



Sydney's Animals For Everyone Rehoming Incorporated

ABN 68 545 973 832

RON R251000093

NSW CFN 26206

Unit 19 / 30-32 Barcoo Street, Roseville NSW 2069

www.saferehoming.com.au

info@saferehoming.com.au

*'Every animal deserves a chance to
live a happy life'*

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Re: SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS for the INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

(1) Can it be difficult to tell the difference between a scared domestic cat (who may have escaped from their home, gotten lost or been abandoned), and an 'unowned' or 'wild' cat? Will they sometimes exhibit the same behaviours when trapped and impounded?

I answer as a qualified behaviourist with over 10 years practical experience in rescue, dealing with over 2000 cats from the whole spectrum of socialisation.

Cats are both predators and prey in the wild, and their behaviour reflects this. As all animals which are preyed upon, their instincts default to either a fight or flight response, but they also provide insight and 'advise' if you like during any interaction. There are generally 3 responses when cats feel threatened, one of which would be flight if that's possible. The other two are related to fight.

Some will have a fear aggressive response in relation to fight: Hisses, growls, swipes and/or bites are fear aggressive attempts to warn someone or something to stay away. If the warning is not taken, the behaviour escalates.

Others will have less of a fight or flight response initially, and will be more shut down when they feel threatened, but they still tell us with more subtle signs: flattened ear, dilated pupils, raised fur down the spine, puffed up fur on the tail, etc. However often if these signs are ignored, and the threat continues to escalate, many cats will default to the fear aggression mentioned above.

One might look at any number of the aforementioned signs a cat is displaying and deem them 'wild' or 'feral', however it is not unusual for even the most friendly and 'domesticated' cat to display any or all of these signs when they feel threatened, including lashing out by swiping and biting. A scared domestic, pet cat will feel threatened when in a trap or cornered just like an unowned or wild cat will. This is an instinctive reaction to a situation that is completely foreign to any cat, and more than likely a person who they don't know, in an environment that is not conducive to calming a cat down.

As many cat owners will attest to, getting their pet cat into a carrier for a vet trip can be very challenging. This is usually done by someone the cat knows very well, in their home environment that they know very well. So when we think about a domestic pet cat in that context and add in all the factors I have mentioned above, I think it becomes very clear that even the friendliest domestic pet cat will more often than not present as a scared unowned or wild cat in trap or in a cage in a pound with barking dogs and host of other noises.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Best regards,

Tim Crossman
President and General Manager
SAFE Rehoming