

Managing a Feral Cat Colony

Basic steps

So you've decided you want to engage in Trap-Neuter-and Return (TNR) and manage a colony of feral cats in your neighborhood. What do you do? TNR involves trapping the cats in a colony, getting them spayed/neutered, vaccinated for rabies and FVRCP and marked for identification, then returning the feral cats to their territory. A caretaker provides food and medical needs of the colony cats and monitors for any newcomers or other problems.

At its essence, TNR is **not** about rescuing cats, it's about population control and permanently reducing the number of feral cats in an area. It's not about getting a wonderful cat a great home, it's about lowering stray intake and euthanasia rates, and creating better, less hostile environments for the cats. In addition, spay/neuter of the cats eliminates common nuisance behaviors such as yowling and foul odor, and vaccinating them for rabies and FVRCP also provides a public health benefit. If you want to undertake a TNR project and care for a managed colony, here's an outline of the basic steps to take:

1. Educate Yourself

First thing you should do is learn all you can about TNR. *The Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook* and instructional video, *How to Perform a Mass Trapping*, are available from The Humane Society of the United States as part of their CD/DVD set, *Effectively Managing Feral Cats*. Alley Cat Allies at www.alleycat.org is also a good venue for information.

If you're interested in practicing TNR on a large scale, you can order the guide, *Implementing a Community Trap-Neuter-Return Program*, authored by Bryan Kortis and published by The Humane Society of the United States.

2. Build Good Community Relations

It is of paramount importance that you build good community relations. Unless the cats live in some remote setting, you must take their human neighbors into account and try to build positive, harmonious relations to avoid colony cats being a nuisance complaint.

3. Feeding Schedule

There are many benefits to beginning to manage the colony as soon as possible. Establish a regular area used for feeding. By arranging a regular feeding schedule and maintaining this schedule, you will train the cats to show up at a certain place at a certain time to aid in trapping and monitoring the health of the colony cats. Do not leave food out: After 30 minutes remove all food not eaten by the colony cats. This will also deter the attraction of wildlife and pests. Improving the cats' nutrition by improving the quality of their food will better prepare them for the stress of trapping and neutering.

4. Secure an adequate holding space for trapping and spay and neutering

Depending on the size of the colony, trapping all the cats may take two or three days or longer. Accommodations may have to be made for recovery time following surgery which may require addition holding at the veterinary facility.

5. Decide what to do with kittens and friendly adults

It is important to decide what to do with kittens and friendly adults before you start trapping when you still have time to prepare. Ideally, adoptable cats and kittens will be removed from the colony and placed in good homes. Decide before you catch them who will do the fostering and how you will go about adopting them. You can, for example, work with a traditional rescue group. If fostering or adopting resources are simply not available, don't let that stop you from getting the cats neutered and halting the reproduction cycle. You'll have accomplished a great deal of good by that alone.

6. Arrange for spay/neuter

You'll need to find a clinic or individual veterinarian and set a date to spay/neuter the cats. You should make accommodations for the spay and neuter in a timely manner to minimize the amount of time the cat is maintained in a trap. Strictly follow the veterinarian recommendations following the spay and neutering process to minimize surgery complications.

7. Trapping

Trapping is the last step. Too often, well-meaning people trap first and think about what to do with the cats later. To ensure the long-term success of your project, and to minimize the problems you will need to deal with, you should ensure that everything else is in place before you put the bait into the first trap. This is true whether you're trapping one cat at a time, or the entire colony. The trap must be monitored often and not used during inclement weather. The time spent in the trap must be minimized to reduce stress upon the feral cat. Close monitoring of the trap will also deter wildlife from getting trapped. Any animal bites that may occur in the handling of the trapped animals must be reported to Rabies Control and APS and the animal placed in quarantine.

8. Return

A few days after being released, the cats will return to their usual routines. Caring for feral cats is an ongoing effort and after their release involves the responsibility of feeding and obtaining medical attention when needed. Documentation of sick cats under treatment is to be made on the tracking tool provided in the column designated "**veterinary care/date**" with the veterinarian initials.

9. Caretaking

TNR participant has the obligation to maintain the care and feeding of the colony for the lifespan of the colony. Should the TNR participant not be able to fulfill their obligation, they must immediately or prior to this situation notify APS of the secondary caretaker that will continue the colony care. This person will contact APS and must view all required videos and sign all initial documents prior to taking over the care of the colony.

Under agreement to engage in the TNR program, the TNR participant agrees to allow APS to make periodic welfare checks at the colony location.

As TNR participant, I, _____, have read this document and understand all elements and viewed the videos with APS. I understand that failure to follow these guidelines can result in dissolution and removal of the colony.

Signature of TNR participant

date

Signature of APS officer (witness)

date

(Source: Guidelines of this document were taken from neighborhoodcats.org)