

TNR in a Nutshell

“I have now been studying cats and the people who try to help them for many years, and I am continually struck by the mutual attraction between cats and people, the lengths which people are prepared to go to in caring for their pet cats and in protecting ferals, and the amount of pleasure which those people derive from the grace, comforting presence and displays of affection of their cats.”

- Dr. Jenny Remfry, author of “Ruth Plant: A Pioneer in Animal Welfare” (2001)

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the most effective and humane way to treat feral cats and manage their colonies. Cats are trapped and taken to a veterinarian to be sterilized and given any necessary medical attention. At this point friendly cats are moved to an adoption program — immediately (and most importantly) reducing colony size — while those not suitable for indoor life are returned to the place of trapping. All cats are scanned for a microchip and returned to their guardian. Anyone (including you, dear reader!) can learn to safely practice TNR, and those who do can witness first-hand the benefits of a humane approach to outdoor cats.

Spaying and neutering colonies of cats:

- stabilizes populations at manageable levels;

- eliminates annoying behaviors associated with mating (fighting, yowling, and spraying);
- improves the overall health of outdoor cats;
- is more effective and less costly than repeated attempts at eradication;
- is humane to the animals and fosters compassion in the community.

Key stakeholders (cat caretakers, citizens of the local community, volunteers, and any property owners where the cats reside) should work together to implement a management plan. Financial support may be available from an already-established organization; if not, then money may have to be raised by voluntary contributions. Local governments

should be approached and asked to contribute to the fund, as TNR will save them money over time. The initial investment may seem high, but in the long-term a proper TNR program will cost much less than repeated eradication attempts. The major expenses are for equipment, veterinary services, and food.

Before you Begin

So, you've made the decision to help your local feral cat community and want to use TNR to do it: Congratulations! The work you do in your area will go a long way towards ending cat homelessness. The following is an outline of the steps you can take to put your ideas into action, and how to work with others in your community to achieve the greatest impact.

Assessment

It is important when implementing a new TNR program to get a broad view of how (or if) your community is currently managing feral cats in some way and who is involved. Identify all individuals who feed community cats and all locations of feeding sites. Create a spreadsheet tracking pertinent information regarding the cats (i.e., number of cats, sex of each cat if possible, state of health, whether females are pregnant, if there are kittens). Also, identify the cats who are only occasional visitors or who are very friendly, as these may be companion animals and could have an indoor home.

While TNR programs are increasing in number and gaining wider acceptance,

there are still few laws or regulations that specifically govern it. When addressed in the law, it is usually at the local municipality level. Refer to Addendum 2 in the back of the handbook for more information.



City Critters, Inc.

Mama "Squirrel" and kittens, Bronx, New York City, NY.

Main Steps for Implementation

Once the assessment is done, you're ready to start work in the field.

The location should be evaluated as to whether it is an appropriate environment in which to keep the colony. Spots near vacant buildings and other uninhabited areas can be good locations for colonies, but be careful, as buildings scheduled for demolition or areas too close to major highways may not be suitable.

For the most part, the area where the cats are currently living is the best place to keep them. If relocation is necessary, after careful consideration start searching for a suitable new location (i.e., farms, neighbors with land). (Refer to “Guidelines for Safely Relocating Feral Cats” for more information.) Euthanasia, the final option, is recommended only for very sick cats, who cannot be treated and released.

Notify your neighbors of your plan before trapping begins to prevent them from thinking that you will harm the cats, and also to allow them to keep their cats indoors so they are not trapped.

Planning

Make arrangements for kittens and cats who may be socialized after veterinary treatment so they can be placed into an adoption program. Foster homes should be arranged prior to trapping. All cats and kittens should be sterilized prior to adoption, and caretakers can charge an adoption fee to help recover part of the cost. Obtain humane traps and transfer cages and learn how to properly use them. Make arrangements for transport, overnight stay prior to being released, and delivery to and from the veterinary clinic.

