but knew more cats would move in to take their place. Strays are adept at finding food sources and relatively comfortable quarters, she said.

After researching the problem online, Abunawass found a better way to manage the cats and protect the students. She started a trap, neuter and release program at the university. Through the program, she traps the animals in humane traps and takes them to the West Georgia Spay and Neuter clinic in Villa Rica. There the cats are spayed or neutered and vaccinated for rabies and distemper. Afterward, she returns them to the area of campus where they were caught. So far the group has been able to capture and neuter 36 cats.

Many of the cats are wild and completely undomesticated. They will never be able to live in a home, and some people feel they are a danger to the community.

But the program has also trapped some kittens that were young enough to domesticate, and those are put up for adoption so they can have a better life than is offered as a feral cat. Nine young cats have been adopted.

The project also has an educational component, teaching students to be responsible pet owners. She hopes showing the students what really happens to those abandoned cats, can help stop them from taking in [pets](#) they can't care for.

After starting CampusCATS, Abunawass tried unsuccessfully to get a student organization to adopt the program.

So, she approached the Carroll County Humane Society about taking in the program under its umbrella of services.

"The best part for us, outside of that we can give people the letters for their donations, is that they handle the accounting also," Abunawass said.