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Record low shelter killing raises both hopes & questions

NOVEMBER 14, 2014 BY [MERRITT CLIFTON](#)

by **Merritt Clifton**

U.S. animal shelters are now killing fewer cats and dogs than at any time in the past 60 years--nearly 300,000 fewer in the most recent fiscal year than just one year earlier, and just 8.6 per 1,000 Americans, the lowest ratio on record--but is the recent dramatic progress really saving animal lives?

Are fewer animals being born, for whom there are no adoptive homes? Are more homes opening to adopted animals?

Or are shelters simply relegating killing of homeless animals to others, including nuisance wildlife trappers and hoarders operating under the guise of "rescue"?

Can the recent drop in shelter killing be responsibly sustained?

Was it responsibly achieved in the first place?

Answering all of these questions will take time and more data.

50% drop

What we do know, from the survey data that follows, is that U.S. animal shelter killing is down to about 2.7 million per year, including about 1.4 million cats (53%) and 1.3 million dogs (47%). This represents a 50% drop in shelter killing in 18 years.



M the cat assisted in this data compilation. (BC)

U.S. progress vs. shelter killing

Year	Millions of dogs & cats killed	Per 1,000 humans
1950	2.0	13.5
1970	23.4	115.0
1985	17.8	74.8
1992	5.7	22.2
1997	5.3	21.1
1998	5.3	19.7
1999	4.9	18.0
2000	4.9	17.8
2001	4.5	16.6
2002	4.5	16.8
2003	4.4	15.7
2004	4.2	15.3
2005	4.5	14.8
2006	4.9	17.4
2007	4.4	14.8
2008	4.0	13.6
2009	4.2	13.8
2010	3.6	11.6
2011	3.4	11.2
2012	3.0	9.6
2013	3.0	9.5
2014	2.7	8.6

Except for 1985, the listed figures are composites from three years of data collection concluding with the listed year.

<http://wp.me/p4pKmM-6G>

The accomplishment warrants celebration, but with judicious restraint until how it occurred and the consequences of achieving it are better understood--especially since the drop of 300,000 may have come more as result of changes in shelter operating policies than through programs that actually prevent cat and dog births, reduce the numbers of cats and dogs at large, protect the health and safety of humans and other animals, and reduce the net amount of animal suffering.

We know that little or none of the recent progress in reducing shelter killing has occurred through increased adoptions, because there has been no sustained net increase in adoptions in 30 years. Adoptions through special programs, including the Home 4 the Holidays program sponsored by the Helen Woodward Animal Center in Rancho Santa Fe, California, have actually declined lately--but because far fewer cats and dogs are entering shelters than 10, 20, and 30 years ago, many cats and dogs who previously would have had no chance to be rehomed are now receiving the remedial and promotional help they need to be adopted. *See "Why we cannot adopt our way out of shelter killing,"*

77,250 fewer cats killed--but why?

We know that U.S. animal shelters in the most recent fiscal year appear to have killed about 77,250 fewer cats than in the year before, but we do not know whether fewer homeless cats were actually killed. This is because hard figures do not exist for the numbers of feral cats killed by nuisance wildlife trappers. Most states do not require nuisance wildlife trappers to report the numbers of cats they catch and kill.

What we do know is that the advent of neuter/return feral cat control more than 20 years ago coincided with steep drops in shelter admissions and killing of cats over the next ten years. Then the numbers leveled off for about a decade, before the recent emergence of a trend toward shelters not only encouraging and cooperating with neuter/return programs, but also refusing to accept feral cats and/or participating in "shelter/return" programs. In some instances "shelter/return" programs relocate feral cats to new habitat, usually via intermediary volunteer "cat colony caretakers," whose activity is often only lightly supervised and documented, if monitored at all.



This kitten provided computer assistance.
(BC)

Nuisance wildlife trappers

The limited available aggregate data on the fast-growing nuisance wildlife control industry indicates that about 6,000 private nuisance wildlife contractors are currently doing more \$1.2 billion a year worth of business. Add to that \$72 million per year billed by USDA Wildlife Services, which works mainly for other public agencies and also kills feral cats. Altogether, Americans now spend almost as much to kill "nuisance wildlife" as the estimated \$2.5 billion spent by animal control agencies and humane societies to control the dog and cat population.

