



## Common Complaints about Cats and How to Alleviate Problems

While most individuals who have contact with animals would agree that they are “good for us” (help lower blood pressure, reduce stress, provide companionship), and most individuals (whether they agree with the previous statement or not) support the idea of humanely caring for feral cats; however, sometimes conflicts do arise. Depending on the size of the colony, you may need to address concerns from more than one of your neighbors. By addressing the specific concerns and showing that you want what is best for the cats and the neighbors, you may be able to diffuse many conflicts. Having a managed feral cat colony in your neighborhood can benefit the entire community; besides controlling rodent populations, the colony can demonstrate to all that compassion for cats teaches non-violence and tolerance for others. So, here are the following most common reasons people complain about feral cats and ideas for addressing their concerns.

- **Kittens.** Spay/Neuter (trap-neuter-return) will prevent more kittens from being born and stabilize the colony. In some cases, feral kittens can be socialized and adopted; this also helps reduce the size of the colony. Plus, TNRed ferals are healthier, because they are given rabies and distemper vaccines.
- **Wild animals.** Feed cats during the day (when nocturnal animals are not out) and pick up any leftover food (and dishes) once the cats have eaten. By maintaining clean food stations, this will help keep unwanted animals at bay. Other humane deterrents are described in the fact sheet "How to Keep Cats (and Other Wildlife) Out of Your Yard."
- **Cats using yard as a litterbox.** Caregivers can place covered, sand-filled litter boxes in their yards, and/or offer to periodically clean the neighbor's yard. See "How to Keep Cats out of Your Yard" fact sheet for more information. Cats much prefer to use sand and will do most of their eliminating there. Scoop daily to keep sand or boxes clean and to prevent odor; scoop more often in hot weather. Pouring a layer of baking soda beneath the clean sand or litter can be helpful in preventing odors. (Cats will stop using the litter or sand if the odor becomes too strong.) Odor can also be a reason for neighbors to complain.
- **Spraying, fighting, howling.** Neutering quickly reduces or eliminates these behaviors. Regular and sufficient feeding will also prevent fighting. Clean areas where urine has been sprayed. White vinegar or Nature's Miracle can eliminate any odors or staining. Cats will continue to spray in an area that smells of urine, so check and reclean the site if needed. Avoid using ammonia products; they smell similar to cat urine, so they may encourage future spraying.
- **Sick or injured cats.** Cats that need medical attention should be trapped immediately and treated. Neutering also prevents “fighting” injuries. Make sure cats are vaccinated against rabies to alleviate health concerns. Maintain good vet records, including a rabies tag number for each vaccinated cat.

This will allow you to show actual evidence that the feral cats are healthy. Be sure your cats are eartipped, so neighbors can easily identify cared-for, sterilized, and vaccinated cats.

• **Unsightly area(s).** Make the area as attractive and clean looking as possible (food stations and sleeping areas). If the area where the cats are fed is a particularly offensive one for neighbors, gradually move the feeding station to another area a few yards away. The cats will follow their food. You can also create a small, partially enclosed feeding site to make food and water bowls, as well as cats, less visible. Be sure the shelters you have erected look clean and are unobtrusive. Many caretakers have built creative shelters and feeding stations. These structures can be painted in natural colors, like dark green and brown, to blend in with surrounding foliage. In addition, make sure to change bedding often to prevent odor and flea concerns. Cats can also be treated for fleas when you trap them, by using a topical product like Advantage or you can get Capstar pills from a vet to crush and put in food. Some herbal products will deter fleas. Try sprinkling mint, dried pyrethrum flowers (also good against mosquitoes), or a non-toxic herbal flea powder beneath the bedding.

## **Talk With Your Neighbors**

1. A feral cat caretaker can alleviate many of the above problems and concerns, by simply talking to the neighbors. The most important thing is that you open a friendly dialogue with neighbors. Appear reasonable and professional, rather than emotional and angry, even if your neighbors are not. This will give them confidence that you know what you are doing and that you care about their concerns.
2. Start out by telling them that you did not create this situation; explain that the feral cats are there because someone else failed to sterilize their pet cats, abandoned them, or allowed them to become lost.
3. Then, explain the benefits of trap, neuter, return (TNR), the ineffectiveness of eradication, and the futility of withholding food. Describe the progress and let them know how many fewer cats there are (or will be) due to your efforts. Make them realize that you are doing them a favor by caring for the cats and preventing the birth of more. And tell them that TNR is becoming a nationally accepted program for humanely controlling feral cats.
4. If health concerns are a topic, tell neighbors that cats who are TNRed are healthier because they are examined by a veterinarian and they receive vaccines; they create a buffer zone for rabies between humans and other wildlife.
5. You might also want to provide them with ACR's fact sheet on TNR and information on the "Community Benefits of Feral Cats."