Don't leave a cat in an unprotected trap and never leave the cat where she might be threatened by other animals, people, or weather. Immediately cover the trap with a towel or blanket when the cat is caught in order to calm her down. When one cat has been trapped, move her to the transfer cage so you can use the trap for a second cat.

Do not trap in inclement weather, especially during heat waves; traumatized cats are very susceptible to heat stroke. The use of rabies poles and tranquilizers are discouraged. Tranquilized cats may leave the area before the tranquilizer takes effect and can get into situations that could endanger their lives, such as wandering onto busy streets. Do not trap lactating mothers, if possible. If, however, a lactating mother is trapped you need to make a decision on whether to have her spayed — she could be hard to retrap. If you decide to have her spayed, find her kittens as soon as possible.

Refer to “Steps for Successful and Safe Trapping” for information on equipment.

Veterinary Care

If you're not working with a cat rescue organization, then you will need to reach out to local veterinary clinics to find one that is willing to help. Discuss your plan with the veterinarian and confirm beforehand that the doctor(s) and technicians are prepared to treat feral cats. Some veterinary clinics are not equipped to treat and house feral cats. Once you find a veterinarian who works with feral cats and is willing to help with your colony, you may want to inquire about a possible fee reduction, since you will be bringing the doctor several cats to be sterilized. Many veterinarians who treat feral cats are willing to negotiate cost.

All cats to be returned must be identified by clipping one quarter inch off the top of the left ear. Ear-tipping is the universal

marking to identify a cat who is part of a managed TNR program. Ear-tipping can be a life saver for feral cats — if trapped by animal control, they can be returned to their colony. This procedure is performed while the cat is under anesthesia, and the ear is properly cauterized to stop bleeding. All cats should be treated for internal and external parasites, inoculated for rabies and distemper, and given a long-term antibiotic injection. Micro-chipping is also recommended, in case the cat is ever trapped and taken to animal control. She could then be identified and returned to the colony.

After surgery, male cats should be fostered overnight and females should be kept for two nights prior to being released. No cat should be released immediately after surgery. Most veterinary clinics do not hold feral cats after surgery, so you will have to make arrangements to hold the cats for a few days.

You may leave the cat in a trap or you may carefully transition the cat from a trap to a larger cage if fostering for more than two days. Place newspaper under the trap to absorb urine and provide food and water. Keep the trap or transition cage in a basement, shed, covered porch, or other area that is out of extreme weather conditions. Keep the trap covered with a towel or blanket to keep the cat calm.

Refer to the chapters “Health Care for Feral Cats: Guidelines for Colony Caretakers” and “Guidelines for Veterinarians” for more information.

Domestication

Although some older cats can be domesticated or socialized, the best time to tame feral cats is when they are kittens; ideally before they are eight weeks old. While it is possible to domesticate older kittens (12 weeks old), if no homes are available and your local shelter is killing unwanted domestic kittens, a more humane and practical solution for all is to sterilize the kittens, vaccinate, and return to the colony.

Refer to “Feral Kittens and Pregnant Cats” for more information.

Relocation

When returning a cat to the original site is not possible, relocate the cat to a different site, such as a farm, a riding stable, or even a backyard, as long as new caretakers are willing to take responsibility for consistent care. Relocation may take several weeks or months and must be undertaken with the utmost care. “Dumping” feral cats in rural areas, forests, or farmland is strongly discouraged. If the cat is unable to find a reliable food source, she may starve to death.

When relocating a feral cat, you must confine the cat for three to four weeks, to allow her to get familiar with the new sights, sounds, and smells. This period allows a new bond of trust to be established. If this confined transition period is not adhered to, the cat may not remain on the property, which can lead to a traumatic situation for the cat.

Refer to “Guidelines for Safely Relocating Feral Cats” for more information.

