

2011 Annual General Meeting of the Cat Action Team: Report of the CAT Food Committee

One of the goals of the Cat Action Team, as indicated on our website, is to work with the public in caring for stray, feral and barn cats across Prince Edward Island by providing food for these unowned cats. CAT has never undertaken to supply all the food necessary to support every colony; that would be beyond our capacity. Yet over the years many hard-working volunteers have done their best to solicit donations of food, and to distribute that food to the colonies where it is most needed.

It wasn't until this year, however, that the Board of Directors recognized the need to establish a Food Committee, which presently consists of myself (Pat Srebrnik) working along with Anne MacPhee. Anne and I like to joke that we were chosen because both of us were new members of the Board, and neither of us has a colony of our own. So we hope we come to the task without bias, but we also know that we have a lot to learn. And, as I will remind you at the end of this report, Anne and I are hoping that many of you will volunteer to help us.

Here's one thing that Anne and I have learned already: just as CAT never has enough slots at our neuter day clinics to accommodate every cat who needs an appointment, we also find that there are many, many hungry cats out there, who need far more food than we are able to provide. And just as the TNR committee must make difficult choices, so must the volunteers who decide where to send the food we do have.

This is of course very distressing for our volunteer caregivers, who really *do* care: every caretaker we've ever spoken with has told us he or she spends money out of pocket to feed the cats. Some caretakers can afford to buy nearly enough for their colony cats; but others, especially those who feed large or multiple colonies, are always agonizing over where to get more food, especially during the winter months.

Those CAT volunteers who sort and distribute the food do take special circumstances into account. It is recognized that some caregivers are able to spend more than others on the colonies they manage. Truly feral colonies tend to be given higher priority than barn colonies. Normally, some food is always held in reserve for colonies where the cats are found to be in particularly poor physical condition. But it is also true that there are some colonies – especially the older colonies – which have almost always received at least a portion of the food donated to CAT, whereas other colonies – especially the recently discovered colonies – have been receiving little or no food.

Is this fair? Well, “fairness” is difficult to define and near-impossible to achieve, but perhaps the situation will become more understandable when I tell you what Anne and I have learned about where the food comes from, and how it is divided up and distributed (and if you are a long-time member who already knows more of this history than we ever will, please be patient: we are certain that there are some caregivers who are as mystified as we were before we became members of the Board).

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Most of the food we distribute to colonies comes from two major sources. The first of these is the “reclamation shipment” that arrives about three times a year, and which can include cat litter, dog food, and even bird seed, in addition to cat food.

The second of these sources is the Iams food donated to us by via the students at the Atlantic Veterinary College. Before I go into more detail about each of these programs, I want to emphasize that the amount of food we receive from these sources is not set: it varies dramatically, month to month and year to year; but it is never enough to feed all of the cats for which we care.

For several years, it was Francine Labbé who took on the enormous responsibility of arranging for the “reclamation” food to be sorted and distributed. This year, Ron Curtis has taken on the job, and we want to thank both Francine and Ron for organizing the volunteers who do this essential work, and for making some very difficult decisions about how the food is divided. Over the years, Francine and Ron have developed a network of volunteers who sort the food when it arrives -- a physically demanding task -- and then take the food away for further distribution: that is, most of the volunteers who pick up food at the sorting point, re-distribute the food not just to the colony or colonies which they personally manage, but also to other colony caregivers who do not themselves come directly to the sorting point. This spring, Ron has begun to compile a spreadsheet which indicates how much food arrives in each shipment, and which also explains the various factors he considers when he decides where to allocate the food.

The “reclamation” food was CAT’s first major source of food, so it was of course divided, for the most part, between colonies established during the early years of CAT. Over the years, as the population of some of the older colonies has dwindled, some of the “reclamation” food has been diverted to more recently discovered colonies. But the identification of new colonies has always outstripped the amount of “reclamation” food we receive, to the point that if the “reclamation” food were scrupulously divided, neither the older colonies who have depended upon the reclamation food for years, nor the newer colonies, would begin to have enough food to maintain the cats.

Fortunately, in about 2005, Dr. Marti Hopson of the Atlantic Veterinary College arranged for CAT to receive ongoing donations from what became our second major source of food: the food donated to us, via the students at the AVC, by (to use its full name), “Procter and Gamble, Makers of Iams and Eukanuba Dog and Cat Food” (from here on, we will refer to this simply as the Iams food).

There has been some misunderstanding about the Iams food, so I want to explain how it works: Iams donates this food as part of a program to enhance student activities at the AVC. When a shipment arrives, the AVC students can purchase food for their own pets. The money raised in this way is used to fund student projects. Any food that is left over is donated to CAT. We are grateful to Iams for the food they send, and we owe hearty thanks to Marti and to all the AVC students who have worked with us over the years to process the Iams shipments.

Because the “reclamation” food was already going to many of the older colonies, it was tacitly agreed, by those within CAT working on food distribution, that the Iams food would normally be sent to colonies not already receiving reclamation food. It was also agreed that the Iams food would be divided approximately in half, with one-half going to the eastern part of the Island and the other half going to the western part of the Island.

