

Haight Holds Cat Census

By Joe Strupp

Calling all Haight-Ashbury cats!

Come forward and be counted.

That's the message from a group of Haight District cat lovers and the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).

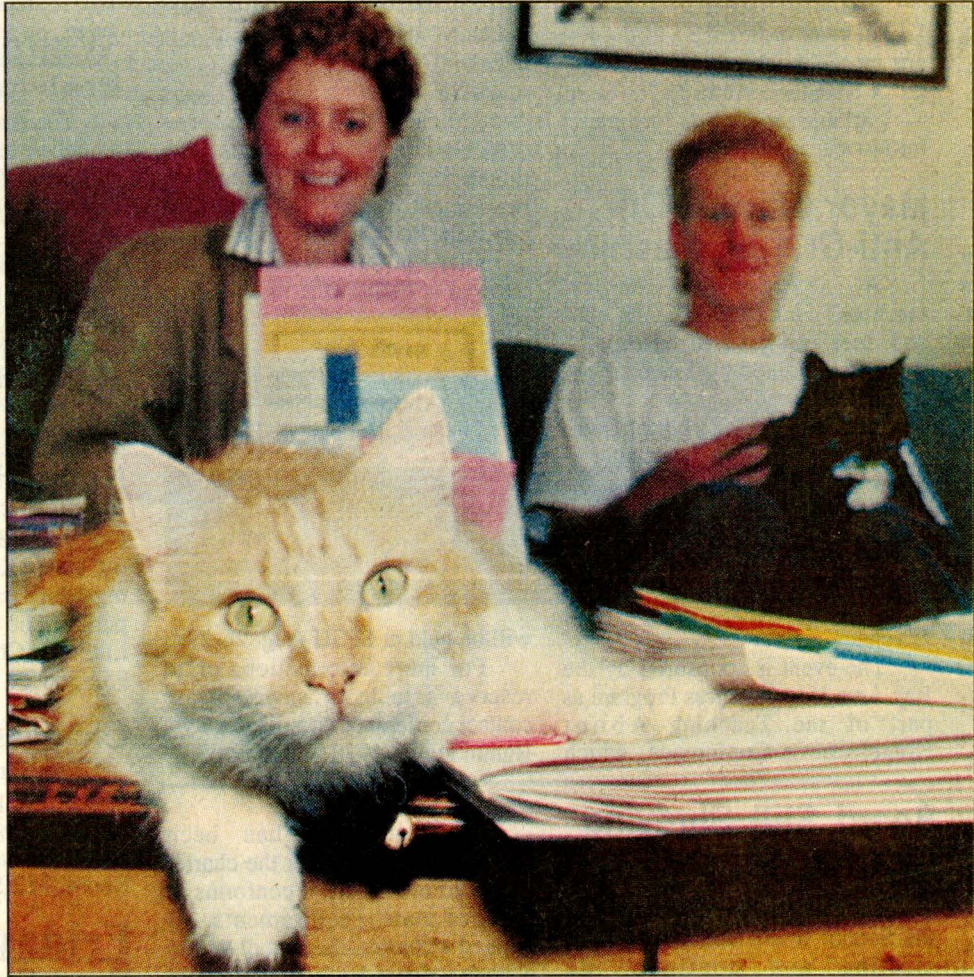
The two groups have combined efforts for the first "Cat Census," which aims to find out how many cats are in the city and to inform owners of the need for identification tags, cat care and spaying and neutering.

"We need to get a feel for what is going on in the neighborhoods as far as cat population and how many are being spayed and neutered," said Kathy Therber, an SPCA organizer. "We also want to find out about the attitude of pet owners in the area, and that will give us a profile of what animal issues are out there."

The SPCA and a group of about 12 Haight residents calling themselves Community Action Team (CAT) have spent several months knocking on doors in the Haight to push cat-care information and count the felines.

The census is being conducted only in the Haight right now, as a pilot program, but organizers hope it will go citywide if successful, said Therber.

"The idea is to get people



DEXTER DONG

Luckily for this cat, who is one of three felines belonging to CAT volunteers Karen and David Eldred (in background), standing up isn't necessary for being counted.

involved in a community-level effort," said Therber. "There are a lot of goals we are trying to meet, and if we get more animals spayed and neutered and more people involved, we would consider it a success."

The volunteers have gone to about 100 homes, Therber

said. She said each home with a cat is asked to fill out the census.

Questions include how many and what kinds of pets residents have, how many are allowed outdoors, how many are spayed or neutered, how the pets were obtained, whether the

owners have lost a pet, whether the residents have seen any strays in the area and whether they want future pet-care information.

The census also includes an information kit with a name tag, referrals for free
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spaying/neutering and health care, plus coupons for pet-supply discounts.

Therber said the Haight is a natural for the pilot plan because it has a large number of pet stores and is known for having many cats.

Dan Silver, owner of Animal Crackers Pet Food and Supply — which is offering a 10 percent discount coupon in the census kit — said the need to keep cats healthy and spayed or neutered is crucial.

Letting the cat population grow unchecked "can create problems with viruses and disease and be harmful to them," said Silver, who has three cats and a dog. "Anything that they can do

to make people more aware of the problem is positive."

In the past five years, cats have surpassed dogs as the most commonly owned pet, Silver said. That fact, he said, helped prompt the census.

"Most people that have pets that I've seen are responsible," said Silver, whose store is located at 780 Stanyan St. "But there are a lot of people out there who are less responsible and may not neuter or spay them."

Karen Eldred, who owns three cats and is one of the census takers, said the volunteers are being well received.

"We've been doing this for a while and it is arousing peoples' awareness about the responsibility,"

said Eldred. "We are meeting our neighbors and people have been very responsive and understanding."

The volunteers have also found some abused and neglected cats, Eldred said.

"We need more volunteers to help us do the rest of the city," said Eldred. "We have people asking from other neighborhoods for us to come to their area and do it there."

If this pilot project is deemed successful, CAT will likely launch a similar program in at least one other neighborhood by the end of 1993, Therber said. She said it's not known where it would take place, but that the areas with the most need would be considered.