

Misleading Research Cited to Support Community Cats/Return-to-Field Programs

By William Hamilton, MPA (March 7, 2023)

Virtually all studies and peer-reviewed articles used to support the hypotheses of those advocating for Community Cats Programs (CCPs) and Return-to-Field policies fall into one of three categories: (a) studies describing practices that are only tangentially relevant, if at all; (b) studies that can be extrapolated only to shelters with low live release rates for cats, typically below 60%; and (c) studies that are *both* irrelevant and inappropriate.

Five of the 17 studies analyzed below were co-authored by Julie Levy, DVM, Director of the Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program at the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Florida, Gainesville. She has also cited many of the other studies below in her publications.

Kate Hurley, DVM, Director of the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program, has worked with Dr. Levy to apply the results of these studies to all animal shelters in the U.S. Dr. Hurley has cited no pertinent studies that she may have authored or co-authored, but she has also cited many of the studies analyzed below in her publications.

1. Boone, J. D., et al. (2019). "A Long-Term Lens: Cumulative Impacts of Free-Roaming Cat Management Strategy and Intensity on Preventable Cat Mortalities." *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 6.

This study says: "[F]ree-roaming cats sometimes die from outdoor hazards (including predation, vehicles and other accidents, starvation, extreme weather, and lack of medical care)...our model did not explicitly assign cause of hazard-based death for each individual. Consequently, these deaths were excluded from our definition and calculation of preventable deaths." Thus, the authors conveniently skimmed over the real risks cats face outside.

CCP advocates claim that sterilization reduces cat roaming and thus deaths outside. However, the only population of free-roaming cats that the authors *do* say would benefit from sterilization is kittens: "[D]eaths of kittens...can be reduced by taking appropriate management actions (i.e., sterilization to reduce the number of kittens that are born and subjected to potential mortality...)."

In other words, sterilization does not result in fewer deaths of adult cats, whether tame or feral, as the CCP advocates state. The primary benefit of sterilization is that it leads to reduced cat populations. The secondary benefit is that it reduces roaming, fighting and caterwauling by intact males, thus placating nearby residents.

Finally, the study does not use the term "community cats" and does not differentiate between feral and socialized cats, so it is not relevant to CCPs. However, almost all cat caregiver volunteers and rescuers already agree that TNR (trap-neuter-return) for *unadoptable* cats is the most humane method of colony management and population reduction.

2. Chu K., PhD and Anderson WM, JD, 2007, U.S. Public Opinion on Humane Treatment of Stray Cats, Law & Policy Brief, Alley Cat Allies, Bethesda, MD. [survey]

One of the programs cited as supporting the Return-to-Field movement, the policy of making sure outdoor cats *remain* strays, is "The Million Cat Challenge" (MCC). Launched in 2014 and conducted by the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program (headed by Kate Hurley, DVM) and the University of Florida Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program (headed by Julie Levy, DVM), the "challenge" was to reduce the culling of healthy tame cats in animal shelters and increase their live outcomes by one million cats over five years. The MCC achieved those goals in less than four years by funding CCPs *in shelters that had killed most incoming cats*.

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One crucial conclusion of the program says, “Unidentified lost cats are far more likely to be reunited with their owners if they remain in the neighborhood where they were found than if they are removed and taken to a shelter.” One of the primary documents (not strictly a “study”) supporting this statement by Chu and Anderson, cited above, was a survey by the polling firm Harris Interactive. (Chu was an economist at the FDIC, and Anderson was an attorney at Alley Cat Allies.) However, the words “unidentified,” “lost” and “owner” were not mentioned in this study, nor was the question asked about the likelihood of owner reunions. It was simply a phone survey of 1,205 random people, weighted toward women over 40, asking their opinion on only two possible outcomes: *Leave a stray cat where he is* or *catch him and put him down*. Of course, the vast majority of respondents, given only those two choices, chose “leave him where he is,” even, as was made clear in a second question, if he would probably be killed within two years by one of many outdoor threats.

A study based solely on the *opinions* gleaned from random phone interviews is necessarily subjective and extremely variable. If those conducting the surveys phoned the same interviewees the next day and asked the same questions, they might have gotten different answers to those questions. Nevertheless, the interviewees’ answers were then extrapolated to the nation as a whole and therefore carried more weight than they merited.