USDA Wildlife Services killed 790 feral cats in 2013. If nuisance wildlife trappers killed as many cats proportionate to revenue, they killed about 131,700. But USDA Wildlife Services works primarily on public lands, much of it far from feral cat habitat. Nuisance wildlife trappers work mostly for private property owners, including the management for condominiums and gated communities.

In all likelihood, nuisance wildlife trappers killed three or four times as many cats as USDA Wildlife Services, perhaps half a million or more.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Pit bulls killed</u>
1986	168,000
1993	358,000
2003	900,000
2007	967,300
2008	920,000
2009	825,000
2010	810,000
2012	930,300
2013	910,000
2014	724,000

187,230 fewer pit bulls killed?

U.S. animal shelters killed about 187,230 fewer dogs in the most recently completed fiscal year than the year before--and the entire reduction appears to have been in reduced killing of pit bulls, as the toll among acknowledged pit bulls fell from 910,000 to just 724,000, the lowest number in more than 15 years.

But this apparent gain may be illusory. A recent study done at the Richmond SPCA in Richmond, Virginia, directed by Emily Weiss of the ASPCA, found that shelter workers can accurately identify a pit bull or close pit mix 96% of the time. A second study, published in the March 27, 2014 edition of the *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* and summarized in the September 10, 2014 edition of *Science Daily*, found

that 41% of shelter workers are willing to lie about pit bull breed identification to try to rehome more pit bulls.

In short, are shelters really killing fewer pit bulls, or just not acknowledging that about 20% of the dogs they kill are pit bulls?

Screening failures

Also evident is that shelter screening of pit bulls and other dangerous dogs for adoption suitability has markedly slipped. There were only two fatalities involving U.S. shelter dogs from 1858 through 1999, both involving wolf hybrids, one in 1988 and one in 1989. There were three fatalities involving shelter dogs from 2000 through 2009, involving a pit bull, a Doberman, and a Presa Canario.



Trooper & Sarah. (BC)

There have been at least 35 fatalities involving shelter dogs from 2010 to present, involving 24 pit bulls, seven bull mastiffs, two Rottweilers, a Lab who may have been part pit bull, and a husky.

Also of note, there were 32 disfiguring maulings by shelter dogs from 1859 through 2009, 19 of them involving pit bulls. From 2010 to present, there have been at least 123 disfiguring mailings by shelter dogs, 81 of them involving pit bulls. In 2014 alone, 34 shelter dogs have killed or disfigured someone; 27 were pit bulls.

For every human killed, hundreds of animals have been—about 6,800 animals killed by shelter dogs in 2013 alone.

The attack data goes a long way toward explaining the mid-2013 discovery by the Best Friends Animal Society that younger people no longer regard shelters as the best places to find a dog.



Max the numbers runner. (BC)

More “rescue hoarding”

Both feral cats and pit bulls are also disproportionately often involved in “rescue hoarder” situations, including the recent collapses of several dozen “no-kill shelters” with hundreds of animals apiece requiring re-rescue from conditions of extreme negligence. Since 2010, from 2,500 to 6,000 animals per year are known to have been transferred from shelters to people later caught in “rescue hoarding.” Are all such cases coming to light, which seems unlikely, or perhaps only 10%, or fewer? [See

“Impoundments for alleged neglect fell in 2013, <http://wp.me/p4pKmM-hZ>.]

As the numbers of animals killed in shelters drop, the quality of life of the animals “saved” requires much closer attention.

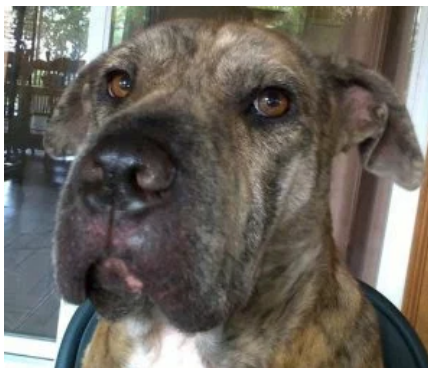
Eight regional tables

The tables below shed further light on shelter killing, region by region. There are eight regional tables in all: Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, Gulf Coast, Appalachia, Midwest, Rockies/Interior West, and Pacific.

