GET THE FACTS ON CATS
How can you get the facts on cats? Turn to The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). We love cats... and we know cats. Cats are charming, graceful, loving creatures, and it's no surprise to us that these wonderful animals have become the most popular pets in the United States. In fact, a recent survey estimates that 36 percent of U.S. households now have cats as family members. For a grand total of 60 million pet cats nationwide!

But not everyone knows cats as well as they might. Myths and misconceptions about cats still abound, many of them centuries old and rooted in ignorance and superstition. Cats today continue to suffer from these fascinating myths and replace them with facts about these fascinating creatures.

THE GOAL: TO HELP CATS

The goal of "Get the Facts on Cats" is to improve cats' lives through informing and educating people. The campaign was officially introduced in March at The HSUS's Animal Care Expo '99, in Orlando, Florida. Through publications and special mailings to shelters across the country, we're encouraging people everywhere to understand and appreciate cats anew. Part of The HSUS's ongoing work to reduce pet overpopulation and promote responsible pet ownership, "Get the Facts on Cats" focuses on cats because their growing popularity has led to an increased need for information. A greater understanding of cats and responsible cat ownership is essential if we are to help keep cats from becoming the victims of their own success.

REPLACING MYTHS WITH FACTS

For all their immense popularity as pets, cats are surprisingly misunderstood. Even after centuries of close association with humans, cats still carry a burdensome legacy of negative legends and associations that often lead to their mistreatment. One of the most widespread misconceptions about cats is that they are aloof, independent animals who don't really form attachments or affectionate bonds with those close to them. But not all cats live in loving and responsible homes: cats are often the victims of cruelty, neglect, and human ignorance. The HSUS is working to protect cats everywhere.

Cats are domestic animals who thrive on proper care and attention. But sadly, there are still many people who think that cats are self-sufficient and need little or no care. The HSUS's "Get the Facts on Cats" campaign is designed to educate the public about what cats really need.

Contrary to commonly held beliefs, cats form deep and affectionate bonds with those close to them. But not all cats live in loving and responsible homes: cats are often the victims of cruelty, neglect, and human ignorance. The HSUS is working to protect cats everywhere.

Cats form strong bonds with their cat friends. Cats form strong bonds with the human friends in their lives, too, but too many humans deny themselves the opportunity to develop a rewarding relationship with a cat because they assume the cat doesn't want or need such attention.

Another commonly held— but false—belief about cats is that, although they are domesticated pets, they remain somehow wild and shouldn't be subjected to protections and regulations such as those generally accepted as necessary for dogs—for example, licensing and leash laws. The most damaging aspect of this belief is that cats should be allowed to roam free out-of-doors. In fact roaming outside is a source of much suffering for cats. Outdoor cats are directly exposed to myriad dangers, some deadly: traffic, disease, aggressive dogs and other cats, abusive humans, poisons, and theft are only a few of them. Free-roaming cats themselves can damage property, be a nuisance, or even euthanized. It's a scenario shelter workers see all too often. If your cat becomes lost, don't wait. Begin your search immediately.

Another false myth that harms our cats: cats are "no maintenance" pets. While it's true that cats don't have to be walked, as dogs do, they still require care and attention, including regular veterinary care. It's also essential that cats be spayed or neutered. One pair of cats and their offspring can produce 420,000 kittens over a seven-year period, and millions of cats must be humanely destroyed each year by shelters because there are not enough good homes for them all. Countless others live a life of intense suffering on the streets or at the hands of neglectful owners. Don't add to this tragedy: turn in your cat as a stray. Heartmark the cat and have her microchipped. If the cat is in your community try to keep the cat indoors.

Indoor cats can do and lead happy, healthy lives. The average life span of an indoor cat is thirteen years (many live to be even older), but that of an outdoor cat is only three to five years. Why take the chance you may lose years of a beloved cat's companionship? Keep your cat indoors.

But (and here's another myth we're about to topple) keeping your cat indoors doesn't mean he or she shouldn't wear a collar with an ID tag. All cats should wear a collar and ID tag. Even an indoor cat can slip out and become lost, and a sad sight at any shelter is the unclaimed cat turned in as a stray. Heartbreakingly, few cats wear identification, and adding to the heartbreaking is the fact that many people (especially if they let their cat go outside) do not begin to look for a missing cat until it's too late; the cat may be dead from exposure or other hazards, or, if the cat was lucky enough to be taken to a shelter, she may have already been adopted out to a new home or even euthanized. It's a scenario shelter workers see all too often: if your cat becomes lost, don't wait. Begin your search immediately.

