



Extended form funding application from *redzonecats* to the New Zealand Companion Animal Trust

Introduction

The Christchurch residential red zone comprises an area of several thousand abandoned/soon to be abandoned homes on earthquake damaged land extending from the centre of Christchurch out to the coast. This land will become the Avon River Park and wildlife area. The Christchurch earthquakes have caused many pet cats to become homeless. Some fled in panic and never returned home and some were left behind when owners had to suddenly vacate their homes. Others have become lost when moved by their owners to new locations in the city, which is an ongoing process. Lost pets that were not desexed, and an original feral population, have been breeding in the red zone for more than 2 years, resulting in new generations of young feral cats.

Jane Newman and other members of her family business, Newman Energy Research Ltd, are partway through a pilot study of homeless cats in the residential red zone. This work is explained on the website <http://www.redzonecats.com/> To date this work has been largely self funded. During the process of trapping known long term lost cats, initially in association with prominent Avon River Community members Diana Madgin and Professor Bill Willmott, it quickly became apparent that far more homeless cats are present in the red zone than sightings suggest. The methods we developed in response to this early finding have recently been publicised and are now identified as the “*redzonecats*” programme.

Objectives

The ultimate aim is to achieve a humane and environmentally responsible solution to the problem of homeless cats in the Christchurch earthquake residential red zone.

The current goal is to extend the *redzonecats* pilot study to cover approximately 10% of the red zone within the next 3 to 6 months, and to use the resulting data and community buy-in as leverage to obtain funding from local interest groups (Christchurch City Council, Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, Avon River Park community & relevant private trusts) in order to achieve solutions for the entire red zone.

The objectives of work for which partial funding is sought from the NZ Companion Animal Trust are as follows:

- (1) More accurately quantify the number and where possible gender of homeless cats by applying the *redzonecats* programme of camera surveillance at feeding stations in approximately 10% of the red zone.

- (2) Continue trapping, health testing and placing cats in new homes, or their original homes when possible, with an initial emphasis on female/pregnant and wounded cats which are targeted using camera surveillance.
- (3) Raise community and official awareness of the number of homeless cats in the red zone.
- (4) Achieve community buy-in to the *redzonecats* initiative via the redzonecats.com website, social media, and Press/TV coverage.

Methods

Introduction

The *redzonecats* programme has several key points of difference compared with the work of other groups. These are the use of camera surveillance, routine testing for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FLV), and taming of feral cats as an alternative to euthanasia or trap, neuter and release. Detailed information on all methods is provided on the *redzonecats* website at <http://www.redzonecats.com/>

Camera surveillance

Inexpensive trail cameras with infra-red night vision capability are used to monitor cats at feeding stations. These cameras take stills and video both day and night and store the information on camera cards for daily downloading to computer. Cameras are left at feeding stations for between 2 days and 1 week to determine whether particular cats are regular visitors, and have a consistent routine. Once established the feeding stations are maintained until all cats have been trapped. High quality images allow pregnant and wounded cats to be identified and prioritised for trapping. Cats with visible evidence of a prior home are also prioritised. Efficient trapping of specific target cats is achieved by determining individual routines, aided when necessary by real-time surveillance of set traps over a wireless network. Video available with a Christchurch Press article posted online shows footage from real time surveillance in daylight <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/christchurch-life/9304084/> . All cameras also provide infra-red night vision after dark. This is essential because most red zone cats are primarily nocturnal.

Photographs of cats visiting feeding stations are printed to show remaining local residents (if any), in order to verify that specific cats are homeless. Trapped cats are checked for a microchip reading by McMaster & Heap vets. Those lacking ID are advertised as found unless clearly feral.

Testing

Nineteen cats have been trapped to date (Table 1), from a total of 35 cats detected at sites representing about 5% of the red zone. Cats without identification are tested for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV by SNAP 1 case) and feline leukemia virus (FLV by SNAP & PCR, 3 cases). The use of PCR for FLV testing commenced early in the programme to check a positive SNAP test, and 2 out of a total 3 FLV cases have been negative on SNAP but positive on the more sensitive PCR. The *redzonecats* website has a fuller discussion of this issue. We test for FIV because it is carried by feral toms in Christchurch generally. Cats which test positive for FIV or FLV are euthenised if unclaimed. To date all but one have been feral. Cats with negative test results are desexed, microchipped, vaccinated, treated for wounds or dental problems and fostered/rehomed.

The Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences at Massey University has offered to provide disease screening for *redzonecats* at a reduced cost, where possible. In addition, Drs Laryssa Howe (Infectious Disease specialist) and Nick Cave (Senior Small Animal Veterinarian) at Massey University are in discussion with *redzonecats* about other collaborative opportunities that would align with the objectives of the organization.

