

C4 COVER STORY

1,000 cats present cat house catastrophe

From C1

more than 30,000 yuan per month, rent is 6,800 yuan and then there are fees for veterinarians, medicine, vaccines, sterilization, supplies and many other things.

Shortly after arriving in the city, Duo sold her nice house and spent all her and her husband's money, two million yuan, on the cats.

Each day, Duo is up to her neck cleaning, washing sheets, feeding milk to sick kittens, spraying room deodorizer, bathing the cats and saying sorry to neighbors for the troubles her cats cause. She tucks blankets around the cats during cold winters' nights and chases after mosquitoes in summer.

Her cats can sleep until their natural wake up time and eat balanced, healthy pet food while Duo has only three to four hours sleep each night and instant noodles for her daily diet.

"You can't imagine how hard it was," she says sighing as she holds a kitten in her arms, which are covered with old and fresh scratches. "It's not merely the financial problems or the cleaning."

Though her house gets little sunshine, it's blocked by shops in front, Duo is quite satisfied.

"Oops! Boys and girls, get in the house now!" She calls her cats like children, her naughty children and rushes out to catch them, one after the other.

In the distance, a city management inspector in uniform is patrolling. "Don't let them out. Don't get yourself in trouble," he shouts when slowly walking down the alley. Seeing no cats outside, the inspector turns away.

"He's most polite," Duo says as she opens the door a little wider to let the kittens out again for a good sunbath.

Every day, she plays this hide-and-peek game three to four times; it's routines.

But she has some ugly memories.

In July 2004, not long after Duo and her cats moved to Datong Village, Fengxian District, Huo Huiying, Duo's mother-in-law, a retired senior engineer, who tried to protect the cats, was beaten blind — and she is still blind today. It happened in a fight with her neighbors who demanded money from Duo if she wanted to keep her cats alive.

"At first they wanted us to pay them 800 yuan per month, then 1,000 yuan, then 1,200 yuan, and finally they wanted 1,500. That was absolutely impossible!" She is still angry.

For Duo and her family, those three years were a time of terror, extortion, death threats, threats to poison and kill the cats, many fights and sieges by neighbors and urban management inspectors. There were power and water cut-offs.

Each time a siege ended, there were always cats left in its wake. During the three years, more than 30 cats were buried beside the house; some of them were poisoned; some disappeared but later were found floating in the river; some were battered and their legs broken; some were blinded.

In those days, Duo was distraught and squeamish. She always awoke in fear in the middle of night, then stood silently in the darkness at the steel-mesh door for hours, afraid that someone would



Cat lover
Duo Zirong

steel or kill her cats.

"All I want is peaceful coexistence of man and cat," Duo says. "But I know it's not right to adopt cats non-stop."

On some days she receives 40 to 50 cats from all parts of the country, including Shandong, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces. "There will come a day I can no longer adopt and afford to keep cats," she says.

Duo hopes more people can adopt her cats. "I don't care how long someone can raise a cat, one year, one month or even one week. If he wants to adopt the cat forever, I thank him greatly; if he is tired of taking care of a cat but can return the same healthy cat to me, I also thank him."

Contact Duo Zirong at 138-1663-4670 Rooms 108 and 110, No. 2, Lane 3825 Dushi Road



Cat rescuer a heroine or a 'hoarder'?

Jenny Hammond

With stray and feral cats a big issue in Shanghai, Duo Zirong's rescue of 860 restaurant-bound cats last weekend makes big news and Duo has been hailed as a hero, though an eccentric one. But an expat animal rescue expert says she is just prolonging the miserable lives of her cats.

Carol Wolfson, founder of the local animal organization Second Chance Animal Aid, explains the other, less cheerful side of the situation.

Having heard about Duo's "rescue," Wolfson says. "It's absolutely tragic but very common."

This is not the first truck in Shanghai, nor China, that has been stopped from transporting stolen and stray cats to the South for the fur and food trade.

"The problem of strays is universal and not until there are adequate animal welfare and spay/neuter programs implemented by both government and/or large volunteer organizations with huge funding, will this problem even come close to a solution," says Wolfson.

Duo should be applauded for intervening in a cruel and barbaric situation, but she represents what animal welfare organizations consider a "hoarder," explains Wolfson.

"Although she thinks she is saving cats, she is actually doing no more than extending their lives in a contagious, disease-ridden, and cruel existence for cats, which are solitary animals. "It is a cat concentration camp, nothing less."

