

ELDERLY CATS

ELDERLY FERAL CATS: As feral cats age their eyesight, hearing and reflexes diminish along with other functions of the body. Along with aging can come any number of illnesses, immune deficiency problems, dental and mouth infections, upper respiratory infections during the cold months and arthritis of the joints. Feral cats go through the same aging process as our domestic house cats, but it can be sooner because of their circumstances. Feral cats, with any of these problems, cannot be put into a carrier and taken to the vet for care. They are living out of doors and are vulnerable and must be trapped if they are to be vetted. Circumstances and quality of care can accelerate their aging and it is the responsibility of the caretaker to see that they are given every opportunity to thrive and be safe. It is also up to the cat. There will be times when no matter what steps you take; the cat will not be trapped. All you can do is keep reaching out with whatever support you can administer and love them.

Most aging feral cats sleep longer during the day and have a tendency to eat less and be more particular about their food. They may become thinner and their ongoing care will need to be assessed and administered by their caretaker.

FCCC'S Recommendations:

1. Feed them separately. Provide a high quality food and add special supplements.
2. Be sure they eat the food while you are there
3. Keep their special food on hand and feed it to them regularly
4. Provide **plenty** of warm and dry shelters for **everyone** with fleece for the winter months that are insulated.
5. As cats age, the shelters are their haven. I have observed them sleeping late into the afternoon in the July and August heat.
6. Look for signs of aging, such as greasy coats, imbalance, drooling, difficulty hearing when you arrive, slowness and stiffness in walking or watery eyes. These are easily observed.
7. If possible, after they have eaten, hang around to see if they are urinating and moving their bowels. Examine the feces if you can. Some disorders can be treated onsite. If you are right there, a stool sample can easily be collected and tested at a vet's office.
8. How do their coats look? Good supplements can take care of dull coat and excess shedding.
9. Program (the only commercial flea treatment I know of that can be put into the food) can be given for a bad flea problem along with garlic and other supplements.
10. Worms can be treated onsite with medication and supplements.
11. Abscess and joint care is possible.

Research aging felines online and apply what you can to the feral cats. There are some excellent recipes in Anitra Frazier's book, "The New Natural Cat", that can be added to the food for feral cats of all ages. Consult a veterinarian for medications and dosages.

Honoring the last days: Taking good care of an elderly feral cat is essential to the health of the colony and the cat's place within the family structure. Making them comfortable and tending to their needs is an important part of feral cat caretaking. Magical moments can take place between an aging feral cat and their caretaker. It can happen in many ways and it does happen frequently. We have had elderly feral cats cross the line and become totally ours to pet and groom and care for as we would any of my own indoor domestic cats. This is a very poignant moment for everyone!

When the time comes for them to pass, if they do not crawl off somewhere to suffer and die alone, we can take them to the vet and peacefully provide them with a loving space with our arms and hearts around them as they cross over to the Rainbow Bridge.