

TNR: Past, Present, Future

TNR Timeline in the U.S.

1980 Annabell Washburn, often credited with being the first advocate to bring TNR to the U.S., establishes Pet Adoption and Welfare Service (PAWS). PAWS begins practicing TNR on feral cats living on Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts.

1982 Ellen Perry Berkeley's "Maverick Cats: Encounters with Feral Cats," the first book about feral cats, is published in the U.S.

1986 Washburn works with Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine staff and students to sterilize feral cats in the British Virgin Islands, marking one of the first collaborations between veterinarians and activists.

1988 Founding the program Alliance for Animals, Donna Bishop introduces TNR for feral cats in Boston.

1989 The Stanford Cat Network (now the Feline Friends Network), the first TNR program for a large college, begins on the Stanford University campus. Within 15 years, a population of 1,500 is brought down to 85 feral cats.

1990 Louise Holton co-founds Alley Cat Allies (ACA), the first U.S. national organization to promote and implement nonlethal control for feral cat colonies. Holton based ACA on the Cat Action Trust (U.K.).

1991 *Animal People* magazine staff begin a seven-month trial of TNR in Fairfield County, Conn.

1992 Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society establishes a TNR program in Newburyport, Mass.

1992 Tufts University's School of Veterinary Medicine sponsors the first feral cat workshop organized by Dr. Andrew Rowan, with Merritt Clifton, Louise Holton, and Donna Bishop as presenters.

1992 Feral Cat Coalition located in San Diego, Calif. starts the first mash-style TNR clinic.

1993 Ocean Reef, Fla. resident, Alan Litman, with the cooperation of the Ocean Reef Community Association, establishes and launches ORCAT.

1993 San Francisco SPCA, under the direction of Richard Avanzino, creates the "Feral Fix Program."

1994 Lynda Foro creates the first national No-Kill directory and the first No-Kill Conference.

1994 San Francisco becomes the nation's first no-kill city when the San Francisco SPCA, under Rich Avanzino, establishes an adoption pact with the Department of Animal Care and Control.

1994 Operation Catnip in North Carolina opens a mash-style spay/neuter clinic.

1994 PetSmart Charities provides grants towards TNR programs for free-roaming cats.

1994 Jeff Elliott's article, "The Accused" is published in *The Sonoma County Independent*, shedding light on the misinformation and myths surrounding cats and predation.

1995 The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Animal Welfare Forum focuses on the welfare of cats and includes discussions about feral cats and their management. Louise Holton is called upon by Dr. John Hamil of The California Vet Medical Association to answer questions about feral cats and rabies; he calls Holton an expert in the field.

1995 Doing Things for Animals (founded by Lynda Foro) holds the first national no-kill conference, “No-Kills in the ‘90’s.” (“No-Kill Timeline,” accessed 2022).

1996 American Humane Association and The Cat Fancier’s Association sponsors a conference, “A Critical Evaluation of Free-Roaming/Unowned/Feral Cats in the United States.”

1997 Louise Holton founds Alley Cat Rescue (ACR) to focus on establishing a shelter to rescue homeless cats and offer subsidized spay/neuter services to support local TNR in Maryland; to date ACR has spayed or neutered over 400,000 cats. ACR established a national network of Cat Action Teams across the U.S. to assist people and a directory of low-cost spay neuter clinics.

1998 Dr. Julie Levy opens a second chapter of Operation Catnip in Alachua County, Fla.

1998 Feral Cat Coalition of Portland receives a grant to build a mobile vet hospital, and they change their name to Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon to serve feral cats across the entire state.

1999 Neighborhood Cats in New York City is created by Bryan Kortis, Ruth Sharp, and Shirley Belwood.

2001 Best Friends Animal Society holds its first “No More Homeless Pets” conference.

2001 A third chapter of Operation Catnip opens in Virginia.

2004 The No Kill Advocacy Center is created by Nathan Winograd, listing TNR programs for feral cats as part of the No Kill Equation.

2005 The first “No Kill Conference” (organized by the No Kill Advocacy Center) is held.

2006 The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) advocates TNR for feral cats.

2008 University of California, Davis researchers find that domestic cats originated from wild cats in the Fertile Crescent region of the Middle East (Bailey, 2008).

