








Shelter intake numbers on the decline

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The Cherokee County Animal Shelter has seen a significant decrease in the amount of animals surrendered to the county facility, and with more residents utilizing low-cost spay and neuter options, those numbers could continue on the decline.

"We have been doing a lot of community outreach about spaying and neutering," shelter director Sue Garcia said.

Anytime residents visit the shelter's pet food pantry or go in to surrender a pet, Garcia said they are told about the Spay/Neuter Coalition, a nonprofit with a mission to educate the public on low-cost spay and neuter options, and the Georgia Animal Project, a nonprofit that performs low-cost altering services.

Declining intake numbers has been a trend for quite some time now, with 5,691 animals surrendered in 2010 compared to 4,971 animals surrendered last year. If intake numbers continue to decline, a new record could be set by the end of this year.

Intake statistics provided by the shelter for the last four months show that 286 animals were surrendered to the facility on Univeter Road in April, which is a decrease of 35 from April 2013. Intake numbers for January of this year also were down by 92 animals. February was down by 46, and March was down by 40. Statistics for May are not yet available.

During the peak summer months last year, the shelter was taking in 26 animals per day. Forty percent of the animals turned over to the shelter were owner surrenders; 30 percent were strays residents brought in; 24 percent were strays brought in by the county's animal control; and 4 percent were listed as other.

Dogs and kittens are the two animals that are most frequently brought into the shelter; adult cats are not far behind. According to intake statistics from 2013, the shelter took in 1,885 dogs; 544 puppies; 1,081 cats; 1,312 kittens; and 149 other animals, such as horses, rabbits and birds.

"The puppies have gone down significantly," Garcia said. "Everyone needs to focus a lot on (altering) the cats. People tend to overlook that, and I am not sure why, but that is where we really need to start making some headway."

Garcia said due to the warmer temperatures, the shelter has seen an influx of kittens.

"We have started to get a lot of kittens," she said. "It started a little late this year because the cold spell lasted a little longer, but we are getting kittens in."

Whenever an animal is adopted from the Cherokee County Animal Shelter, it is policy for the animal to be altered if it already has not had the procedure performed.

"There are way too many cats and dogs for the number of human beings there are," Garcia said.

Georgia Animal Project founder Cindy Foster, who is the former director of the county's shelter, agrees.

"Dogs, both males and females, are more aggressive when they are not altered and looking for love, so to speak. From a safety standpoint, it is much safer for dogs to be spayed or neutered because they are less likely to bite," she said.

Foster said there also is a health risk for unaltered animals, such as cancer and prostate problems.

Another pivotal reason to alter a pet is overpopulation. According to the Humane Society of the United States, about one adoptable dog or cat is put down every 11 seconds.

"The overpopulation problems can all be avoided with spays and neuters," Foster said. "There are thousands and thousands of animals being euthanized in Georgia alone; by fixing one, you are saving thousands."

The Georgia Animal Project, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, was started in 2006 after Foster saw a need to battle animal homelessness. The organization hosts clinics four days a week and performs low-cost spays and neuters.

"I realized that the only way to battle animal homelessness was to prevent it," she said.

Last year, the nonprofit performed more than 3,300 spay and neuter surgeries, which was about a 50/50 split for cats and dogs. During the 157 clinics held last year, the organization performed 1,966 spays and 1,362 neuters.

So far this year, there have been 61 clinics, where more than 760 spay surgeries were performed and another 646 neuter surgeries were done. The Georgia Animal Project, this year, has serviced 731 cats and 678 dogs.

The cost for services through the project cost \$55 for a cat neuter and \$65 for a cat spay. Dog alterations are broken up by weight, with prices starting at \$85 and peaking at \$105. All altering fees include a rabies shot, if the animal is not current on the vaccine.

To help offset the cost of performing low-cost spay and neuter procedures, the organization relies on donations and grants.

"We basically tell people what our fees are, and if they say they can't afford that, we will ask what their circumstances are," she explained. "If they can pay half, then we will find a subsidy for the other half. We just depend on people to be honest with us, and, for the most part, they are, especially when they find out how low our fees are."

For more information about the Georgia Animal Project or to schedule an appointment, visit theanimalproject.org or call (770) 704-7297. For more information about the Spay/Neuter Coalition, visit www.spayneutercoalition.org.