

\$12,500 offered for arrest in spate of grisly cat killings

By Juan Ortega
STAFF WRITER

LAUDERHILL » The reward money on Friday rose to more than \$12,000 for the capture of whatever or whoever has been killing dozens of cats in South Florida.

"I hope it helps somebody decide to do the right thing and turn whoever has done this in, so that this can stop," said Sharon Jacobson, founder of The Clydey Foundation Inc., a South Florida nonprofit group that said it would contribute \$5,000.

The organization funds medical care for pets whose owners cannot afford it.

Authorities in Miami-Dade County and Lauderhill say it's too early to tell who is killing the cats. However, experts said such killings generally are done by foxes or raccoons.

"It's rare that we see these kinds of injuries caused by people, so it's important to rule out the other possibilities," said Randall Lockwood, animal behavior expert with the

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, in Washington, D.C.

Since May 14, dozens of mutilated cats have been found in the areas of Cutler Bay and Palmetto Bay in Miami-Dade County. Similar attacks in Broward County were reported Saturday and Wednesday in Lauderhill.

In Miami-Dade County, most of the animals were killed at night and their carcasses were found during the day. They were gutted and skinned, or their bellies were sliced open.

In Lauderhill on Wednesday, Alyssa Capote, 19, said she was horrified to find one of her three cats, Nila, drained of blood and with her legs lopped off.

"I almost threw up," said Capote, who has a 3-year-old daughter. "Are they going to go after children next?"

Lauderhill Police Capt. Rick Rocco said Nila was sliced open with a "clean cut," as though a sharp weapon was used.

Miami-Dade police declined to

say whether necropsies were conducted on cats killed in the county.

Lockwood, of the ASPCA, said mutilated animals were reported during the past five years in other states, including California, Texas and Colorado. Authorities found coyotes, foxes or raccoons were the attackers in those cases.

The attacks have prompted some Lauderhill residents to pledge they will keep children and pets indoors for fear they could be hurt, especially now that students are starting their summer vacation.

Jack Levin, a criminology professor at Northeastern University in Boston, said the South Florida attacks are worrisome, considering there have been convicted killers who started out torturing animals.

Levin said a group of teenagers could be targeting cats because it makes them feel powerful and gives them bragging rights.

Police in Lauderhill and Miami-Dade began sharing notes Friday to determine whether the cat killings are linked, said Lauderhill police Capt. Rick Rocco.

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