



## An Overview of Caring for Outdoor Cats





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OF THE UNITED STATES

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### Looking at the Big Picture



Outdoor cats include community cats (stray lost and abandoned pet cats and unsocialized feral cats) as well as owned cats that are allowed to roam. The Humane Society of the United States estimates that three to four million cats – community and owned – enter animal shelters every year. At least half of them are euthanized. This may occur for a variety of reasons, including age, illness, injury, temperament, lack of space, scarcity of homes, and owner request.

Although the number of cats euthanized has steadily declined since the 1970s, even socialized lap cats often face slim chances for adoption because there are just too many of them and too few resources.

Owned cats who are let outdoors may become sources of nuisance complaints and neighborhood disputes. While approximately 85% of owned cats are sterilized, the remaining 15% can have kittens who may or may not find homes. Community cats are the most significant source of cat overpopulation because only approximately 2% have been sterilized. They produce approximately 80% of the kittens born each year.

Feral and stray cats are often confused, but there are significant differences between them. Stray cats are owned pets who are lost or abandoned. They are accustomed to contact with people and may be reunited with their families or adopted into new homes.



Feral cats are the unsocialized offspring of owned, stray cats, or other feral cats who have not been spayed or neutered. Feral cats are not accustomed to contact with people and are typically too fearful and wild to be handled. Feral cats who have spent their entire lives outdoors can sometimes adapt to indoor life, but attempts to tame adult feral cats can divert time and energy from the most important objective: reducing the population of community cats.

Reducing the number of community cats and managing their care is the goal of Trap-Neuter-Return programs. The basics of TNR involve trapping the cats in who live together in a group known as a colony, having them spayed or neutered, vaccinating them against rabies, identifying them with an ear tip, and returning them



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to their original territory where a caretaker provides regular food and shelter and monitors the colony for newcomers and any problems.

Ear tipping is a procedure where a quarter inch off the tip of the left ear is removed in a straight line cut (performed while the cat is anesthetized during spay/neuter surgery). It is the only reliable method known for identifying a spayed/neutered feral cat. The TNR process also allows for friendly cats and kittens to be identified and, if possible, sent to adoption and foster programs, causing an immediate reduction in the number of community cats in the area.



Life is especially hard for these cats whose populations are not managed through TNR. They are constantly searching for food in dumpsters and garbage cans and may be hunting birds and other wildlife, with or without success.

They may also be fed by kind-hearted people who don't spay and neuter them. These people mean well, but they don't realize that cats should be spayed and neutered as soon as possible to improve their quality of life and prevent the birth of more kittens. Other people who are interested in getting the cats sterilized can't find veterinarians to work with feral cats or low-cost spay/neuter options.

Un-spayed community cats can become pregnant as early as 5 months of age and typically only have one live litter per year, with an average litter size of three to four kittens. Up to 75% of the kittens may die—usually from poor nutrition, disease, parasites, or predation – before they reach adulthood. Those who survive will become feral without socialization to people at a young age (usually under 8 weeks). Un-neutered male cats will roam in search of food and fight for mates. They may be hit by cars, killed by wildlife, poisoned, etc. Without spaying and neutering large numbers of community cats, their numbers rapidly increase.

Community cats often live in a colony—a group of related cats. The colony occupies a specific territory where food (e.g., a restaurant dumpster, a person who feeds them) and shelter (e.g., beneath a porch, in an abandoned building) are available.



#### **Understanding Problems Associated with Outdoor Cats**

Outdoor cats can create significant challenges to the animal welfare system and to the community at large. Animal shelters usually euthanize feral cats because they are not adoptable as

pets. If a shelter doesn't have the resources to socialize feral kittens and has no community partner to do so, the kittens will likely be euthanized as well. Even tame kittens and cats may be euthanized due to their overwhelming numbers and lack of resources.