Thus, the MCC survey offers no evidence that friendly stray cats left in the field are more likely to be reunited with their guardians.

3. Edinboro, C.H.; Watson, H.N.; Fairbrother, A. “Association between a Shelter-Neuter-Return Program and Cat Health at a Large Municipal Animal Shelter.” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 2016, 248, 298–308, doi:10.2460/javma.248.3.298.

This study says (emphasis added): “[M]ore cats were *adopted or transferred to rescue organizations* from [the San Jose Animal Care Center] in 2013 than in 2006, and the proportion of cats that were euthanized decreased from nearly 70% in 2006 to < 30% in 2013....[The] proportion of *transfers to rescue groups* increased dramatically, from 14% to 25%...The related public education activities include[ed] encouraging *adoptions of socialized cats* and enhanced conflict resolution for nuisance cats....A valuable next step in evaluating the success of the SNR program would be to monitor the health and welfare of the cats after release.”

“[URI increased] during the study period, [because] shelter staff did not vaccinate all cats against FVRCP within 24 hours after admission as recommended in published standards of care for animal shelters...In cats at SJACC, URI has been controlled through improvements in environmental cleaning protocols, [and] avoidance of moving cats from their cages on a daily basis....[It] is...likely that the presence of URI was historically underreported when kittens and other stray cats were admitted and then euthanized.”

The San Jose Animal Care Center’s “Shelter-Neuter-Return” program returned *only unsocialized, unadoptable cats* to the field while contributing to a dramatic increase in *adoptions and rescue group transfers* of tame, adoptable cats. The second practice is precisely what the supporters of CCPs now oppose.

URI outbreaks were due to several factors and operational deficiencies, not just overcrowding. Euthanizing kittens and stray cats who had URI upon intake made it look like URI was flaring up when such euthanasias were stopped, again falsely attributed to overcrowding. Returning adoptable cats to the field does not appreciably reduce URI in shelters.

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4. *Hamilton, F. "Implementing Nonlethal Solutions for Free-Roaming Cat Management in a County in the Southeastern United States." Frontiers in Veterinary Science 2019, 6, 259, doi:10.3389/fvets.2019.00259.*

This study's classifications of cats is confusing. Its Introduction begins with, "Governmental agencies are responsible for controlling the excess population at public animal shelters. A major part of the excess consists of unlicensed, free-roaming cats, sometimes also referred to as feral (unsocialized) cats, community cats (which may be owned but unlicensed), and strays. [Cats are not required to be licensed in any state except Rhode Island.] This paper will use the term free-roaming cats [for] any cats, whether owned, stray, or feral, that are free to roam the streets."

Thus, the paper acknowledges recognized differences among feral, community (including owned) and stray cats but aggregates all of them as "free-roaming." Though convenient for the researchers, such an umbrella classification does not support its application to the two clearly defined cat groups at the heart of the CCP controversy: feral cats and friendly stray cats (whether owned without ID, abandoned, or lost).

However, the study further muddies the waters. From 2005 to 2017 it tracked the cat intake of "owned cats" and "stray cats" only. It does not indicate whether this means owner-surrendered or free-roaming owned cats. However, since it is impossible to confirm that friendly stray cats without any ID are recently owned, the intake numbers would appear to exclude them and make the term "stray" a synonym for the generic "free-roaming."

Another reason that this study cannot apply to the situation in other shelters is its concern solely with the Hillsborough County Animal Services (HCAS) public shelter in Florida. Shockingly, in 2000, that shelter's euthanasia rate for cats was over 90%. Low- or no-kill shelters should not be subject to or influenced by research gleaned from such shelters with an abhorrent mortality history. At least the study's author included this disclaimer: "Because companion animal population management is a dynamic and complex problem, it is hard to be sure which variables explain most of the variance in the data." (With such a vague and unhelpful conclusion, one wonders why the journal bothered to publish this paper.)

5. *Johnson KL and Cicirelli J, 2014, Study of the effect on shelter cat intakes and euthanasia from a shelter neuter return project of 10,080 cats from March 2010 to June 2014. PeerJ, 2:e646.*

This study examined the impact of a Return-to-Field program in a municipal shelter in San Jose, California. The program included sterilizing, vaccinating, ear tipping and returning healthy, impounded cats to the place they were found, with or without an identified caregiver. Over four years, the shelter's program garnered decreases in cat intakes (from 70% to 23%) and cat and kitten impounds (by 29.1%).