Long-Term Maintenance

The long-term management of a colony should include arrangements for daily feeding, fresh water, provision of insulated shelters, and providing and cleaning litter boxes. (Refer to “Winterizing Feral Cat Colonies” for more information.) Dust the shelter bedding with flea powder to prevent infestations, and keep feeding areas clean and tidy. It may take several months to bring a large colony under control and achieve stable groups of content and healthy cats. Any new cats attaching themselves permanently to the colony should be trapped and sterilized. Many of these new cats may be tame, domestic strays, able to be resocialized and placed into homes.

Feral cats can be retrapped a few years later for booster rabies vaccinations, health check-ups, teeth cleaning, etc. At this time, they will be more trusting of their caretaker and can be tricked into cages and traps. A plan should be worked out with the veterinarian where mild illnesses can be treated with antibiotics placed in moist food.



Louise Holton

Cat shelter, Adams Morgan, Washington, D.C.

The Community Benefits of Feral Cats

Animals are good for us. Many people who have contact with animals, whether from an indoor companion animal or a colony of outdoor cats, would agree. Having a managed feral cat colony in your neighborhood can benefit the entire community. The colony can demonstrate to all that compassion for cats teaches nonviolence and tolerance towards others.

- Feral cats can minimize rodent problems. While cats do not hunt rats and mice into extinction, they do keep their populations in check and discourage new rodents from moving into the area. Feral cats fill in a gap in the current ecosystem. For example, bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) used to live up and down the East Coast, but were hunted ruthlessly and driven away by development. Feral cats exhibit similar behaviors to these native feline predators, and they help to control the same species of small prey animals.
- An established, stable, sterilized, and vaccinated colony of feral cats will deter other stray and feral cats from moving into the area. This actually decreases the risk that residents will encounter an unvaccinated cat, and will virtually eliminate problem behaviors like fighting and spraying.
- Many people enjoy watching feral cats, and observing animals has been shown to lower blood pressure in medical studies (Sakagami and Ohta, 2010).

- People who help to care for feral cats by feeding them and taking them to the vet enjoy many benefits. Often cat caretakers are elderly and live alone, a population at risk for depression, loneliness, and isolation. Cats relieve these conditions and often bring a sense of happiness and purpose to people who help them. Just as companion animals have been shown to extend life expectancies, lower blood pressure, and relieve stress (Qureshi et al., 2009; Levine et al., 2013), caring for feral cats can improve the health and happiness of the caretaker.
- Individuals who cannot take on the full-time commitment of adopting a companion animal can participate in programs to help feral cats. This provides a viable alternative to irresponsibly purchasing an animal one is not prepared to care for.

Talk to Your Neighbors

Depending on the size of the colony, you may need to address some concerns from one or more of your neighbors. By addressing any specific concerns and showing that you want what is best for the cats and your neighbors, you may be able to defuse many common conflicts.

The most common complaints about cats include the soiling of lawns or gar-



Alley Cat Rescue

The author, feeding a colony in Adams Morgan, Washington, D.C.

dens, the late-night yowling, the leftover food scraps attracting wildlife, the sight of sickly animals, the unpleasantness of dirty feeding areas, and sometimes just the fact that free-roaming cats are around. A feral cat caretaker can alleviate many of these problems and concerns.

- First and foremost, it is critical that you open a friendly dialogue with your neighbors. Rather than being emotional and angry, appear reasonable and professional, 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.
- Let them know that you did not create this situation. Explain that the feral cats are there because someone else failed to sterilize their pet cat, abandoned the cat, or the cat became lost.

- Explain the benefits of TNR and the ineffectiveness of eradication. Tell them that withholding food is not only cruel but also pointless, as the cats will continue to breed. Explain how many fewer cats there 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.
- You may also want to call a community meeting or gathering of concerned neighbors to discuss the situation and possible solutions. They may be more comfortable when they learn that groups across the country and around the world are implementing TNR programs for feral cats.
- 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 reclean the site if needed. Avoid using ammonia products; they smell so similar to cat urine that they may encourage more spraying.
- To prevent cats from soiling neighbors' yards and gardens, dump sand in an out-of-the-way area, or in covered wooden litter boxes that can be built outdoors at the colony site. Cats much prefer to use the clean sand and will do most of their eliminations there. (Continue reading for more information on cats and gardens.) Scoop daily to keep sand 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 is another reason neighbors might complain.