Together, these tables constitute my 22nd annual review of animal shelter killing.

Each year, with the help of many volunteers who submit the data from their communities, I assemble a demographically balanced mosaic of shelter exit data from animal control and open admission shelters.

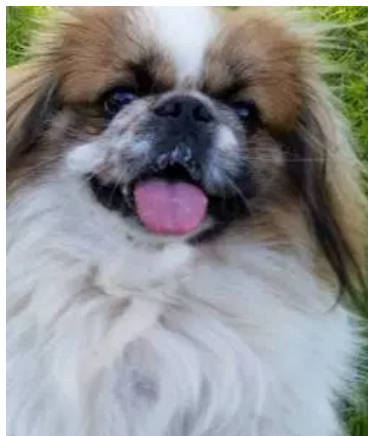
The exit data is compiled from the annual reports of every major open admission and animal control shelter serving each listed community, using only data from one or more of the three most recently completed fiscal years. The estimated totals for the U.S. as a whole are projected each year from the data from jurisdictions including at least half of the total human population of the U.S.



Rhonda the copy editor. (BC)

Trend data is added by conducting additional surveys, including counts of the shelter dog populations at representative shelters of all types around the U.S., and a survey by listed breed

of dogs offered for sale or adoption in online classified ads. [See "Pit bulls were 32% of U.S. shelter inventory in June 2014," <http://wp.me/p4pKmM-AY>, and "Large retrievers still nearly twice as popular as pit bulls," <http://wp.me/p4pKmM-BA>.]



Max is back. (MC)

Historical data included this year

This year the regional tables include, for comparative purposes, the numbers from the first year in which each jurisdiction was included in previous compilations. In almost every instance, the actual peak of shelter killing in the jurisdiction was reached many years and sometimes decades earlier. When each jurisdiction was added to my tables was often just a matter of when someone first sent me the numbers; but all of the first year data listed is from what might be termed the "No Kill Era," following the first No Kill Conference in 1995, a

milestone in establishing no-kill animal control as a national ambition.

From left to right, each table shows first the "Benchmark" historical data, from whatever the year for each jurisdiction, and then the current or most recently available data.

Reading the columns

The "Animals" columns are the combined totals of dogs and cats killed in the shelters serving the jurisdiction. The "Ratio" is the combined number of dogs and cats killed per 1,000 human residents of the jurisdiction.

The "Humans" column is the current human population of the jurisdiction, stated in thousands. Please note that the current human population of any given jurisdiction may vary considerably from what it was when it was first included in my tables. This is because of human population growth, mergers and divisions of cities and counties, and redefinitions of metropolitan areas.

The number of real significance is the "Ratio," in other words; in instances where the human populations of jurisdictions have significantly changed, comparison of only the actual numbers of animals killed may be misleading.



Bethie provided proofreading. (MC)

State totals appear in bold type.

The regional totals appearing in bold at the bottom of each table are not tallies of the data used to produce them, listed in each table, but are rather estimates proportionately weighted to reflect demography.

The percentage figure in parenthesis at the lower left of each table is the percentage of the human population encompassed within the jurisdictions from which the totals were derived.

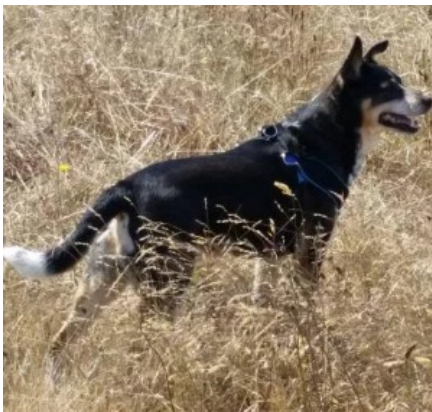
Gaps in cat/dog ratio data

There are significant gaps in the breakdown of shelter killing data between cats and dogs, especially in the Appalachia and Gulf Coast regions. This reflects the format in which the data became available to me.