2010 The Los Angeles Superior Court issues an injunction that prohibits Los Angeles shelters from promoting or supporting TNR until an environmental impact report on feral cat predation is completed (Yoshino, 2010).

2012 “The Outdoor Cat: Science and Policy from a Global Perspective” conference is hosted by The HSUS and co-sponsored by the Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy, the Found Animals Foundation, and the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association.

2013 Maryland Senate Bill 820, which creates a state-funded Spay and Neuter Grants Program to reduce shelter euthanasia, is passed.

2014 A large survey by Beall Research reveals that public opinion does not support euthanizing healthy cats as a means of population control (Wolf and Schaffner, 2018).

2015 Madrid, Spain becomes a no-kill city after adopting legislation that bans “the slaughter of stray animals.”

2019 Alley Cat Rescue publishes the results of a widespread survey of TNR groups and colony caretakers. The data, compared

to responses to the survey from 2012, show that the total number of community cats sterilized annually by respondents increased from 45,000 in 2012 to 62,000 - an increase of about 4% per respondent.

2021 The City of Los Angeles resumes its city-wide, government-funded TNR program, which had been halted since 2009.

2021 The Joy Freedman Care for Cats Act is introduced in Baltimore County, MD. This act codified a TNR program in the County Code and called for guidelines and procedures for the program to be established.

2021 The “D.C. Cat Count;” a collaborative effort between the Humane Rescue Alliance, PetSmart Charities, the Humane Society of the United States, ASPCA, and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute; is one of the first efforts to count the number of cats living within a city. The goal of the Cat Count is to determine how best to manage the population (Hedgpeth, 2021).

2021 The largest survey of U.S. cat care and advocacy groups is published in a report titled “The State of the Mewnion.” The survey covers a wide range of topics relating to organizations’ operations and procedures, and responses reveal the most common practices, as well as common deficiencies, among nonprofit cat groups (Aeluro et al.). [Link to study](#)

2021 Participants in the 11th annual Alley Cat Rescue Feral Fix Challenge collectively sterilize over 45,000 community cats in the U.S., Greece, South Africa, the U.K. and the United Arab Emirates.

2022 Conservation biologists use camera traps throughout Washington, D.C. to study cat predation. The data shows that cats are unlikely to hunt native wildlife in urban settings (not including parks) and that cats were more likely to prey on rats

than native wildlife up to 800 feet away from the borders of forested areas (Herrera and Gallo, 2022). [Link to study](#)

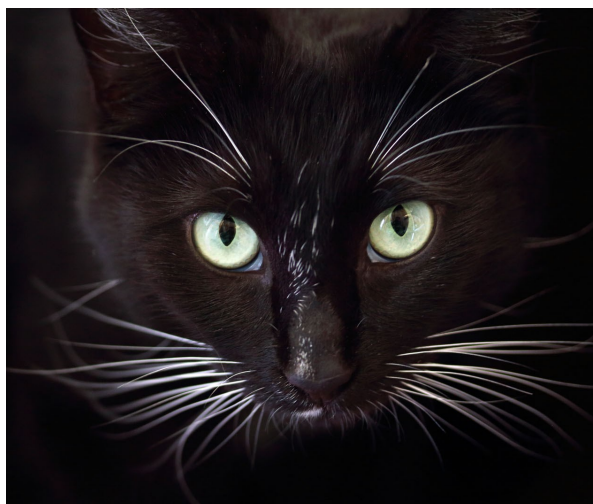
**See end of handbook for sources list.*

Late 1960s and 1970s in England

There were several TNR pioneers during these years, one being former model Celia Hammond, who started trapping and sterilizing feral cats and returning them to their outdoor homes. Celia pressured the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) to change their policy away from catch-and-kill, which led to the creation of the Feral Cat Working Party. Celia became the first chairwoman of the National Cat Rescue Coordinating Committee (NCRCC), a British group organized in 1975 by animal activist Ruth Plant.

