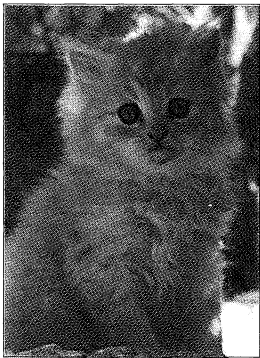


# JUST ONE LITTER



RACHELLA LASSERE DE CHAPPAUD

*Cindy forgot that the apartment repairman was coming to fix her sliding glass door that day. She forgot to confine her seven-month-old kitten in the bedroom. When she got home from*

*work, there Kali was, waiting for her outside under a pine tree. "Thank goodness you're okay," she sighed.*

*A week or so later, the kitten is putting on weight. She is pregnant. What a disappointment, Cindy thinks. She had been waiting for Kali to go through one heat cycle before she had her spayed—she'd always heard that was best. But Cindy isn't worried about finding homes for the kittens. She will just take them into the clothing store where she works and put them in the window.*

Cats have surpassed dogs as the most popular pets in the United States, with 30.6 million households owning cats. As a result of this surge in interest, the number of cats entering animal shelters has also dramatically increased.

Given the rate at which cats reproduce, it becomes clear why there are so many homeless cats. For example, if Cindy's cat were allowed to breed at will, it could be the source of 420,000 cats in only seven years. But 420,000 is not the root of the pet-overpopulation problem. Kali's one litter is.

*Well, the kittens are a real success. All 4 find good homes in one week. Cindy decides to get her cat spayed, but she's in no hurry. After all, Kali never*

*goes out.*

*Six months later, Kali's kittens are all in homes and have matured. The striped female who went to the mother with two children is no longer kitten-cute, and the kids don't pay as much attention to her anymore. She is left outside and out of the way most of the time. When she delivers 5 kittens, the family puts a free-kitten ad in the paper. Luckily, a man is interested in all 5. He says he wants to use them as barn cats on his property. In fact, he sells the kittens to a local dealer, who sells them to a research facility. The family does not have the mother cat spayed.*

Every day, the newspapers are filled with classified "free pet" ads. Many of the people seeking to give away litters of puppies and kittens find success—they find "good" homes for each one in their litter. They think the book is closed once the last puppy or kitten leaves with its new owner, that the problem is solved. It isn't.

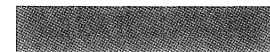
In a recent case in DeKalb County, Georgia, a man was convicted of torturing and killing 77 cats. He admitted to torturing the felines and later photographing their remains. He kept detailed records of each cat's acquisition, appearance, behavior, and treatment in a log he dubbed "TCJHTD"—"This Cat Just Had To Die." This man obtained cats through newspaper ads for free kittens.

*The family that took the black male kitten say he's a great cat. They let him out periodically, especially since it's summer. Now that the cat is eight months old and sexually active, he spends a great deal of time roaming the neighborhood looking for receptive females. One day his excursions take him across a highway, where a car strikes him. He is left to die near*

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BY KATE  
RINDY  
AND  
RHONDA  
LUCAS DONALD

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**Many of us take for granted the facts of pet overpopulation, but others may not be completely aware of the devastating consequences of a single unplanned litter of puppies or kittens. If you are overpopulation "litter-ate," we urge you to pass along this article to someone who could benefit from it; if you are not, we urge you to take heed.**

Many of the people seeking to give away litters of puppies and kittens . . . think the book is closed once the last puppy or kitten leaves with its new owner.

*the median. The family discovers their dead pet, and the parents tell their crying children that these things happen and that they'll get another cat. In his short life, this cat fathers 8 litters—50 kittens.*

*The young woman who took the black female kitten lives in a no-pets apartment. When her landlord discovers the cat, he orders her to get rid of her pet or be evicted. Unable to move and unable to find anyone to take a mostly grown cat, she takes the animal to the outskirts of town and abandons her. In the year and a half before this cat dies of distemper, she has 4 litters of feral kittens.*

*The young man who adopted the striped female has her spayed when she turns six months old and keeps her indoors always. She will be a healthy, wonderful companion for him for sixteen years.*

Fifteen months after Kali first became pregnant, 83 kittens have been born. Cindy found "good" homes for Kali's first 4 kittens, but she didn't consider the other 79. The sad fact is, every litter, planned or accidental, adds to pet overpopulation. The cycle must stop before it starts—before that one litter.

*Jack and Susie bought a male Akita puppy from a large pet-store chain. Of course, he came complete with AKC papers registering him as a purebred. They name him Bear, and as he grows and matures sexually, Susie can barely handle his 100-plus pounds. He is erratic, seems preoccupied, and won't listen to her when they're outside. She has lost control of him six times already, and he ran loose for several hours each time before coming home.*

*Jack takes Bear to a dog trainer, who advises him to neuter the dog. Neutering would make Bear manageable, reduce his inclination to run off, and help prevent him from becoming aggressive.*

*But Jack wants to use Bear as a stud dog. He paid \$500 for Bear, not to mention the trips to the vet for shots, checkups, and even vitamins. Surely, the puppies should bring in a lot of money! Somehow, though, he never arranges to stand Bear as a stud; meantime, the dog is getting more and more difficult to handle.*

The American Kennel Club (AKC) reports that it has 36 million purebred dogs registered in its studbook. In 1989 alone, the AKC registered more than 1 million dogs

and 550,300 litters. Although there is a demand for purebred dogs, purebred pets are not immune to the whims of people who see animals as disposable commodities.