In addition to the reclamation food and the Iams food, CAT receives smaller amounts occasionally from the Humane Society, from veterinary clinics, from retailers, and from food drives undertaken by various charitable groups: for example, Bob Stanley and Pat Srebrnik just had the privilege of spending an evening with a group of 5-year-old “Sparks” in Linkletter, who all brought food to donate to the cats. In return, we admired pictures of their cats, exchanged stories about cats, and tried to encourage them to be responsible pet owners.

This year, we’ve had an additional source of funding earmarked for the purchase of food. As many of you know, Donna J. Hickox, a dedicated and long-time CAT member and volunteer, passed away suddenly, soon after our last AGM. Donna was particularly concerned with getting food to the cats, and in her honour, Paula Connolly and Vicky Smith have been gathering “Pennies for Paws.” Between July and December 2010, their efforts brought in over \$1000, and they plan on raising even more money in 2011. Meanwhile, \$800.00 from “Pennies for Paws” has been spent on cat food. That food, like the Iams food, is being divided equally between the western and eastern halves of the Island.

It’s a good thing we had the extra money from “Pennies for Paws,” because this year has been a particularly difficult one: while we continue to take on many new colonies, we have received far less food, from the reclamation shipments and from Iams, than in past years.

In past years we have not kept very good records of what we receive or where it goes, but since the last AGM we’ve been steadily improving our record keeping. On a separate sheet, we are providing you with the scanty figures we have gathered so far, in the hope that it may give you some sense of how much (or how little) food has arrived in the past year, and also, how dramatically the amounts of food can fluctuate from month to month.

To return to the question of whether the food is distributed as fairly as possible: After talking to several people who have been involved in sorting and distributing the food in the past, the Food Committee believes that everyone has sincerely tried to make the best possible decisions on behalf of the cats. But in the absence of detailed records, we can’t begin to be more specific about which colonies got what proportion of the food, or how the distribution system might be made more equitable.

That’s one reason why Anne and I are now going through the tedious process of asking every colony caregiver to provide us with an approximate number of the cats being fed.

But there's a second, even more important reason why we are asking you to please respond promptly and fully and as accurately as you can to our requests for information:

For the sake of the cats -- who don't have any idea whether they are living in older or younger colonies, or in eastern or western PEI -- it is essential that, instead of wasting our energies quarreling over our limited amounts of food, or constantly readjusting the formulas by which that food is divided, we go out and work to get more food, by stepping up our appeals to corporate donors, to retailers, and to the public.

We need the figures that only our volunteer caregivers can provide in order to demonstrate to past donors that, grateful as we are for their past generosity, we urgently need more food. We need these figures to approach new donors -- corporate donors, retailers, and others. We will also be applying for grants which require us to provide detailed information.

We all know that our need for food far outstrips our current supply. But to persuade our donors of that, we need facts and figures.

Anne and I can't do it all. So we are appealing to everyone here today for help, for example, by suggesting retailers or clinics or other organizations you know of that might respond to an appeal from CAT. We also hope that before you leave, some of you will volunteer to work with us, in any way you can, to get more food donations and more cash donations earmarked for the purchase of food. We hope that with your help, we will be able to announce at next year's AGM that we have dramatically increased the amount of food we can distribute to the cats in our colonies.

—Respectfully submitted by Pat Srebrnik, Chair of the CAT Food Committee

ADDENDUM: Food received, April, 2010 through March, 2011:

From the reclamation food shipment:

June 2010, calculated by Ron Curtis:

- 74 boxes (banana boxes) of dry cat food
- 30 boxes of canned cat food
- 125 boxes (or large bags) of dry dog food
- 30 boxes of canned dog food
- 60 boxes of cat litter
- 26 boxes of bird seed
- A quantity of dog or cat treat

October 2010, calculated by Ron Curtis:

- 35 boxes (banana boxes) of dry cat food
- 27 boxes of canned cat food
- 90 boxes (or large bags) of dry dog food
- 21 boxes of canned dog food
- 6 boxes of wild bird seed
- A quantity of dog or cat treats.

February 2011, calculated by Ron Curtis:

- 70 boxes (banana boxes) of dry cat food
- 36.5 boxes of canned cat food
- 117.5 boxes (or large bags) of dry dog food
- 26 boxes of canned dog food
- 28 boxes of wild bird seed

From Proctor and Gamble (Iams) and the students at the Atlantic Veterinary College:

[Note: although the Iams student representatives at the AVC request food every month, they do not always receive what they have requested. For example, in the winter (Jan - March) of 2010, there were only two shipments, which were not inventoried, and then nothing more until ...]

February, 2011:

Canned cat food: 72 cans of 5.5 oz + 24 cans of 3 oz = 468 oz = approximately 29 lb / 13 kg

Dry cat food: 11 bags of 6.8 lb dry cat food x 11 = 74.8 lb / approximately 34 kg

Dry dog food: approximately 137 lb / 62 kg

March, 2011:

Dry cat food: 64 bags of dry cat food, 6.8 lbs (3.08 kg) each = 432.5 pounds / 197.12 kg
(no canned food, no dog food)