Taming of feral cats

Approximately 50% of cats trapped to date have previously lived in a home based on collars, desexed status, and/or tame behaviour. The remainder are feral, which is defined here as born and raised without human contact. A high proportion of feral cats in the red zone have been born since the earthquakes. They are young and usually healthy. Neuter and release is inappropriate for the red zone because there are no residents to maintain long term feeding stations and feral cats are not compatible with planned conversion to park and reserve status. Part of our pilot study concerns taming of feral cats in a home environment. Where necessary an accelerated taming programme is used, which is explained on the *redzonecats* website. All but one healthy feral cat has been tamed, and they make affectionate and rewarding pets. Taming is not possible in an institutional environment, so community fostering is essential. Several online comments about the Press article at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/christchurch-life/9304084/> are from community members who have tamed feral cats and found the process rewarding despite also being challenging.

Expanding the *redzonecats* programme and engaging the wider community

Introduction

To date the pilot study suggests there are likely to be several hundred homeless cats in the red zone, at least half of which are feral. The current objective of the *redzonecats* programme is to extend the pilot study to cover 10% of the red zone. This will more than double current data and allow more accurate estimation of cat numbers and population characteristics i.e., feral versus previously homed, proportion of breeding females, and health status of the cats. Crucially, this phase of work will also test the extent to which the Christchurch community and local veterinary professionals are committed to actively solving the problem of homeless cats in the red zone. If sufficient community ownership of the initiative is achieved this will provide leverage for funding applications to Christchurch City Council, the Avon River Park community, CERA, and relevant private trusts.

Press/TV publicity.

An extended article on the *redzonecats* programme appeared in the Weekend section of the Christchurch Press on October 19 2013. This was noted by readers interested in both cats and wildlife, and directed attention to the website <http://www.redzonecats.com/> Michele McMaster of McMaster & Heap veterinary practice, which has a special relationship with *redzonecats*, writes a regular column in one of the Christchurch community newspapers. She plans to profile Cat #19 (Ptolemy), his foster carer Belle, and sponsor/new owner Philippa, in a forthcoming article. Diana Madgin, who is a garden writer for the Christchurch Press and active member of the Avon River community, is also interested to write about the cats in the context of the earthquakes and displacement of both people and pets. Television reaches a national audience and as Campbell Live has taken a long term interest in Christchurch communities affected by the earthquakes, this may be another opportunity to raise awareness of the issues.

Facebook

A “Red Zone Cats” community page has been established on Facebook and attracted significant support, including offers of practical assistance ranging from a lady working for a demolition firm, who has reported a mother cat with kittens, to vet nurses interested in health and nutrition, and members of the community who can run feeding stations and surveillance, or provide foster care. The Student Volunteer Army (SVA) also networks via Facebook and an initial post placed by the SVA president attracted 15 offers of assistance in the first few days. It is becoming apparent that the social media is a very effective networking tool for a community initiative and *redzonecats* will benefit from this. Facebook is also useful for featuring photographs of red zone cats which may be recognised by a previous owner or alternatively may be offered a new home.

Website

The website <http://www.redzonecats.com/> has been created using a Wix template. This has provided all of the necessary features in a very user-friendly format. It has not been necessary to pay for (or, equally importantly, wait for) professional assistance, and updates and amendments can be implemented and published at will. The site has also been extremely reliable. The website is designed to provide detailed explanations of the *redzonecats* methods and feedback has been excellent, including from the many community members who feel strongly about the welfare of homeless cats but have only a rudimentary grasp of the internet and do not use Facebook. The website content will facilitate independent application of the *redzonecats* methods by a gradually increasing network of individuals and groups, and additional pages or sites can be created to share camera images and cross reference surveillance data from feeding station areas. This will also be a useful resource which the community can use to look for possible matches with lost cats, including comparison with cats advertised on Petsonthenet and Trademe Lost and Found.

Sources of funding and other support

Redzonecats has made formal presentations to SPCA Canterbury, whose CEO Barry Helem suggested the current funding application and has offered supplies of cat food, and Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA), which has so far declined to provide funding support. Cat Rescue and Cats Protection League attended a *redzonecats* presentation hosted at the quarterly forum organised by SPCA Canterbury, and offered access to traps if required. A relationship with the wider Avon River Park community is currently being established. The new Avon River Park and wildlife area will be created on the site of the residential red zone and funding has been assigned to its development.

The funding sought from the NZ Companion Animal Trust would cover approximately 50% of the veterinary costs required to extend the *redzonecats* programme to 10% of the red zone. The remaining funds required for veterinary care and equipment (etc) will be covered by donations, sponsorship, veterinary subsidies, and adoptions. Since publication of the Christchurch Press article 2 weeks ago two sponsor donations of \$500 each have been made, in addition to an aggregated \$1200 of smaller donations. McMaster & Heap now discount testing, desexing, dental work, vaccination and consult fees for red zone cats processed by the Newman family or closely associated foster carers. Those adopting red zone cats have in some cases paid the full cost of veterinary care required for the cat they are adopting, which can be several hundred dollars.

The data obtained by expanding the *redzonecats* programme to 10% of the red zone, if combined with effective engagement of the wider community, is expected to provide leverage for funding applications to local groups including the Christchurch City Council, Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, Avon River Park community, and relevant private trusts.