Besides the obvious cruelty of returning a healthy, friendly cat who may be lost or abandoned to the outdoors, the fact that she may not even have a caregiver shows why this study should not apply to any humane animal shelter. Another term for such behavior is "pet dumping," which is a crime.

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6. Kreisler RE, Cornell HN, and Levy JK. 2019. *Decrease in Population and Increase in Welfare of Community Cats in a Twenty-Three Year Trap-Neuter-Return Program in Key Largo, FL: The ORCAT Program. Frontiers in Veterinary Science. 6: 7.*

According to this study, throughout a 23-year TNR program, only the feral cats were returned to their outdoor habitat. *The friendly stray cats were adopted*, a policy that contravenes CCP protocols: “[T]here were 1,111 cats returned back to their original location, and 1,419 cats removed via adoption.”

7. Lazenby BT, Mooney NJ, Dickman CR. ‘Effects of low-level culling of feral cats in open populations: a case study from the forests of southern Tasmania.’ *Wildlife Research* (2014) 41:407. doi: 10.1071/WR14030.

Dr. Hurley and Dr. Levy claim that this study shows that removing outdoor cats from their habitat encourages cats from surrounding areas to move into the missing cats’ habitat (a consequence sometimes called “the vacuum effect”). However, this study actually reveals that:

1. It involved feral cats only, no friendly stray cats as are found in the U.S.
2. The authors were three Australian biologists with no apparent interest in or relevant knowledge of cats. They were researching the effectiveness of a method to permanently eliminate cats from unpopulated land.
3. The cats were truly wild, in a section of forest on the island of Tasmania, with no caretakers or human contact, not comparable in any way with outdoor domestic cats in the U.S. The paper was even published in the journal “Wildlife Research.” (Feral cats are not classified as wildlife.)
4. The researchers killed some of the cats (they use the terms “culled” or “harvested” but do not say what method was used) to create a “vacuum” intended to attract other cats and made all observations using remote cameras. However, those citing the paper have extrapolated these circumscribed and nonreproducible findings to all outdoor cats in the U.S. Such an inference is nonempirical and illogical.

This Tasmanian study also raises the serious moral/ethical issue of American researchers relying on a foreign study that employed such crude and barbaric methods as slaughtering its subjects to arrive at its result, especially when a more accurate, relevant and humane method would simply have been to interview a representative sample of outdoor cat caregivers in the U.S.

Another major difference between feral cats hunting for prey in a remote forest and those in the city are that most homeless urban cats obviously have a regular and reliable source of food supplied by humans. They would not otherwise survive, since urban cats, who are carnivorous, cannot live on scarce and hard-to-catch rodents and birds alone, like forest cats can. Food in neighborhoods may be intentionally left out by colony caretakers or on a resident’s property or may only be scraps thrown out in garbage, but it’s enough to keep the cats close to that source and less likely to roam in search of a new source.

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8. Levy JK, and Crawford PC. 2004. Humane strategies for controlling feral cat populations. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 225(9): 1354-60. PMID:15552308.

This study says (emphasis added): “Strictly speaking, feral cats are defined as those that are untamed and evasive. They are either born in the wild and lack socialization or are abandoned to the wild and become untrusting of humans....*For the purposes of this discussion, “feral cat” will be used to denote any unconfined, unowned cat, regardless of its socialization status.*”

However, the study concludes that the outdoor cats’ large-scale adoption is unrealistic, partly because of the “feral [i.e., unsocialized, unfriendly] nature of the cats....Although TNR programs frequently incorporate adoption for friendly cats, the imbalance of available homes, massive size of the feral cat population, and *feral nature of the cats* make large-scale adoption an unrealistic solution alone.”

Although it may have been difficult to determine the adoptability of all the feline TNR patients, the authors arbitrarily labeled them “feral.” That does not mean all of them *were*.

If the central hypothesis of a study rests on the demographics of its subjects, in this case cats, some effort should have been made to assess, count and extrapolate their temperaments to arrive at a reasonable estimate of the percentage of cats who were actually tame and adoptable. Generalizing the entire community cat population was lazy science, sidestepping the rigor of the scientific method while sealing the lifelong fate of the cats.