In several other jurisdictions, in absence of current cat and dog totals, I have used cat and dog totals from earlier years than those covered by the most recent available sum of killing. Thus the totals of cats and dogs may not match the number in the "Animals" column.

No misleading numbers

Finally, readers familiar with current shelter jargon will note no reference to so-called "live release" or "save" rates. These are simply inversions of "euthanasia rate," the oldest and most misleading statistic ever devised to measure animal shelter performance.



Bo provided technical advice. (BC)

If a jurisdiction is doing an effective job of preventing the births of cats and dogs for whom there are no good homes, of keeping pets in homes, and of protecting community health and safety, the cumulative "live release" rate will decline, as ever fewer healthy, adoptable animals enter shelters, and admissions dwindle to mostly just those animals who are so ill, injured, or dangerous that euthanasia is the only humane response.

At that point, the ratio of shelter killing per 1,000 people will usually be below 2.0, a target that many jurisdictions have already reached.

For those jurisdictions, an abnormally high "live release" rate may signify mainly that they still have a long way to go in preventing surplus cat and dog births, abandonments, the growth of feral cat populations, and dog attacks.

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NORTHEAST (New England & New York state)										
	Benchmark data			Current/recent data			Cats	Dogs	C/D	
	THEN	Animals	Ratio	Humans	YEAR	Animals				Ratio
New York City	1999	40,068	5.4	8,337	2014	5,095	0.6	3,350	1,745	
NEW HAMPSHIRE	1997	6,162	5.2	1,321	2012	1,351	1.0	1,005	346	
VERMONT	1997	4,728	8.0	626	2011	778	1.2			
Springfield, MA				153	2011	295	1.9	221	74	
Tompkins County, NY	2000	94	7.8	102	2011	243	2.4			
MAINE	2001	8,000	6.3	5,772	2012	1,329	4.3	5,138	644	
Monroe County, NY				734	2011	4,556	6.2			
Buffalo/Erie County	2000	7,871	8.5	7,314	2012	919	7.4	1,859	3,793	
NORTHEAST (39%)				34,270		65,138	1.9	41,688	23,450	64/36

The Northeast region, between harsh winters that suppress outdoor cat and dog populations and being the first region with strong s/n support services, has killed fewer shelter animals per 1,000 humans for as long as the numbers have been available.

MID-ATLANTIC

(Delaware, D.C., Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania)

	Benchmark data			Current/recent data			Cats	Dogs	C/D	
	YEAR	Animals	Ratio	Humans	YEAR	Animals				Ratio
Allegheny Cty., MD				74	2013	161	2.2			
NEW JERSEY	1998	53,559	6.6	8,865	2011	30,896	3.5	24,873	6,023	
DELAWARE	2005	13,500	15.8	907	2011	4,929	5.4	2,917	2,012	
MARYLAND	1997	87,295	17.0	5,894	2011	45,137	7.7	34,660	10,477	
Philadelphia	1997	13,929	19.7	1,547	2012	11,906	7.7	7,434	3,657	
Carroll County, MD				167	2013	1,858	11.1	1,465	393	
MID-ATLANTIC (60%)				29,174		263,575	5.4	200,317	63,258	76/24

SOUTH ATLANTIC

(Florida, Georgia, North & South Carolina, Virginia)

