

## **UPDATE ON THE LA TORRE FERAL CAT CONTROL PROGRAMME**

The feral cat programme is not new to La Torre and has been running for several years. It was introduced due to the (then) large and growing number of feral cats on the resort which were becoming a real nuisance; rapidly increasing in population (often setting up nesting homes on owners terraces and damaging furniture), frequenting the golf course and hanging around the bars, restaurants, dustbins and private properties in search of food. This update is provided due to the number of new owners now on La Torre who may not be aware of the programme.

La Torre Golf Resort is in a semi-rural location, and therefore naturally has a population of feral (street) cats. The feral cat population at La Torre is an essential part of the Ecosystem and helps to control the numbers of rats and other vermin naturally found in large semi-rural areas such as our resort.

It is essential that the feral cat population is monitored and controlled. In just 18 months, one female un-neutered cat could have 2,000 descendants and in Spain in general feral cat colonies are growing exponentially as is their suffering due to inbreeding and the lack of any veterinary care (source: Pets in Spain Animal Charity). The Pets in Spain animal charity launched a long term project in August 2014 specifically aimed at the sterilisation of feral cats as they recognise this is an important community issue. There are already similar programme running in towns in the Alicante province such Torrevieja and Pilar de la Horadada. Other resorts have had similar problems - for example the Mar Menor Resort has sought our advice on how to deal with this issue which became a problem for them.

With the help of a team of dedicated registered volunteers, we have introduced a recognised Trap Neuter Return (TNR) programme on La Torre, which has been presented to Torre Pacheco Town Hall and has been passed to the Region of Murcia Government for final approval. The programme has also been voted on and approved at a General Resort AGM.

TNR involves capturing and neutering the cats and then releasing them back on to the resort. We work with a registered local vet who checks the cat's health, neuters them and puts a small mark in the ear to identify that the cat has been neutered and is part of the local colony. Once the cats have been neutered, they are returned to La Torre. The cat population has stabilised and diminished in size over the years, remains generally healthy and controlled yet continues to provide the benefits of suppressing pests and rodents on the resort. This is an ongoing process as although the older cats finally die, new stray cats still find their way to the resort, feral cats move in from surrounding areas and pet cats (particularly if pregnant) are abandoned on the resort. As an example we had an influx of 'new' feral cats last year whose habitat was disturbed when Pinatar Arena excavated the land for their football pitches outside the perimeter wall.

In order to be able to monitor and control the cats, we have installed thirteen fixed and permanent stations at strategic points around the resort, as far away from properties as possible. Controlled supplies of food and water are provided regularly to encourage the cats to congregate in these areas for food. The purpose of the monitoring station is twofold; firstly it will encourage the cats to stay away from owners' properties and dustbins in the search for food, and secondly it will enable the cats to be monitored and trapped when necessary.

There has been some criticism that the cats are being fed too much, and also that they are being fed near to properties. It is true that some owners have given permission for cats to be fed on their

properties, but this does defeat one of the objectives of the programme – to keep the cats away from private dwellings - and we respectfully ask that owners do not do this. In addition, we are aware that some owners, visitors and residents put food out for the feral cats at their properties. Again, we ask that this is not done – not only does it further encourage cats to congregate around properties, it may also lead to overfeeding which reduces the effectiveness of the cats natural instinct to seek out rodents and other pests – and when those visitors leave, the cats are still there expecting to be fed, causing a nuisance to the neighbours. In fact, in Pilar de la Horadada, under the terms of the program, the Town Hall can issue fines to anyone who feeds the cats outside the program, as well as anyone who manipulates or destroys the feeding stations.

The volunteers who feed feral cats at the dedicated feeding stations are under the protection of the programme, supported by Security if necessary. Under no circumstances should the food and water placed in these areas be removed or thrown away (yes, it does happen!). Please also remember that the volunteers are providing an extremely valuable service to the community. They give up a lot of their free time and should not be subject to any kind of abuse. However, anyone who feeds feral cats at private properties will not be under the protection of the TNR programme and will be deemed to be acting on their own behalf. In such instances, if there are any complaints or disagreements as a result, this will be treated as a private dispute between the individuals involved and nothing to do with the TNR programme.

Feral cats are not pets – some can be docile but others remain in their wild state and there should not be any attempt made to domesticate them as they can be known to attack. The feral cats can be identified by the mark in their ear – obviously there are also pet cats on the resort belonging to owners and residents but these will not have this marking. Please therefore ensure that food for pet cats is not left outside – feral cats are not fussy about where their dinner comes from!

We therefore seek the cooperation of all owners in order to support the programme, without which we would soon again be overrun with a growing cat population. Help to keep our feral cat population under control:

Please don't leave food or drink for your pet cats outside.

Please don't feed the feral cats **at all** – leave it to the volunteers and allow nature to provide.

Please don't throw the food and drink away that has been put in the dedicated stations – it will only cause the cats to go looking elsewhere.

Please respect the volunteers to whom the Community must be incredibly grateful for their dedication and support and without whom the programme would not be successful.

Please make your visitors and/or guests aware of this programme and the request not to feed the feral cats.

If anyone is interested and willing to help with the TNR programme please contact Admiburgos at [murcia@admiburgos.com](mailto:murcia@admiburgos.com)

With thanks.

Lynn Wynne  
Resort President  
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