Dr. Levy can’t have it both ways. Outdoor cats are either adoptable because they’re friendly or unadoptable because they aren’t. Thus, this study’s conclusion is contradictory and invalid.

9. Levy JK, Gale DW, and Gale LA, 2003. Evaluation of the effect of a long-term trap-neuter return and adoption program on a free-roaming cat population. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 222(1): 42-6. PMID:12523478.

This study says (emphasis added): “A comprehensive long-term program of neutering *followed by adoption* or return to the resident colony can result in reduction of free-roaming cat populations in urban areas....*Adoptions accounted for a substantial portion of the decrease in the cat population, even among feral cats.* It has been reported that feral cats become less aggressive toward each other and more friendly toward their feeders following neutering, and this may have encouraged adoption of previously feral cats....*The permanent placement of cats in homes* is consistent with conventional animal welfare values; *the more traditional pet lifestyle* is considered to meet the needs of domesticated pet species better than a homeless and free-roaming existence.”

What has changed in 20 years for Dr. Levy to make a complete about-face today? If she claims more recent research, why does she include this citation in her recent legal declarations under oath in support of CCPs? The “permanent placement of cats in homes” is what all volunteers and caregivers want. CCP advocates say they don’t.

10. Levy JK, Isaza NM, and Scott KC. 2014. Effect of high-impact targeted trap-neuter-return and adoption of community cats on cat intake to a shelter. *The Veterinary Journal*. 201(3): 269-74. PMID:24980808.

During a two-year TNR program the feral cats were returned to their outdoor habitat, and the socialized cats were adopted, contrary to CCP protocols: “High-impact TNR combined with

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the adoption of socialized cats and nuisance resolution counseling for residents is an effective tool [sic] for reducing shelter cat intake."

11. Lord, L.K., T. E. Wittum, A. K. Ferketich, J. A. Funk and P. J. Rajala-Schultz (2007). "Search and identification methods that owners use to find a lost cat." *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 230(2): 217-220.

[and]

12. Slater, M. R., E. Weiss and L. K. Lord (2012). *Frequency of Lost Dogs and Cats in the United States and the Methods Used to Locate Them.* "Animals(2): 301-315.

The first of these two similar studies (Lord et al.) says, "Results suggest that the percentage of lost cats recovered by their owners is low...35% returned home or were found in the neighborhood." The second study (Slater et al.) says, "Since 25% of lost cats were not found, other methods of reuniting cats and their owners [i.e., other than cats coming home on their own] are needed."

Thus, leaving healthy cats in place or returning them to the location where they were found are not effective methods of reuniting stray cats with their owners, contrary to one of the tenets of the CCP movement.

13. Schmidt, P. M., et al. (2007). "Survival, Fecundity, and Movements of Free-Roaming Cats." *Journal of Wildlife Management* 71(3): 915-919.

Dr. Hurley has interpreted this study to show that any level of socialization in a community cat suggests some care being provided, which increases the likelihood of thriving and supports the return of that cat to the area where s/he was found.

However, an unsocialized cat is typically accustomed to the rigors and risks of outdoor life and has a much greater likelihood of thriving outside than a tame, socialized cat, who may be lost or abandoned, and who risks getting bullied or injured by unsocialized cats. If anything, the level of socialization in a community cat suggests the care and love the cat received *from her owners* before she got lost. At least if a shelter impounds her, that socialization works in her favor. The more socialized a cat is, the more quickly and likely she is to be adopted — if she isn't claimed by her owners first.

14. Spehar, Daniel D and Wolf PJ, 2018 and 2020, *The Impact of Return-to-Field and Targeted Trap-Neuter-Return on Feline Intake and Euthanasia at a Municipal Animal Shelter in Jefferson County, Kentucky, Animals, vols. 8(4) and 10(8).*

From the Abstract: "RTF programs provide live outcomes for community cats otherwise at high risk of euthanasia after shelter admission....The purpose of the present study was to examine changes in feline euthanasia and intake...at a municipal animal shelter in Jefferson County, KY, after an RTF program was added to an ongoing community-based TNR program. The euthanasia of cats at Louisville Metro Animal Services (LMAS) declined by 94.1%..."

This study of a formerly high-kill shelter recorded a depressing live release rate of 38% before adopting a Return-to-Field program. By not impounding all stray ("community") cats, that rate jumped to a stellar 94.1% by the eighth year of the program.