A shelter in a community with a large, un-sterilized outdoor cat population may experience

- higher intake rates of cats owing to the rescue of kittens and the capture of adults
- higher euthanasia rates for all cats because feral adult cats aren't suitable for adoption as pets
- the necessity to euthanize adoptable animals because feral cats are occupying limited cage space
- the increased financial strain associated with caring for and euthanizing kittens and cats
- a constant rate of nuisance complaints about outdoor cats

From a human quality-of-life standpoint, people are bothered by outdoor cats for many reasons, including

- loud noises made by cats who are fighting or mating
- the pungent odor of unneutered males spraying urine to mark their territory
- the disturbing presence of sick and dying cats and kittens
- predation on birds and other wildlife
- the unwanted intrusion of cats onto private and public property
- concern about disease transmission to people and other animals

When community cats are not managed and/or there is concern for their safety, people often want the cats to be taken away.

In most cases, once the cats are spayed and neutered and the neighborhood is educated about TNR, hostile situations quickly calm down. In addition, because feral cats are intimately tied to their own territory where they were born and have spent their





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entire lives, relocation should be a last resort because, even when it is done properly, many of the cats will disappear after they are released, in search of their old territory. A valid reason to consider relocation of feral cats would be if the cats face imminent danger – for example, the scheduled demolition of the empty building in which they are living.

### **Resolving Issues with Neighbors**

Not everyone wants cats in their yards and gardens so be sympathetic. It will get you further than insisting that the cats have a right to be there. Learn as much as you can about TNR so that you can speak knowledgeably with neighbors about its advantages, including the facts that noise, odor, and endless litters of kittens are ended by sterilization. Your neighbor's complaints may be solved if you provide deterrents to discourage cats from his or her garden or simply move feeding bowls further away. If you suspect or know that your neighbor does not want cats on his/her property, work together to figure out solutions to keep the peace. Outdoor cats, especially if they aren't spayed and neutered, can be a nuisance.

Stick to the facts about what TNR is and how it will reduce the number of community cats. If the cats are walking on your neighbor's car, offer to buy a car cover. You may also be able to reduce the cats' roaming by providing them with shelter and a bathroom area (not near where you feed them) on your property. One option is to fill a covered sand box with woodstove pellets. They're inexpensive and you can see what needs to be removed: feces and sawdust. (The pellets change to sawdust when mixed with urine or other liquids.) Just make sure the pellets you get don't contain any toxic additives used for binding or increased flammability; if you're unsure about additives, call the manufacturer.

There are many humane deterrents that can be used to discourage cats from claiming yards or gardens as their own. In addition, you may want to consider building or purchasing a "cat fence" or similar enclosure for your property (search online, "cat enclosure"). Make the enclosure escape-proof, and make sure there are no toxic plants, garden chemicals, or other dangerous objects, such as exposed electrical cords, in the enclosure.

It may not be possible to satisfy a neighbor. It may be legal for him to set out traps on his own property to catch cats. However, dumping cats elsewhere; is considered abandonment and is illegal. It is legal, and sometimes required, that people take a cat they've trapped to the local animal care and control agency. If a cat you're caring for goes missing, contact your animal care and control agency right away to inquire if any ear-tipped cats have been brought to the shelter. Some shelters hold ear-tipped cats to give caretakers the chance to reclaim them. However, cats



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without ear tips may or may not be held. Become familiar with your state's laws regarding animal- holding periods, trapping and abandonment, and other issues that relate to cats.

If it isn't possible to return community cats to their territory because they are in imminent danger or they pose a risk to vulnerable wildlife, it may be possible to gradually move their feeding location and shelter nearby without relocating the cats.



Relocating a large number of cats should be a last option because it's hard work and not easy to find a suitable location, such as a barn or stable. Relocating pairs or small groups of bonded cats may lead to greater success than relocating single cats.

The new territory needs 1. to have a reliable new caretaker who will strictly follow the two- to three-week confinement period and fully accept responsibility for the cats' long-term care, 2. to include a structure of some sort (eg., a barn, shed, or garage) for protection from the elements during the initial confinement, when the cats become familiar with their new caretaker and learn that their food source has changed, and after the cats are released, and 3. to be at a safe distance from construction or heavy traffic.