Steps for Preventing Problems with Neighbors

- All cats should be spayed or neutered to prevent the noisy and objectionable breeding behavior that neighbors dislike: yowling, spraying, fighting, and excessive roaming.
 - Make sure cats are vaccinated against rabies to alleviate health concerns. Immediately retrap and vet any cats who become ill or injured. Maintain good vet records, including a rabies tag number for each vaccinated cat, to provide evidence that the feral cats are healthy. Be sure your cats are ear-tipped so neighbors can easily identify cats who are sterilized, vaccinated, and cared for.
 - Keep food areas clean. Pick up any and all trash regularly, even if it's not your trash. Remove empty food bowls, old dried-up food, dirty bedding materials, etc. Make the area as attractive and clean-looking as possible. Never leave cans lying around. They are not only an eyesore, but they also attract flies and other animals to the area.
- If the area where the cats are fed is a particularly objectionable one for neighbors,

gradually move the feeding station to a less objectionable area a few yards away. This can be done in increments and completed in one to two weeks. The cats will follow their food. Create a small, partially enclosed feeding site to make food and water bowls, as well as cats, less visible. Hide it behind or under some bushes.

To keep from attracting wildlife, feed only in the morning or daylight hours when raccoons and other wild animals are not active. Cats will quickly adjust to the new schedule. Again, be sure to remove leftover food after feeding.

Try to make the shelters you have erected look clean and 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.

If fleas are a concern, treat feral cats with a flea product, like Advantage, when you trap the cats. Only a few drops need to be applied to the back of the cat's neck; your veterinarian can do this for you. Be sure to change the bedding material or hay in shelters regularly. Some herbal products will deter fleas. Try sprinkling mint, dried pyrethrum flowers, or a non-toxic herbal flea powder, like Diatomaceous Earth, beneath the bedding.

There are also some oral flea treatments available. But use caution and make sure that a cat eats only one dose and does not go around eating the food of other cats if the medicine is in all the cat food.

Advantage Multi for Cats is a broad-spectrum parasite preventive in a monthly topical application. It prevents heartworm disease, kills adult fleas, and will treat flea infestations. In addition, Advantage Multi treats roundworm infections caused by *Toxocara cati*, hookworm infections caused by *Ancylostoma tubaeforme*, and ear mite infestations caused by *Otodectes cynotis*. This medication is for use on cats and kittens at least nine weeks of age and weighing at least two pounds.



Desirée Stapley

Feral colony in Key Largo, FL. Feeding stations are tucked out of sight amongst lush vegetation.

Capstar (nitenpyram) is an oral medication designed to kill adult fleas. The pills can be crushed into wet food and used daily. Capstar is intended for cats who are at least four weeks of age and weigh more than two pounds. It begins to kill adult fleas within 30 minutes of ingestion.

Cats and Gardens

Here are some helpful and humane suggestions for neighbors who wish to keep community cats out of their yards and gardens. For more information on the

products mentioned in this section and where to purchase them, please see the Helpful Resources section in the back of the handbook.

