

Body condition of feral cats and the effect of neutering

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Abstract

Considerable debate exists regarding the most appropriate methods for controlling feral cat populations, both from humane and logistical points of view. The physical condition of feral cats has not been reported, and it is not known if these cats benefit from neutering. This study investigates the body condition of feral cats by measuring body weight (BW), body condition score (BCS; Burkholder, 2000; Laflamme, Kealy, & Schmidt, 1994), and falciform fat pad. The study includes lateral abdominal radiographs taken at the time of neutering of 105 adult feral cats for measurement of falciform fat pad depth and area. At that time we also assessed BW and BCS. One year later we assessed the effects of neutering on body condition by evaluating a subsample of 14 cats. At the time of surgery, the cats were lean but not emaciated (BW 3.1 +/- 0.9 kg; BCS 4 +/- 1; based on a 1 to 9 scale ranging from 1 [emaciated] to 9 [grossly obese]). Falciform fat pad depth and area averaged 7.1 mm and 197.4 mm², respectively, indicating a small amount of fat. Fourteen cats, reevaluated 1 year after neutering, increased 260% + 90% in falciform fat pad depth, 420% +/- 390% in fat pad area, 40% +/- 4% in BW, and 1 level in BCS ranking (1 to 9 scale; all differences $p < .001$). Similar to confined socialized cats, feral cats gained significant weight and body fat after neutering.