The Cat Fancier's Association, the world's largest registry of pedigreed cats, describes hoarding as an illness that is characterized by the excessive accumulation and retention of things and/or animals until they interfere with day-to-day living, such as the care of home, health, family, work and social life.

"Perhaps having up to

eight cats is almost acceptable, but when one rescued cat becomes 10, then hundreds, and now 1,000 in her home, this is actually a form of obsessive control disorder; it's a disease of collecting and not being able to stop, despite the outcome to the animals she believes she is saving," says Wolfson.

Explaining that this situation needs to be addressed quickly, she says: "Cats should be quickly adopted out by animal-loving people who will provide them with proper and immediate pet care and permanent homes. The rest of the cats, and all sick and chronically ill and injured cats should be seen by a vet and probably be humanely euthanized."

Wolfson explains that because the cats were purchased means Duo or the purchaser is actually aiding and perpetuating the stealing and breeding of animals for the fur and food trade.

"We hear the going rate is 40 yuan (US\$5.27) for a cat in Guangdong Province. If she was able to get the cats at about 14 yuan each, what is to stop some other dealers from telling them they will adopt from her and then just selling them on?"

"Because she has bought the cats she is giving a public sign to the dealers that this is a good business."

There is no easy solution, says Wolfson.

"If she is like most hoarders, she will just keep them in her home until the human health issue (not even the cats' welfare) becomes so large that the government/police have no choice but to take the animals out of her home and put them down."

Wolfson says it's crucial to limit the number of rescues in any home, especially if there are other pets already. Newly rescued animals must be isolated from other pets.

If an expat wants to help they can contact the hoarder and offer to adopt an animal.

For more information visit: www.scaashanghai.org

Meow! Hiss! Purr! Want a cat?

Lu Feiran

A cat lover is asking for help after rescuing some 860 furry felines destined for restaurants in Guangdong Province. The cats are all at her home in Minhang District — raising the grand total to around 1,000 at the controversial cat house.

That includes some adoptions after desperate pleas for help because Duo Zirong, 39, already had around 400 before the Friday night rescue.

Duo wants people to adopt the cats and ease the burden in her commercial space.

On Friday night Duo blocked a truck containing 860 cats at Nanfang parking lot in Minhang. A woman named Ms Li bought the cats for 5,000 yuan (US\$660) after hard bargaining with the driver who originally wanted 30,000 yuan. The price came down when police were called.

She turned the cats over to Cat Woman Duo who has been hailed by animal lovers but hated by her neighbors wherever she goes.

Tao Rongfang, an official from the Shanghai Animal Protection Association, said she couldn't believe it when she saw so many cats in the truck.

"China doesn't have a law or regulation on animal protection," says



Tao. "That makes things worse. We felt helpless about the matter.

"Illegal dealers steal, abuse and kill cats by peeling off their skins, chopping off their legs and heads and frying them for various dishes."

The price for every 500 grams of live cat is around five yuan, says Tao.

Cat dealers collect stray cats and pets and Duo believes that 100 of her own cats were among those on the truck that she stopped that was en route to Guangdong Province, where the cats were to be on the menu.

Duo says she spotted two trucks carrying cats, but one drove off before she could do anything.

"The cats were squeezed into small cages," Duo says. "Most were in bad shape. Some even wore collars, which means they belonged to someone."

She called the police. The cats were rescued after police and officials from

the Shanghai Animal Protection Association arrived. Nonetheless, the cats had to be purchased in order to be saved. Duo said 10 cats were dead and the others had wounds and diseases. Some had broken legs, others had high fevers. Duo and several volunteers started caring for the felines immediately. "We fed them and dealt with the wounds," Duo says. "I haven't slept for two days."

Duo said most of the cats need veterinary care. "We can't keep this many cats at home. They need food, inoculations and sterilization."

Duo says she plans to build a Buddhist temple on a mountain in Hangzhou when her economist husband has enough money. "I'll pray for the cats, hoping they will be no longer be cats in their next life."

Association officials say Duo's deeds are touching, but not practical.

"The health of so many cats cannot be guaranteed within such a packed space, not to mention humans," says Tao. "And one day she'll be cornered, and no one will want her, her family, and her increasing numbers of cats."

For adoption information, no drop-offs Shanghai Animal Protection Association, visit www.petunion.com Tel: 6143-2442