Again, the Kentucky shelter started out with a terrible live release rate of only 38%. Many U.S. shelters have boasted stellar live release rates in the 84% to 94% range for years. Since

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these shelters are not comparable to Kentucky's shelter in this crucial statistic, this study does not support or call for a Return-to-Field policy in successful shelters.

15. Spehar, DD and Wolf, PJ, 2019, *Integrated Return-To-Field and Targeted Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return Programs Result in Reductions of Feline Intake and Euthanasia at Six Municipal Animal Shelters. *Frontiers of Veterinary Science*, March 21.*

PetSmart Charities granted a total of almost \$6 million dollars, \$3.7 million of which went to six shelters to help them conduct Return-to-Field and TNR programs over three years. Another \$2.2 million went to Best Friends Animal Society (the employer of one of the authors of the study cited above, Peter J. Wolf) for their part in helping the same six shelters implement the program. The experiment ended in 2017. The six shelters were in Albuquerque, NM; San Antonio, TX; Baltimore, MD; Philadelphia, PA; Tucson, AZ; and Columbus, GA. Besides the Return-to-Field protocol for friendly stray cats, all the shelters began implementing "targeted TNVR" (trap-neuter-vaccinate-return) for feral cats, a concentrated effort to round up all feral cats in a given area for traditional TNR (the V for "vaccinate" is typically implied).

Even though the data for each method (Return-to-Field and TNR) was recorded separately, the effects of these two programs were combined, so the discrete effectiveness of each method was not recorded. We don't know if traditional TNR for feral cats only was primarily responsible for the positive outcome in the six shelters, none of which appears to have had TNR programs in place before the study. Based on numerous other studies of TNR, it could easily have achieved the positive results by itself. Most large city shelters have practiced TNR for feral cats only for decades. Also, the live release rates of the six shelters before the study ranged from a pitiful 31% to a not great 64%. After the study, these ranged from 74% to 90%. The pre-study rates do not compare with the longstanding and outstanding rates of most major animal shelters in the U.S.

The shelters in the study needed to do *something* to save more cats, and almost any program would have helped. There's no way they can or should be compared with other high-performing shelters. The six shelters were, in effect, "bribed" handsomely to participate in a program they could have initiated on their own using volunteers. Most of the improvement in the six shelters' live release rates probably came from establishing the same TNR programs already widely practiced nationwide, so whatever part of their success may have resulted from a Return-to-Field/Community Cat Program does not apply to successful or "no-kill" shelters.

16. Swarbrick, H.; Rand, J. "Application of a Protocol Based on Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) to Manage Unowned Urban Cats on an Australian University Campus." *Animals* 2018, 8, doi:10.3390/ani8050077.s.

The second paragraph of this study's Introduction effectively disqualifies it as pertinent to CCPs: "Although they are of the same species (*Felis catus*), unowned urban cats are usually considered to be distinct from truly feral cats, which do not depend on humans for shelter or food, and are usually found in rural or forested areas some distance from human habitation. The primary food source for feral cats is through predation, and thus they may impact significantly on Australian native wildlife. Management of feral cats is a significant challenge and is beyond the scope of this paper."

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Free-roaming cat policies “Down Under” are obviously radically different from those of all U.S. shelters. The authors describe “unowned urban cats” as “free-roaming, stray...or community cats” — all of whom they inaccurately labeled “unowned.” That said, the study does mention these results: “All adult socialized cats were successfully *placed in adoptive homes*....[Also] 83% of socialized immigrant cats and kittens...*were successfully [adopted]*.” In other words, results antithetical to the outcome anticipated in CCPs.

17. Wallace, J. L. and J. K. Levy (2006), “Population characteristics of feral cats admitted to seven trap-neuter-return programs in the United States.” *Journal of Feline Medicine & Surgery* 8(4): 279-284.

The only reference to the socialization status of the cats in this study is this statement: “*For the purpose of this study, feral cats were defined as any unowned free-roaming cat, regardless of a wild or tame socialization status.*” In other words, the authors did not actually *determine* the socialization of the cats brought into each shelter but assumed they ran the gamut from friendly to fractious. Their definition of “feral” to include any socialization level was arbitrary.