Ruth, another TNR pioneer, was certainly ahead of her time, being one of the first individuals to question animal control’s lethal methods for managing stray cat and dog populations while suggesting that suppressing the reproductive cycle could provide a more effective and humane solution. In treating hard-to-handle feral cats, Ruth naturally turned to contraceptive pills; which led Dr. Jenny Remfry to carry out some of the first field trials of administering synthetic progestins to free-roaming cats in the UK. Ruth also strongly believed that education was key to ending pet homelessness and encouraged an open dialogue between animal control and the public, rather than simply killing animals (Remfry, 2001). “Ruth Plant believed firmly — heretically, in those days — that animal welfare work shouldn’t be limited to pets but should also serve stray and feral animals” (Berkeley, 2004).

In 1977, two members of the NCRCC created a new organization, the Cat Action Trust



Mother cat, Smokey.

(CAT). Celia Hammond was appointed a patron, Ruth Plant became Honorary Secretary, and Roger Tabor and Dr. Jenny Remfry served on the Advisory Panel (Remfry, 2001). Today, the Cat Action Trust has several branches of volunteers neutering feral cats throughout England and has become a model organization.

Feral Cat Symposium Held in 1980

Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) invited 14 speakers for their symposium, “The Ecology and Control of Feral Cats,” held in London, England. “It is fair to say that UFAW’s symposium was a defining event, a watershed occurrence. Before 1980, feral cats were considered vermin; after 1980, they were beginning to be considered worthy of humane treatment,” notes Berkeley (Berkeley, 2004).

Dr. Jenny Remfry, who worked with UFAW, deserves immense credit for this change in attitude, along with veterinarian Roger Ewbank, who became director of UFAW in 1979. Ewbank became interested in Remfry’s work with feral cats and “thought the time was ripe to put the ecol-

ogists in touch with the people advocating population control” (Berkeley, 2004).

Tom Kristensen, a veterinarian from Denmark’s Society for the Protection of the Cat, spoke at the symposium about the wonderful results they had with TNR in the mid-1970s. Dr. Remfry had visited Denmark in 1976 to find out what they were doing and brought her findings back to Britain. Her recommendation was to implement TNR for all feral cats (Berkeley, 2004).

Roger Tabor also spoke at the symposium, sharing data from his study of neutered cats in London’s Fitzroy Square. His study included a group of black and white cats similar in coloring to T.S. Eliot’s famous “Jellicle Cats.” Tabor noted that the resident cats, “even a few years after neutering, still maintain their tight family cohesiveness and still continue to exclude other cats” (Tabor, 1981).

Biologist and author Peter Neville spoke of similar neutering programs in France, Israel, Italy, Kenya, and South Africa, and he himself went on to establish official programs in Greece and Tunisia (Neville, 1992).

Ellen Perry Berkeley reports on all of this in *Maverick Cats: Encounters with Feral Cats*. She also noted that the Feral Cat Working Party “gives its highest recommendation to the neutering of whole colonies, ‘provided that their long-term welfare is ensured’” (Berkeley, 2001).

Dr. Jenny Remfry, with the help of Peter Neville, wrote *Feral Cats: Suggestions for Control*, published by UFAW in 1982. The booklet became a bestseller and the third edition was published in 1995. Remfry reported that attitudes were continuing to become “more enlightened” (Remfry, 1989).

South Africa in the Mid- to Late 1970s

The Johannesburg SPCA changed its stance on feral cats after admitting that decades of trapping and removing them had not worked. They began doing TNR instead. The SPCA was partially inspired by the humane work being done for feral cats in Britain.

Today South Africa has a fairly thriving TNR community working together around the country. Volunteers use their own resources as funding is scarce.

Late 1980s and Early 1990s

In Boston, Mass. in 1984, AnnaBell Washburn, who was working on Martha's Vineyard with PAWS, an organization she had founded a decade earlier, had attended a conference of the World Society for the Protection of Animals and heard Peter Neville speak about the worldwide success of neutering schemes for feral cats. Later in 1985, while vacationing at her house on Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands, she discovered several colonies of feral cats and over the next decade, she took Tufts veterinary students to the island each year to conduct TNR (Slater and Shain, 2005).

In the July 1990 issue of *Cat Fancy*, author Ellen Perry Berkeley wrote the article "Feral Cats," highlighting a few groundbreaking programs tackling the feral cat issue throughout the U.S., including AnnaBell Washburn's dedicated work. Both Annabell Washburn and Kim Bartlett were instrumental in encouraging me to start an organization, to bring TNR as the preferred method of managing feral cats to the national stage. Subsequently, in October of 1990, after caring for a colony of cats in the

neighborhood of Adams Morgan in Washington, D.C. since that summer, I co-founded Alley Cat Allies; which has given community cats, especially feral cats, the much-needed voice they deserve.