Cats in Communities

In addition to challenging myths, The HSUS's "Get the Facts on Cats" campaign is encouraging new attitudes in communities trying to address issues relating to cats. Cats unlicensed to those wonderful creatures.

Because many communities are giving more attention to the plight of free-roaming cats, we've put together a legislative campaign to get interested people started developing legislation that can pass. Our "Get the Facts on Cats" brochure explores ten commonly held myths about cats through cheerful prose and pictures. Buy copies to pass along to your friends, leave copies in your veterinarian's office, or post a stack in your workplace's lunchroom. Cats need us to spread the word!
like dogs, have often been ignored in animal-care-and-control legislation and have little or no protection legally. It's time for this to change. Given the increasing popularity of cats throughout the United States and the corresponding steady increase of cats entering shelters, more and more communities are enacting legislation that will protect both animals and people. Regulations about licensing, restraint and control, and the sterilization of outdoor cats help communities address cat-caused problems. Our campaign booklet *Facts about Cat Law* outlines the need for legislation pertaining to cats (see sidebar, "Three Ways to Get the Facts").

**THE HSUS: WORKING FOR ANIMALS**

No issue has figured more prominently in the work of The HSUS than the welfare of companion animals—cats and dogs in particular. For years we have informed people about the tragic consequences of pet overpopulation, and we have encouraged spaying and neutering, responsible pet ownership, and adoption from shelters. For more than forty years we have waged campaigns against pet overpopulation, including our "Legislation, Education, and Sterilization" campaign and our "Be a P.A.L.—Prevent A Litter" campaign. In 1991 we launched our "Until There Are None, Adopt One" campaign, calling for increased public awareness of dog and cat overpopulation and urging people to adopt dogs and cats from shelters instead of getting them from breeders or pet stores. In 1993 we drew national attention to the issue by calling for a voluntary national moratorium on all breeding of dogs and cats. That same year we were part of "The Year of the Cat," a joint effort by four of the nation's largest animal-protection organizations to celebrate and demystify cats.

Now with our "Get the Facts on Cats" campaign, we're taking those efforts even further. Cats are special animals—their ever-growing popularity is proof of how easy they are to love and what wonderful companions they make. Cats deserve more than to live their lives as strays or become victims of cruelty or pet overpopulation. The nation's shelters are overflowing with cats, a sign of the heartbreaking surplus that has tragic consequences. The HSUS has fought pet overpopulation for four decades. It's time for public understanding of cats to catch up with their popularity—and as we clear away the myths of the past we'll see even more clearly how special cats are.

- You can get the facts on cats! One easy way to start is to make a donation of $25 or more to The HSUS. When you do we'll send you a free copy of our *Cat Care Facts*, filled with indispensable information on the adoption and care of cats.
- In virtually every community across the United States, animal shelters are filled with dogs and cats. In many shelters, cats make up more than 50 percent of the animals. Some are lost pets whose owners cannot be identified. Others are pets whose owners can no longer keep them. Each cat and each dog is hoping for a permanent and loving home. If you're in a position to bring a cat or a dog into your life, adopt one. Give a shelter pet a home. Shelters have purebreds, mixed breeds, kittens, puppies, and older animals. One of them will be your friend for life.
- If you have cat or dog companions in your life, be a responsible pet owner. Spay or neuter your pets, keep ID tags on them at all times, and obey community licensing and leash laws. If you have a pet with a behavior problem, seek help from professionals: a trainer, your veterinarian, or the staff of your local shelter.
- Get involved in some of the many ways to help cats and dogs, our loving companions who give us so much. Volunteer at your local shelter to groom, train, or exercise the animals. Educate others about the special qualities and needs of cats. Order extra copies of our *Facts about Cat Fables* brochure and distribute them widely to get the facts out.
- Finally, help The HSUS continue its programs aiding the millions of companion animals in this country. We want every outdoor creature, but domestic animals who need our care. It's time for public understanding of cats to catch up with their popularity—and as we clear away the myths of the past we'll see even more clearly how special cats are.

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