- Push wooden chopsticks or 10-inch plant stakes into flowerbeds every eight inches to discourage digging and scratching.
- Push Cat Scat Mats into flowerbeds and gardens to prevent digging. These plastic mats can be cut to fit any size area and consist of flexible plastic spikes that are unpleasant for cats to walk on.
- Cover exposed ground in flower beds with large attractive river rocks, to prevent cats from digging. Rocks have the added benefit of deterring weeds and beautifying the landscape.
- Cats dislike citrus smells. Scatter orange and lemon peels or spray a citrus-scented solution on areas you don't want cats. You can also scatter citrus-scented pet bedding such as Citrafresh. Cayenne pepper, coffee grounds, and pipe tobacco work to repel cats as well. Some suggest lavender oil, lemongrass oil, citronella oil, eucalyptus oil, and mustard oil.
- Cat Repellent Clips are biodegradable clips filled with a blend of natural, organic garlic, citronella, lemongrass, and cinnamon oils. These clips can be placed anywhere you don't want cats, like in gardens or flower beds. Clip onto plants and shrubs that cats tend to nibble the leaves of. These clips safely and effectively repel cats for six to eight months.
- Spray a cat repellent (available at pet supply stores) around the edges of the yard, the top of fences, and on any favorite digging areas or plants.
- Plant the herb rue to repel cats or sprinkle the dried herb over the garden.
- Try an ultrasonic animal repellent, which emits high frequency noise inaudible to humans. Cats find the noise to be an extremely loud and annoying alarm, repelling them from the area. These devices are available at lawn and garden stores.
- Use a motion-activated sprinkler, such as the Scarecrow sprinkler. Any cat coming into the yard will be sprayed but unharmed, and it is good for the lawn. These are also available at lawn and garden stores.
- Reppers Outdoor Sticks contain methyl nonyl ketone, which is a cat (and dog) training aid and repellent, that can be used both inside and outside. These repellent sticks are nontoxic to plants, mammals, and humans and can safely keep animals out of your garden, flowerbed or potted plants for up to 60 days. These repellent sticks have been tested and proven to work by Alley Cat Rescue staff and neighbors!

You may want to offer to help your neighbors with any of the above, whether purchasing supplies for them or setting up the deterrents. They will appreciate the offer and your willingness to help even if they don't accept it.

Addressing Other Problems

If neighbors express concern about the effects of feral cats on local wildlife, provide them with copies of ACR materials on feral cats and predation. Explain that cats are rodent specialists and keep rodent populations in check, and if rodents are left unchecked, they could potentially spread deadly diseases.

Also, some neighbors may fear feral cats will pose a threat to their children. Explain to them that feral cats are naturally wary of people and will not approach humans they do not know. A feral cat will not attack a person unless the cat is cornered or feels threatened. Advise neighbors to teach their children not to approach or touch unknown animals. Children should ask an adult for help if they think an animal may be trapped, sick, or injured, or if they find a baby animal.

Feral cats do not pose a health or disease risk to humans, but some neighbors may need to be reassured. Give them copies of ACR's factsheet on "Zoonotic Diseases." Also advise them that they can avoid any risk by not touching community cats and by washing their hands after gardening. Sometimes, even after having expended your best efforts, neighbors may continue to complain, or even be hostile towards you and the cats. This can be very frustrating. In these difficult situations, it may be beneficial to bring in a professional mediator to help solve the

problem in a way that is satisfactory to all concerned.

Remember: It is vital that you maintain detailed, up-to-date health records on all feral cats under your care. Ear-tipping is key to identifying which cats have been sterilized, vaccinated, and are being cared for. It is recommended to microchip all feral cats, in the case that someone takes a cat to the shelter. If the shelter does check for a microchip after seeing the ear-tip, the shelter should contact you to come pick up the cat. Again, you may need to prove the cat has been vaccinated, so keep up-to-date records; it can save a cat's life if animal control becomes involved.

If any complaints are made to you or to animal control, it is important to act quickly and demonstrate that you are willing to cooperate with neighbors. Even if there have been no complaints, you may want to avoid any conflicts by minimizing the impact of the outdoor cat colony on the neighborhood.

Conclusion

If any of the above seems overly complicated or time-consuming at first glance, remember that you are fighting for the lives of feral cats and building good public relations for the future. In addition, you might be strengthening your community by getting more people involved! All feral cat problems that are solved positively and amicably help leave a better overall impression regarding feral cats and caretakers, and will serve to make it easier for all of us to continue to care for our outdoor cats.