

# TNR: Past, Present, Future

---

## TNR Timeline in the U.S.

**1980** Annabell Washburn, often credited as 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 writes, "Maverick Cats: Encounters with Feral Cats," the first book about feral cats to be 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 1500 is brought down to 85 feral cats.

**1990** Louise Holton co-founds Alley Cat Allies (ACA) as 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 Merritt Clifton and Kim Bartlett 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 a 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 begins to provide 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 twisting of study results to frame cats as killers of wildlife.

**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;" it has since been discontinued.

**1996** American Humane Association and The Cat Fancier's Association sponsor 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 her efforts on establishing a shelter to rescue homeless cats and offer subsidized spay/neuter services to support local TNR in Maryland; to date, this program has spayed or neutered over 40,000 cats. ACR also established a national network of Cat Action Teams across the U.S. to assist people with cats in their neighborhoods.

**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 thanks to Bryan Kortis, Ruth Sharp, Shirley Belwood and a colony of feral cats living on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

**2001** Best Friends Animal Society holds its first “No More Homeless Pets” Conference, and continues to hold national conferences yearly.

**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 and continues to operate annually.

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

**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.

**2015** Madrid, Spain becomes a no-kill

city, after adopting legislation that bans “the slaughter of stray animals.”

**2015** 28 U.S. states have local governments with laws and/or policies that support TNR for community cats.

\*See page 195 for source 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 U.K. 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).



Alley Cat Rescue

*Mother cat Smokey.*

In 1977, two members of the NCRCC created a new organization, the Cat Action Trust (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 ecologists 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 neu-

tered 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 was going off to establish official programs in Greece and Tunisia (Neville, 1992).

Ellen Perry Berkeley reported on all of this in her book "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

I discovered a small colony of feral cats living behind an accounting firm I founded in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. An-

other woman who worked in the building and myself put out food for them on a regular basis. I had called the Johannesburg SPCA about the cats, and they told me to trap them and bring them in for euthanasia. I was not going to do this, as the cats seemed fine to me, other than having litters of kittens running around, so I continued to feed and look after the cats.



Alley Cat Rescue

*Billie, rescued by Alley Cat Rescue.*

Then one day, I opened the local Johannesburg newspaper, the Rand Daily Mail, and read that the local SPCA had changed its stance on feral cats saying that decades of trapping and removing had not worked and they would try TNR instead. I was overjoyed at the progressive change and started doing some TNR work with them in Johannesburg. The article also mentioned Britain and the humane work they were doing for feral cats, so I contacted UFAW's Roger

Ewbank, as well as Jenny Remfry to get more information.



Alley Cat Rescue

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

Sadly, over the next decade, TNR fell off the radar in South Africa. It wasn't until 1990, when Kim Bartlett published an interview with me in the *Animals' Agenda*, that a few forward-thinking folks in South Africa picked up on TNR again. It was then that several groups were formed across South Africa to provide TNR services to feral cats; most of these groups continue this work today.

## 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 at-

tended 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, so for 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 ground-breaking 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.

Later in 1991, I was introduced to Alan Litman, the founder of ORCAT. Alan 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.

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 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 350, of which around 100 now reside at the care center (Grayvik Center, accessed 2015). ORCAT is recognized as a model TNR program throughout the country. I have seen thousands of cat colonies around the world, and quite frankly I have never seen any colony of cats living in such luxury, with clean feeding stations hidden discreetly behind or beneath the luxurious foliage, as the cats of Ocean Reef.

I recall spending a week there with Alan and his crew, and every day we toured

the grounds by golf cart with the feeder conducting routine rounds, including feeding, watering, and cleaning up any messes the cats may have made. The feeding route around the area took about four hours, as there were 70 colonies and feeding stations set up. Some colonies were just four or five cats, whereas some consisted of around 12 cats.

All the cats without exception, were in the greatest of health. They were monitored carefully, and if any appeared sick they were trapped and taken to the clinic for treatment. I even met some older cats who were 19 and 20 years old! And every year, the community comes together for a fundraiser for the cats.

After I co-founded Alley Cat Allies, TNR took off on a national scale and several major groups were formed to implement TNR in their cities. In 1991, Randi Fairbrother incorporated Catalysts for Cats as a nonprofit organization in Santa Barbara, Calif. (Catalyst for Cats, Inc., accessed 2015). This group has achieved a lot for feral cats in the 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 a dear friend of mine, Sally Mackler. Sally was one of the first to incorporate mash-style operations in providing TNR services to communities. Sally, along with Dr. Rochelle Brinton, formed the Feral Cat Coalition in San Diego, Calif. in 1992. Since inception, they have TNR'd over 40,000 cats and they

continue to provide free TNR services to the residents of San Diego county (Feral Cat Coalition, accessed 2015).

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 largest program of its type in the southeastern United States. Later in 1998, Dr. Levy moved to Gainesville, Fla. and opened the 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 (Operation Catnip, accessed 2015).

Also in 1997, the Feral Cat Coalition of Portland (FCCP) received a grant making it possible for the group to build a mobile veterinary hospital to provide TNR services to 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 to 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 (Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon, Accessed 2015).

Another highlight of 1997, and a milestone for me, was the founding of Alley Cat Rescue (ACR) in Mt. Rainier, Md. I decided to dedicate my efforts to rescuing homeless cats from the streets and providing sterilization services to the local community; therefore, I created my second cat organization. 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., and Virginia, as well as run a TNR program for feral cats. ACR has sterilized over 40,000 cats since our inception.

In 2001, under the leadership of Nathan Winograd, Tompkins County, N.Y. 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, listing TNR programs for feral cats as part of the No-Kill Equation. That following year, the No Kill Advocacy Center held its first No Kill Conference, which continues to be held annually. (No Kill Advocacy Center, accessed 2015).

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. In doing so, 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, hosted a conference called “The Outdoor Cat: Science and Policy from a Global Perspective” in December 2012. Dr. Kate Hurley, Dr. Julie Levy, Laura Nirenberg, Andrew Rowan, and Dennis C. Turner were among the presenters. In 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 the “optimization of existing management tools and greatly expand[ing] public education to increase awareness and encourage more responsible pet ownership” (The HSUS, March 2013).

## 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.



Troy Snow

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

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 Association. In Canada, 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 “trapping and neutering of feral cats where local charities have the capacity to do so” (RSPCA, accessed 2015). 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.