Alan Litman, the founder of ORCAT had a vacation home in the exclusive Ocean Reef community located in Key Largo, Fla. and in the late 1980s, started Ocean Reef's Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) program for the community's cats.



Billie, rescued by Alley Cat Rescue.

Alley Cat Rescue

Ocean Reef was initially a fishing village and had many introduced rats, so a good-intentioned groundskeeper brought in five unneutered cats to help solve the problem. The cats did their job of course and the rats were under control, but the cats began to multiply and eventually more than 2,000 of them were patrolling the area.

Ocean Reef's residents had been trying to control the cat population through killing, but as we know, this is not a long-term solution. Alan stepped in with a unique plan. He had read somewhere about TNR and being an avid cat lover, he believed the cats



Harry William Liam, feral kitten rescued by Alley Cat Rescue.

should be trapped and sterilized, rather than killed. And although he lived in Pennsylvania, he would visit his Ocean Reef home for one week every month, during which time he started trapping cats and taking them to a local vet to be sterilized.

In 1993, Litman and a group of homeowners opened their own clinic, the Grayvik Animal Care Center, and sterilized 500 cats. Today the population is down from the initial 2,000 cats to around 200 (“Who We Are — ORCAT,” accessed 2023). ORCAT is recognized as a model TNR program throughout the country. The colonies lived in luxury, with clean feeding stations hidden discreetly behind or beneath the luxurious foliage, as the cats of Ocean Reef.

The feeders do the rounds by golf cart conducting routine rounds, including feeding, watering, and cleaning up any messes the cats may have made. The feeding route around the area takes about four hours, as there are 70 colonies and feeding stations set up. Some colonies are just four or five cats, while some consist of more.

All the cats, without exception, are in great health. They are monitored carefully, and if any appeared sick they were trapped and

taken to the clinic for treatment. Some older cats are 19 and 20 years old! And every year, the community comes together for a fundraiser for the cats.

TNR took off on a national scale and several major groups, such as Catalysts for Cats in Santa Barbara, were formed to implement TNR locally in their cities (“Catalyst for Cats, Inc.,” 2008). Catalyst for Cats has achieved a lot for feral cats in their area, and to date, they continue their dedication to alleviating the suffering of cats and reducing their populations through TNR.

Another forward-thinking individual of the time was Sally Mackler. Mackler was one of the first to incorporate mash-style operations to TNR services to communities. Mackler, along with Dr. Rochelle Brinton, formed the Feral Cat Coalition in San Diego, Calif. in 1992. Since inception, the Feral Cat Coalition have TNR’d over 50,000 cats and they continue to provide free TNR services to the residents of San Diego county (“Welcome! - Feral Cat Coalition,” 2023).

In 1994, San Francisco, Calif. became the nation's first no-kill city, marking a historical achievement in the evolution of the no-kill movement. Under the direction of Rich Avanzino, the San Francisco SPCA established an adoption pact with the Department of Animal Care and Control. The agreement guarantees a home to every adoptable dog and cat in San Francisco.

Late 1990s and Early 2000s

In 1997, a local rescue group, including well-known veterinarian Julie Levy, founded Operation Catnip in Raleigh, N.C. to assist stray and feral cats. This was the first and is still the largest program of its type in the southeastern United States. Later in 1998, Dr. Levy moved to Gainesville, Fla.

and opened a second chapter of Operation Catnip. A third chapter was soon opened in February of 2001 in Richmond, Va. Operation Catnip provides a monthly, one-day TNR clinic for stray and feral cats; the program is free of charge to the public (“About Us,” 2020).

Also in 1997, the Feral Cat Coalition of Portland (FCCP) received a grant that enabled the group to build a mobile veterinary hospital to provide TNR services for feral cats. In doing so, the group decided to change their name to the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon (FCCO) to better reflect their assistance with feral cats throughout the entire state. This mobile clinic was the first of its kind in North America and it remains the only mobile hospital exclusively serving feral cats (“Who We Are — Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon”, accessed 2015).

