

About Feral Cats and Trap, Neuter, and Return



What are feral cats?

You might call her an alley cat, a barn cat, or a street cat. No matter how you say it, she is a feral cat, unsocialized and living a valued life outside. Either she was born outside and never lived with a human family, or he is a house cat that has strayed from home, and over time, has reverted to a wild state. These unsterilized cats eventually form colonies, making their home wherever they can find food, avoiding human contact whenever possible. Tomcats prowl for mates, females become pregnant, and the cycle of reproduction continues.



Photo: Duane Wilcox

Feral cats have a home – outdoors

Adult feral cats are part of all landscapes. They usually cannot be socialized and are content living outdoors. Feral kittens can often be tamed and placed in homes, but they must be socialized in their first weeks of life. This is a critical window and if they aren't handled in time, they will remain feral and therefore unadoptable.

Feral is not another word for stray

A stray was once a companion house cat and was abandoned or strayed from home and became lost. Stray cats can often be re-socialized and adopted.

Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR)

Trap, Neuter, and Return or TNR is a program in which stray and feral cats already living outdoors in your city, town or rural area are humanely trapped, then evaluated, vaccinated, and sterilized by veterinarians. Kittens and tame (stray) cats are adopted into good homes. Healthy adult cats too wild to be adopted are returned to their outdoor home to be cared for by local volunteers for the rest of their lives. This ongoing care creates a safety net for both the cats and the community. No more kittens are born, and the feral cat population is reduced.



Photographer: Thomas Evans

Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) Works!

The breeding stops. Populations are gradually reduced. The annoying behaviors of mating cats, such as yowling or fighting, stop. The cats are vaccinated against disease and they are fed quality foods on a regular schedule.



Photographer: Duane Wilcox

Eradication Fails – Every Time

This process is extremely costly because you have to continue to remove cats. Other cats simply move in to take advantage of the available resources and they breed prolifically, quickly forming a new colony. This “vacuum effect” is well documented. Eradication invariably leads to killing since feral cats are wild and unadoptable. With feral cats – the solution is outside the shelter.



Millions of Feral Cats Die Every Year in Shelters

Feral cats are not pets or house cats. Because they are unsocialized, they are not placed for adoption and are killed at most shelters. The best protection for feral cats is for all shelters and animal control to embrace a policy of TNR for their jurisdiction.



The National Feral Cat Resource

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How Can You Help?

Get to Know Alley Cat Allies

Alley Cat Allies (ACA) was founded in 1990 and since then has helped thousands of people improve the lives of tens of thousands of stray and feral cats. ACA has motivated and assisted thousands of grassroots supporters to establish feral cat groups in their own communities. Through education and advocacy, ACA has developed a national network of staff and volunteers with expertise in all aspects of feral cat care. Visit www.alleycat.org and you will find tools to help you help the cats.

Become a caregiver

TNR would not exist without committed caregivers like you. You may already be feeding cats in your yard or near your office. Take the next step and learn how to humanely trap the cats, have them vaccinated, neutered, and return them to their outside homes so you can continue to care for them.

Talk to your veterinarian

Using the guidelines in How to Talk to Absolutely Anyone about TNR, which is available at www.alleycat.org/resources_care.html#12, provide your veterinarian with information about TNR programs. Ask your veterinarian to start treating feral cats, and if she already does, talk to her about providing low cost spay/neuter services for feral cats or volunteering at a free clinic.



Photo: Troy Snow

Get to know your jurisdiction

Attend public meetings and do research at your local library or court house to discover who holds the power in your jurisdiction and how changes are made. Find out who can amend, repeal or pass ordinances related to animals and who is responsible for dealing with feral cats. When a crisis occurs or when it is time to establish TNR programs in your community you will be ready! At www.alleycat.org/resources_care.html#12, you will find more information about advocating for feral cats in your city or town.

Join the Feral Friends Network

If you are already a caregiver, consider becoming a Feral Friend. A Feral Friend is someone who adheres to Alley Cat Allies' philosophy of managing feral cat colonies with nonlethal methods. Feral Friends also provide answers to common questions about feral cats such as: Where can I get a trap and how do I use it? Which local veterinarian can I take feral cats to? How much will it cost to have feral cats vaccinated and sterilized? When you become a Feral Friend you are able to control the level of your involvement by delineating what you are capable of and comfortable with and how you would like to be contacted. Apply at www.alleycat.org/feral_friends.html to become a Feral Friend.



Photo: Gina Mantero



Photographer: Duane Wilcox

Support ACA and Your Local TNR Organization

Your contributions to Alley Cat Allies help stray and feral cats live longer, healthier lives by providing us with the monetary resources to assist the legions of volunteers throughout the United States and Canada who practice TNR. If you wish to make a general contribution, honor a loved one (living or departed), acknowledge a special occasion, or explore the many ways to remember Alley Cat Allies in your will or estate plan, visit www.alleycat.org/support.html.



Photographer: Duane Wilcox