	Benchmark data			Current/recent data			Cats	Dogs	C/D	
	YEAR	Animals	Ratio	Humans	YEAR	Animals				Ratio
Miami-Dade	2000	20,953	9.3	2,591	2013	6,907	2.7			
Gwinnett Cty., GA				805	2013	2,467	3.1			
Jacksonville, FL	2000	26,486	34.0	837	2013	3,388	4.0	1,387	2,001	
St. Pete/Pinellas	2001	12,600	13.7	2,199	2013	11,534	5.2	7,676	3,858	
Broward County, FL	2006	13,000	7.3	2,148	2011	9,672	5.5	6,435	3,237	
VIRGINIA	2000	138,147	20.1	8,280	2013	46,828	5.7	30,309	16,519	
Atlanta metro area	1998	140,188	34.7	6,100	2011	39,018	6.4			
Lee County	2002	8,667	18.7	645	2013	4,233	6.6	2,457	1,776	
Tampa/Hillsborough	2002	32,431	32.4	1,242	2013	10,305	8.0	7,059	3,246	
Palm Beach County	2005	16,411	13.5	1,320	2011	11,003	8.3	7,667	3,336	
Alachua County, FL	2005	4,820	21.5	2,283	2011	4,500	9.7	1,216	1,067	
Pasco County, FL	2001	7,880	22.8	655	2011	4,500	9.7			
Charlotte/Mecklenbrg.	1999	11,043	17.5	144	2012	11,144	11.8	5,688	4,385	
Orlando/Orange Cty.	1999	36,743	20.3	1,446	2011	17,555	15.3	4,687	2,691	
NORTH CAROLINA	1999	264,145	35.0	9,800	2013	157,766	16.1	95,497	62,269	
Columbia, SC	2001	5,666	17.6	389	2012	8,533	21.9			
Oconee County, SC				74	2011	2,412	32.6	1,457	955	
Augusta, GA	1999	10,868	56.9	136	2013	6,578	33.6			
SO. ATLANTIC (75%)				52,428		474,836	9.1	256,411	218,425	54/46

GULF COAST

(Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas)

	Benchmark data			Current/recent data			Cats	Dogs	C/D	
	YEAR	Animals	Ratio	Humans	YEAR	Animals				Ratio
Austin/Travis Cty.	1999	14,328	19.6	1,024	2013	1,112	1.1	513	599	
Taylor, TX				15	2013	22	1.5			
Rockwall, TX				37	2013	88	2.4			
Houston	1999	75,075	23.1	2,160	2012	12,245	5.7			
Houston metro area				5,946	2011	56,250	9.5			
San Antonio	1999	43,661	31.8	1,409	2013	5,890	4.2	5,890	3,546	
Mobile	1999	27,930	70.0	195	2012	2,622	13.4	2,522	4,160	
Dallas	2000	65,778	31.9	1,241	2011	20,051	16.2	5,516	14,535	
Madison County, AL				320	2011	5,329	16.6			
Montgomery Cty., TX				499	2012	9,000	18.0			
Baldwin County, AL	2006	5,432	33.3	183	2011	3,428	18.7			
Lee County (AL)				140	2012	3,500	25.0			
Ascension Parish				110	2012	3,275	29.8			
El Paso	1999	20,064	28.5	827	2012	25,334	30.6			
Amarillo	2002	8,859	50.9	191	2011	10,411	54.5			
GULF COAST (31%)				38,899		471,652	12.0	136,779	334,873	29/71

APPALACHIA

(Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia)

	Benchmark data			Current/recent data			Cats	Dogs	C/D	
	YEAR	Animals	Ratio	Humans	YEAR	Animals				Ratio
Kanawha/Charleston	2007	6,553	34.1	225	2014	1,682	5.6	225	1,253	
Louisville	2005	30,000	42.9	755	2011	5,131	6.8	3,449	1,682	
Knoxville	2000	7,670	20.9	559	2013	6,547	9.9			
Memphis	2003	14,000	15.4	651	2014	6,600	10.2			
Nashville	2004	9,647	18.9	627	2012	8,058	12.9			
Loudon County, TN	2003	754	18.9	46	2011	793	17.2			
Fort Smith, AR				127	2011	5,725	45.1	2,436	3,289	
APPALACHIA (19%)				15,705		179,863	11.2	77,341	102,522	43/57

