

Mutilation of cats has neighbors concerned

By Joe Tash

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ESCONDIDO — Humane Society officials are concerned about a rash of cat mutilations that has occurred in a north Escondido neighborhood in recent months.

The society's officers have come across a half-dozen mutilated cats in the past six to 12 months in the Escondido Hills area, which is along North Broadway near Coun-

try Club Lane, said field supervisor Shirley Stewart.

"It's always the same area, it's always the same type of mutilation," said Stewart. Officers have found bloodless cat carcasses with their rear half missing on green belt areas in the upper middle class neighborhood.

The culprits may be teen-agers who have read Satanic literature and are mutilating the cats as a "sick prank," said Stewart.

But police, who said they are aware of three of the mutilations in the last month or so, are not so sure who's responsible and why.

"The mutilation of their bodies is suspicious," said Sgt. John Houchin of the department's special investigations unit. Photographs and police reports indicate the carcasses have incisions rather than the bite marks typical of animal attacks.

"It didn't look like predators. It looked like it had to be persons," said Houchin, adding that the reports leave many questions unanswered.

"Who? Motive? Purpose? We don't know," he said. "There's just not enough information."

He said there have been no witnesses and no sign that any sort of ritual was performed. The carcasses have not been arranged in any particular manner.

The incidents don't seem to be linked to the upcoming Halloween holiday because they have occurred over a relatively long period

of time, said Stewart.

The ritual angle emerged in part from an odd visit to the Humane Society. About two months ago, a woman came in because her cat was missing. She said her son attends Escondido High School and that his friends were involved in Satanic rituals, said Stewart.

About the same time, the society found a Doberman that had been dragged by a car around the parking lot at San Pasqual High School. The dog's throat was slit and a pentagram was sketched on the ground next to its carcass, she said.

While county veterinarians think the cat mutilations are the work of coyotes, Stewart said, the society is convinced they were done by humans.

So are the homeowners in the Escondido Hills area.

"The last event was so gruesome, the board of directors decided to alert people," said Jack Shoemaker, an official with two area homeowner's associations.

Fliers warning of the mutilations were distributed to residents, he said. "We suggest that you watch out for your pets' welfare and do not let them out during the night to roam about," the flier said.

Stewart said the mutilations are being taken seriously and could result in misdemeanor or felony charges against offenders. She urged anyone with information about the mutilations to call the Humane Society at 745-4362.