Conclusion

The *redzonecats* programme is distinct from all other groups in terms of rehoming as opposed to releasing or euthenising feral cats, and actively locating and trapping cats which are only seen on camera. Many of these reclusive cats have once been pets. *Redzonecats* is also committed to rigorous disease testing of all cats, given the high incidence of FLV discovered during the pilot study, and the presence in the red zone of long-term feral toms carrying FIV. In contrast to *redzonecats*, SPCA Canterbury prioritises abused and sick animals sourced primarily from locations outside the red zone. Cat Rescue rehomes only kittens less than 800 grams, and releases older cats back to their environment after desexing, which is not compatible with the planned Avon River Park and wetland environment. Cats Protection League has a long waiting list at present and cannot accept non-urgent cats. Consequently, a community based initiative like *redzonecats* is necessary to address the problem of homeless cats in the red zone, using humane and environmentally responsible methods. Finally, key aspects of the *redzonecats* model have potential for application regionally and nationally, particularly the use of surveillance to selectively locate and trap high priority elements of homeless cat populations.

Referees

Diana Madgin & Professor Bill Willmott (CNZM)
132 Port Hills Road
Christchurch 8022
03 384 3174
021 412 282

Supporting documents

Investigation of lost and feral cats August presentation with updated data.pptx

Versions of this talk were presented both to the SPCA Canterbury quarterly forum, and to the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA)

Request to McMaster & Heap for comment on red zone cat situation.docx

This is a detailed history of the Newman family's work with red zone cats, and a request for feedback prior to creating the *redzonecats* website

Digital media

The *redzonecats* website is <http://www.redzonecats.com/>

The *redzonecats* facebook page is Red Zone Cats at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Red-Zone-Cats/403548163104387>

The Christchurch Press article dated 19 October 2013 is at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/christchurch-life/9304084/> (Please note, the Press reporter gave a misleading impression that the *redzonecats* initiative has direct support from other groups, which is not currently the case)

Table 1 Trapping, testing and taming records

Lost and feral cat data to 27 October 2013.													Euthenised
													Healthy
													Pending
No.	Cat	Colour	Trapped by	Vet	Date trapped	M/F	De-sexed?	Collar?	Chip?	Feline aids?	Feline leukemia?		Fate
373 River Road & environs: there are still 6 cats visiting this feeding station										SNAP	SNAP	PCR	
1	Bilbo	Grey & white	Di	McMaster & Heap	February 2013	M	Yes	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not tested	Not feral but very timid, now confident
2	Unnamed	Grey tabby	Di	Linwood?	c. March 2013	M	No	No	No	Not tested			Feral, euthenised by unknown vet
3	Monty	Grey tabby	Di	McMaster & Heap	May 2013	M	No	No	No	Positive	Negative	Not tested	Feral, euthenised due HIV
4	Midnight/Thistle	Black	Di	McMaster & Heap	29 May 2013	M	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Feral, now tame
5	Dante	Black	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	1 June 2013	M	No	No	No	Negative	Positive	Detected	Feral, euthenised due FLV
6	Missie/Heather	Brown B & E Tabby	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	12 June 2013	F	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Detected	Tame unclaimed, euthenised due FLV
7	Hades	Tabby/siamese x	Newmans	Unknown	18 June 2013	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not tested, only lost 3 weeks			Tame, repatriated 18-6-13
8	"Tom"	Black	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	26 June 2013	M	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Feral, now tame
9	"Tiger"	Brown B & E Tabby	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	4 July 2013	M	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Detected	Feral, euthenised due FLV
10	Marble	Black & white med hr	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	15 July 2013	M	Yes	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Very timid neutered male, escaped
17	Blackie	Mostly black (white)	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	6 September 20	M	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Feral, nearly tame as of early Nov
Avon Loop; there are still many cats requiring to be trapped in the loop, including 10 visiting our feeding stations.													
11	Mingus	Black & white	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	6 July 2013	M	Yes	Yes	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Tame
13	Toby	Black	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	13 August	M	No	Yes	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Tame
14	Torbiseshell	Torbiseshell	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	9 August	F	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not tested	Feral, pregnant, euthenised due behaviour
19	Ptolemy	Grey	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	26 October	M	Yes	No	No	Negative	Negative	tba	Tame
171 New Brighton Road; this site has been closed. The one remaining cat is feral and cage-shy.													
12	Kitten/Molly	tabby & white	See notes	McMaster & Heap	4 August 2013	F	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Tame
15	Skaara	part Maine Coon tabby	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	21 August 2013	M	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Not feral but very timid, now confident
18	Isis	Brown tabby and white	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	14 Sept 2013	F	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Tame, pregnant spey
29 Locksley Ave. One older black feral unneutered male remaining to be trapped at this address.													
16	Lindi	Brown tabby & white	Newmans	McMaster & Heap	31 August 2013	F	No	No	No	Negative	Negative	Not detected	Feral, pregnant spey, now tame