MIDWEST

	Benchmark data			Current/recent data			Cats	Dogs	C/D	
	YEAR	Animals	Ratio	Humans	YEAR	Animals				Ratio
Marion County, IN				452	2011	839	1.7			
Kansas City	1997	8,884	20.1	464	2013	873	1.9			
Dane County, WI				503	2012	1,092	2.2	871	373	
Chicago	1997	50,996	18.2	2,714	2012	9,589	3.5	552	888	
St. Louis metro	2001	21,855	13.4	2,901	2012	15,213	5.2			
MICHIGAN	2004	133,000	13.3	13,103	2013	69,737	5.3	34,973	22,909	
MINNESOTA				5,304	2011	30,000	5.7			
Milwaukee County	1996	10,853	11.9	948	2011	6,558	6.9	4,416	2,142	
Cleveland	2011	4,100	10.3	397	2012	3,085	7.8	1,643	2,350	
Omaha				676	2011	5,987	8.9			
Indianapolis	1998	19,859	26.8	903	2013	5,790	6.4	241	333	
Dayton/Montgomery	2009	5,431	10.1	538	2011	6,394	11.9	2,973	3,411	
Cincinnati	1997	52,540	28.9	297	2012	5,159	17.3	6,667	3,835	
Oklahoma City	1998	18,786	39.8	611	2014	10,000	16.3			
Hutchinson, KS				42	2014	875	20.1	580	150	
Vermilion Cty., IL				82	2012	1,825	22.4	1,203	623	
Fort Wayne/Allen Cty.	2004	9,724	28.6	355	2011	9,689	27.3	6,711	2,978	
MIDWEST (46%)				71,398		457,492	6.5	269,920	187,571	59/41

ROCKY MOUNTAINS & INTERIOR WEST

	Benchmark data			Current/recent data			Cats	Dogs	C/D
	THEN	Animals	Ratio	Humans	YEAR	Animals			
Yavapai County, AZ	2011	533	3.7	155	2013	108	0.6	68	107
Reno/Washoe	2000	4,864	15.2	430	2012	1,224	2.8	487	737
Denver metro area	1999	12,774	25.6	2,645	2013	9,751	3.7	4,872	4,879
COLORADO	1997	73,861	18.6	5,188	2013	16,407	3.2	9,439	6,968
UTAH	1999	45,990	21.9	2,900	2013	18,000	6.2		
Carlsbad, NM				27	2013	2,267	8.5	1,130	1,118
Las Vegas/Clark Cty	1999	16,152	13.9	2,036	2013	21,183	10.4	17,040	11,465
Phoenix/Maricopa	1999	56,515	20.3	3,942	2011	36,451	11.8		
NEVADA				2,723	2011	35,990	13.2	21,311	14,679
Tucson	1997	33,934	42.9	990	2011	21,720	21.9		
NEW MEXICO	2007	66,709	33.7	2,086	2011	55,000	26.3		
WEST (79%)		11.9		22,881		271,973	11.9	157,744	114,229
								58/42	

PACIFIC

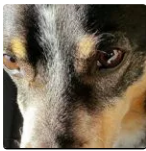
(Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington)

	Benchmark data			Current/recent data			Cats	Dogs	C/D
	THEN	Animals	Ratio	Humans	YEAR	Animals			
Whidbey Island	2009	132	2.2	72	2012	54	0.8	14	40
San Francisco	2000	1942	2.6	826	2013	1,324	1.6	546	674
Portland/Multnomah	1997	7698	12.2	2,314	2012	4,182	1.8	2,635	1,537
Orange County, CA	1998	18,237	12.6	2,879	2013	8,300	2.9	7,000	1,300
Seattle	1999	18,536	11.2	635	2012	464	3.1	267	197
Los Angeles city				3,863	2014	12,682	3.3	8,019	4,663
Los Angeles county				5,956	2014	30,662	5.1	19,476	11,191
Los Angeles total	1999	132,682	14.4	9,816	2014	43,349	4.4	27,495	15,854
El Cajon				101	2012	336	3.3	114	213
Santa Clara Cty, CA	2005	14,097	8.5	1,784	2013	6,622	5.1	3,482	3,020
San Diego city/county	1998	22,248	8.0	3,177	2013	16,424	5.6	8,119	7,724
Petaluma, CA				59	2013	320	5.4		
CALIFORNIA	1997	588,006	18.0	38,041	2011	410,739	10.8	233,832	176,907
San Bernardino Cty.	2002	32,656	18.5	500	2013	5,727	11.5		
Kenai borough, AK	2008	701	13.2	55	2011	730	13.2		
Lodi	2002	790	13.9	63	2012	958	15.2	730	228
Maui				155	2011	4,393	28.3		
PACIFIC (80%)		51.373		525,703		10.1	299,651	226,052	57/43

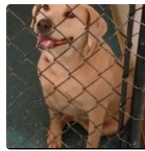
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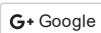


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