

## Hearding Cats DIFF-Style

Over the ten-plus years DIFF has been active on Dataw Island we have been very successful in rounding up and neutering or spaying our community cats and releasing them back to where they were trapped. Our dedicated team of feeders insures that they are fed daily, and we know there are many individual residents who feed one or more at their homes. But, even though they no longer breed or fight for territory, some occasionally leave their familiar surroundings to explore what else might be out there. But where do they go? Have they just relocated to another feeding area or has something happened to them?

Over the years our caregivers have taken lots of pictures of the cats they feed in the hope that it would make it easier to identify them by connecting a picture to a feeding location. The distinctive-looking ones are easy – it's the majority of all-black cats that make the job harder, especially if you catch only a quick glimpse of one darting for cover. And there are also a few strangers each year.

Unfortunately, we sometimes get word from a resident that a cat, perhaps with kittens, has been spotted on the island.

Anne Clements has been keeping track of our community cats with the help of Pat Ashton, one of DIFF's co-founders, and a hefty 3-ring binder. The only sure thing is where they are released after their surgical procedure and vaccinations. She is in the planning stage of a routine to get counts and physical conditions of the cats twice a year from their feeders. Currently DIFF has, give-or-take, 17 community cats in its care. There used to be more, but the nationally recognized “trap-neuter-return” (TNR) effort has reduced the DIFF cat reproductions to zero. But we always have a few strangers each year. We sometimes get word from a resident that a cat, perhaps with kittens, has been spotted. Any new kittens on the island are the result of stray females coming on the island, or being “dumped” with

their kittens, which is becoming more and more a sad reality.

DIFF has responded to these emergencies by capture and vet care, then finding foster homes until the kittens and, if there's a mom cat, can be adopted. Anne will keep records on these new arrivals also. Each cat, from our very first colony on Dataw Drive over 10 years ago, has a listing which includes a description, location, name and if available, a photo. Updates include those adopted, missing or deceased. If we get a call or email describing a cat in a resident's yard, this listing helps to determine if it could be one of our missing "travelers" or a different cat altogether. Sometimes we will receive a photo too. If it's not one of ours we send a notice out to Dataw in the hope of getting an ID and a swift return to its home. If it is not claimed then our trappers go into action.

And the scenario plays out once again, with the fortunate kitty finding several caring humans it didn't know it had, and probably wouldn't appreciate in any case. It is enough for the caretakers that it will have a chance at a better life because it was lucky enough to end up on "The Island of Friends."