18. Wolf, P.J.; Schaffner, J.E. “The Road to TNR: Examining Trap-Neuter-Return Through the Lens of Our Evolving Ethics.” *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 2019, 5, 341, doi:10.3389/fvets.2018.00341.

This study uses the term “community cats” 19 times but does not define it. Thus the study does not directly discuss whether friendly stray cats should be included in that category. However, the study does include this information: “In 2016, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) [stated,] “Public, private, and not-for-profit humane organizations and individuals must make every effort to promote *adoption of acceptable unowned cats*...”” That would include, of course, tame “community cats,” who are excluded from a chance at adoption under CCPs.

It is universally accepted that valid empirical studies have a few basic requirements:

1. They must test and rule out all possible variables for disproving a hypothesis.
2. They must be reproducible by other, independent researchers.
3. They must not be funded or influenced by parties who might benefit from a particular outcome.
4. They must be peer-reviewed and published in a widely recognized and rigorously selective academic journal.
5. Depending on the field of study, experimental research will also include double-blind, randomized control trials, informed consent by human subjects, and humane protocols for animal subjects.

This review has demonstrated that the studies analyzed violate one or more of these requirements, greatly weakening or even invalidating Community Cat Programs that advocate a Return-to-Field policy for friendly/tame stray cats. Shelters that must kill healthy tame cats due to lack of space, lack of adopters and lack of foster partners *should* implement CCPs. High live-release-rate shelters should not. Not all animal shelters are the same.

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William Hamilton has a strong background in animal welfare and advocacy in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2008 he earned a Master of Public Administration Degree from San Francisco State University, where he received the Barbara Jordan Award for Academic and Collegial Excellence. Almost a year of the three-year program was devoted to quantitative and qualitative research.

In 1997 Hamilton adopted his first cat, Norman, while volunteering at *San Francisco Animal Care and Control* as a dog walker. In 2000 he founded the nonprofit *Friends of San Francisco Animal Care and Control* and served as its President for its first eight years. Under his leadership the *Friends* raised and granted thousands of dollars to partnering nonprofits that rescued and cared for animals who were at risk of euthanasia at the municipal shelter. It is still an active and thriving organization. For his accomplishments the *National Animal Control Association (NACA)* awarded Hamilton the Lehman Memorial Award, its highest honor.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors appointed Hamilton as a Commissioner on the City's and County's *Animal Control and Welfare Commission* (waiving its residency requirement) for the standard two-year term. He introduced and supported several important animal welfare proposals for consideration by the Board of Supervisors.

Since 2003 Hamilton has been an active volunteer with the *San Francisco SPCA Cat Assistance Team*, feeding and caring for nine to 18 feral cat colonies (up to 40 cats) a day. He practices the nationally recognized TNR (trap-neuter-return) policy: trapping feral cats for spay/neuter surgery at the SPCA community cats clinic and releasing them back to their usual habitat after recovery, where he or another volunteer cares for them for life. He has also brought tame, socialized cats to *Animal Care and Control* for adoption. He has humanely trapped well over 200 cats and gotten them sterilized. He nurses sick cats back to health, teaches members of the public and other volunteers how to trap humanely, and transports cats for those without a vehicle. Hamilton spends about \$250 a week out-of-pocket for cat food, vet bills and supplies (like bowls, shelters, fly traps, chains and locks).

While volunteering at the national nonprofit *In Defense of Animals* in San Rafael, Hamilton researched and authored the concluding chapter of the scholarly anthology "Animals and War: Confronting the Military-Animal Industrial Complex," which is still in print.

He volunteered for and was on the board of *Give Me Shelter Cat Rescue*, the largest and most successful cat rescue nonprofit in San Francisco. In 2007-08 he was the U.S. Development Manager for the London-based nonprofit *Animal Defenders International*.

In 2010 Hamilton founded the California nonprofit corporation *The Animal Union* and has served as its President/Board Chair since then. It raises money to help small animal rescue nonprofits pay their veterinary bills. In 2021 he launched the *Feral Cat Humane Society*, a special project of *The Animal Union*, to place feral cats, threatened with the loss of their habitat, in the back yards of adopters who are not able to care for cats indoors.

In 2022 Hamilton managed an international petition campaign to reform inhumane cat exclusion policies at *Animal Care and Control*. Over 3,200 supporters signed it.

He runs his own pet sitting and dog walking business, *The Pet Uncle*.