Also in 1997 Alley Cat Rescue (ACR) was founded in Mt. Rainier, Md. ACR is dedicated to rescuing homeless cats from the streets and providing sterilization services to the local community. ACR proudly follows a no-kill policy, where cats and kittens remain in our care until appropriate homes are found; this includes hospice care for sick and elderly cats. We operate an adoption program and provide low-cost spay/neuter services to low-income residents of Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Southern California, as well as a TNR program for feral cats. ACR has sterilized over 50,000 cats since our inception.

In 2001, under the leadership of Nathan Winograd, Tompkins County of New York became the second no-kill community in the U.S., “saving 100 percent of healthy and treatable animals, and 100 percent of feral cats” (Winograd, 2009). Later in 2004, Nathan founded the No Kill Advocacy Center, which lists TNR programs for feral cats as part of the No-Kill Equation. The following year, the No Kill Advocacy Center held its first No Kill Conference,

which continues to be held annually.

Most Recently: 2010 to 2022

Los Angeles has a history of outdoor cat overpopulation and high shelter euthanasia rates. The number of TNR groups and no-kill rescues have grown across the city and surrounding areas in response, hoping to alleviate suffering and save lives. However, the progress of humane cat population management was dramatically slowed in Los Angeles in late 2009 when the Los Angeles Superior Court issued an injunction prohibiting city shelters from financially supporting or even promoting TNR while the environmental effects of outdoor cats in the city was reviewed. The injunction was the result of a lawsuit brought against the city by the Audubon Society and other bird conservation groups who claimed TNR violated state environmental laws. All of the city’s TNR-related programs were ordered halted; this included subsidization of spay/neuter surgeries of adopted animals, release of unsocialized cats to private TNR programs, public campaigns promoting TNR, and even referral of feral cat complaints to TNR groups (Yoshino, 2010). The ban lasted for nearly 12 years, during which time countless kittens were born and died in the streets, and shelter euthanasia claimed many thousands of lives.

The injunction on city TNR services was finally ended at the close of 2019 when the long-awaited economic impact report revealed neither cats nor TNR have any significant environmental impact (Daugherty, 2019).

As the complexity surrounding outdoor cats continues to increase, so does the need for stakeholders to come together on one platform to review all available science so more adequate policies can be created.

Such was the aim of the HSUS and co-sponsoring organizations, the Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy, the Found Animals Foundation, and the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, when they hosted a conference called "The Outdoor Cat: Science and Policy from a Global Perspective" in December of 2012. Dr. Kate Hurley, Dr. Julie Levy, Laura Nirenberg, Andrew Rowan, and Dennis C. Turner were among the presenters. Concluding the conference, participants acknowledged the lack of information and the need for further studies in order to more effectively combat the issues, while also recommending optimizing existing management tools and public education about pet ownership.

Nearly a decade later in 2022, another landmark collaborative effort toward better management of cat populations took place in the form of the "D.C. Cat Count." The Cat Count was one of the first efforts to count the number of cats living within a city. Organized by the Humane Rescue Alliance, PetSmart Charities, the Humane Society of the United States, ASPCA, and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, the project took three years and involved a survey of 2,600 households, people on foot searching out and counting cats, and camera traps ("Research," 2021). In addition to serving as a potential model for other cities and areas to create better estimates of their cat populations, the D.C. Cat Count is a rare example of wildlife conservationists and cat welfare



Troy Snow

TNR is now endorsed by some of the largest animal organizations in North America.

Conclusion

Managing feral cats through spay/neuter started with a handful of compassionate individuals, who saw a more humane way of reducing cat populations. Today, TNR programs are implemented in thousands of cities across the United States and in several countries around the world. Pioneers like AnnaBell Washburn, Celia Hammond, and Ruth Plant paved the way for TNR and helped change the public's view of feral cats.

TNR is endorsed by some of the largest animal organizations in the country, including the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), The Humane Society of the United States, and The American Humane Asso

organizations working together to achieve common goals.

ciation. The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies supports TNR, and the U.K.'s Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) supports the TNR where possible through local charities. With countless studies and research supporting the effectiveness of TNR in reducing cat populations and the public's commitment to nonlethal methods, TNR programs will continue to increase and save the lives of millions of community cats.