The HSUS estimates that as many as 25 percent of the animals entering shelters each year are purebreds. One look through the classified ads reveals how many free pets are registered or come with papers. Many people believe that breeding their purebred pet would be profitable. After all, they paid hundreds of dollars for their pet. (In truth, the reason "mall pets" cost so much is that a large part of the purchase price goes to paying the hefty rent the pet shop pays the mall for its prime location.)

In reality, the average "backyard" breeder may sell only half of the litter and end up giving away the rest. If the breeder has provided proper veterinary care to all of the animals, his or her profit margin is usually slim or nonexistent. There may be a dog or cat, even a purebred, for every home in America, but there is not a home for every available dog and cat.

*One day, Susie is walking Bear in a park when they encounter a large male shepherd. Bear lunges, breaking his lead, and attacks the other dog. Susie tries to separate the dogs and is bitten by*

**The charm of kittens can turn to suffering, caused by pet owners who allow their animals to breed indiscriminately. Insets, left and center: unwanted animals are often bought at auction for use as laboratory-research subjects, or, right: euthanized in shelters nationwide.**

*Bear. The police finally stop the fight. Each dog has cuts and bite wounds but is otherwise okay.*

*Jack decides to have Bear neutered. He is astonished at how much better behaved Bear becomes and how much happier the dog is. Unfortunately, Bear manages to father 6 litters of puppies before his surgery.*

*The female dogs Bear impregnated have 34 puppies among them. Some of these puppies inherit their father's aggressiveness and pose problems to people in the neighborhood. One man, tired of the dogs coming into his yard, manages to shoot one of them. Two more die when they eat rat poison. Four are killed by cars. Animal-control officers capture 7 more of these nuisance animals and must euthanize them because they are ill or unadoptable. One of*

*the dog owners recognizes the size and strength of the puppies and sells his 4 to a dogfighter. One pet owner takes his dog's 4 puppies to the animal shelter and then has his dog spayed. Of the 34 puppies Bear fathers, 22 father or give birth to 156 more puppies.*

Pet overpopulation is not a new issue to most people. Since the 1960s, groups such as The HSUS have worked to inform people of the problem of too many pets and not enough homes and to encourage education, sterilization, and legislation to protect animals and address pet overpopulation.

But "pet overpopulation" may seem abstract to the average person who just has one litter on his hands. One—or even a handful—of animals from one person does not seem like an insurmountable problem.

With a human population already saturated with pets and ten or twenty people bringing litters into each animal shelter daily, the picture becomes clearer.

Pet overpopulation comes from many sources. It comes from people who breed animals intentionally for profit or hobby. While it is true that there will always be a market for purebred animals, that market should be filled by conscientious breeders who are committed to improving their animals' breed in terms of genetics, behavior, and temperament, as well as desirable color, size, and shape. Pet overpopulation comes from puppy mills, those cruel, often horrendous breeding farms that supply pet-store animals. Pet overpopulation comes from the animals abandoned and left to fend for themselves, reproducing litter after litter.

Pet overpopulation comes from animal shelters that do not ensure that the pets they offer for adoption are spayed or neutered. These shelters are revolving doors for pets and their offspring.

Pet overpopulation, or at least attitudes that perpetuate the problem, even comes from advertisements for pet products. Happy children romp with puppies and kittens in an effort to push cat and dog food. These companies are very concerned about keeping pets healthy through good nutrition, but they also do their part to foster pet overpopulation and assure more sales.

Finally, pet overpopulation comes from pet owners who allow their unaltered pets outside, where they do breed. It comes from people who allow their pets to have "just one litter," for whatever reason, or from pet

owners who realize that "Sam" is really "Samantha" only after she delivers kittens.

Many of these people would appear to be model pet owners. They provide veterinary care for their animals, give them special toys, fancy collars, and gourmet pet food. They spend a lot of money on their pets—sales of pet products are expected to exceed \$8 billion this year. When they allow their animals to breed, however, even if by accident, they are irresponsible and the root of the pet-overpopulation problem.

There are many causes of pet overpopulation, but there are also many solutions. For more than twenty years, The HSUS has worked to expose the cruelties of pet overpopulation and the ways to prevent the unnecessary suffering it causes. In the last three years, our "Be a P.A.L.—Prevent A Litter" campaign has been implemented by thousands of individuals and groups across the country.

Veterinarians in increasing numbers are educating their clients about the importance and advantages of having their pets spayed or neutered. Cooperative programs by veterinarians, humane groups, and individuals offer reduced-fee surgeries for animals whose owners can't afford the regular price.

Legislation that protects animals by requiring responsible pet ownership is in place in many parts of the country. Mandatory sterilization of shelter animals, differential licensing, and ordinances regulating the breeding of animals all contribute to responsible pet ownership.

Pet overpopulation is not the millions of surplus animals born each year but one animal or one litter, turned in, given away, sold, abandoned, or no longer cared for. This correlation is rarely understood by the individuals turning in, giving away, selling, or abandoning their animals.

Our challenge is to reach people before they reach the point of giving up their pet, before they allow their pets to breed, and, in many cases, before they make the decision to get a pet in the first place. Talk to your neighbor, your city council, your local media. With a single litter, a single animal, we can make a difference.

*Kate Rindy is an associate in the HSUS Companion Animals Division and Rhonda Lucas Donald is editor of Shelter Sense.*



THE TERRY WILD STUDIO—INSETS L. TO R.: HSUS; HSUS/BAKER; HSUS/WRIGHT