It's important to understand what will happen in the old territory when the cats are removed. If there is still sufficient food and shelter, unsterilized cats from adjacent areas will move in, reproduce, and before you know it, the number of cats will be back to its original level.



Some animal shelters and rescue groups adopt and relocate feral cats as barn cats (working cats who patrol the barn yard for rodents in exchange for food and a safe place to sleep). Just the presence and odor of the cats in a barn or stable may be enough to discourage rodents and keep animal-food supplies safe.

If there is no local, experienced organization or agency to help you, and relocation is your only option, be sure you know how to do it. For an in-depth overview of TNR, including relocation, read "The Neighborhood Cats' TNR Handbook: A Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return for the Feral Cat Caretaker" listed in the Resources at a Glance section.



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## Evaluating Solutions

### *Trap and Remove*

There are many reasons community cat problems are rarely solved by efforts to trap and remove the cats. Cats live at a certain location because it offers food and shelter. It is highly unlikely that all food sources can be eliminated. Therefore, if cats are removed, other cats from surrounding colonies, or newly abandoned or lost cats may move in to take advantage of the available food and shelter. The cycle of reproduction and nuisance behavior begins all over again.

In addition, if most of the cats in a colony are not trapped, then the ones left behind will continue to have kittens, and more kittens will survive because there are fewer cats competing for the available food. The population will continue to increase until the level that can be supported by the available food and shelter is reached.

Other reasons trap and remove will only temporarily reduce the numbers of community cats in a given area include lack of cooperation by the cats' caretakers (the only people who really know the cats' numbers and patterns and who can control whether or not they're hungry enough to enter a baited trap), the unwillingness of volunteers to trap cats who face an uncertain fate upon capture, the lack of animal control resources available to trap community cats, the difficulty of catching all the cats in a colony, and the ongoing abandonment of non-sterilized pet cats, who can also repopulate a vacated territory.



Animal shelters may attempt to humanely trap and remove outdoor cats in response to calls of complaint or concern from the public. However, animal shelters already have overwhelming numbers of lost, injured, abandoned, and relinquished pet cats to care for and rehome, leaving them without resources to help feral cats. Feral cats who have been trapped and brought into the shelter are likely to be euthanized right away or after a mandatory holding period, especially those who cannot be identified as members of a known, managed colony. It is difficult to accurately differentiate between a feral cat or a frightened pet cat without a holding period, and safely caring for a feral cat in a typical shelter cage is extremely stressful for both the cat and shelter staff. In addition, if space is limited at the shelter, an adoptable cat may be euthanized to make room to hold a feral cat.





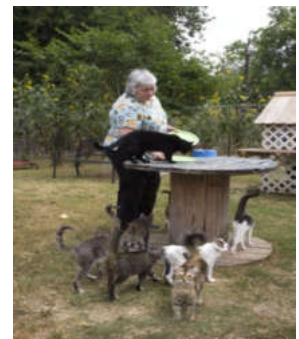
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Some shelters may provide low-cost spay/neuter, vaccination, and ear tipping for community cats; they may also socialize feral kittens in the shelter. Some shelters may provide information and loan traps to citizens interested in trapping these cats for spaying and neutering. If there is a local group helping community cats, the shelter may refer callers to that group. Shelters can also work with local groups to provide an adoption outlet for friendly strays and socialized kittens that have been removed from the colonies during trapping.

Sanctuaries are often suggested as places where community cats can live out their lives. Properly designed and maintained sanctuaries can provide a high quality of care for these cats, and most seem to adapt.

However, not everyone has the knowledge, facilities, time, and money to provide a high level of care. In addition, sanctuaries are quickly filled, and overcrowding can lead to contagious disease problems. Moreover, poorly run and designed sanctuaries raise questions about the quality of life for the resident cats.



### *Feeding Bans*



The logic behind feeding bans is that if no one feeds community cats, they will go away. This rarely works for a variety of reasons.

Cats are territorial animals who can survive for weeks without food and will not easily or quickly leave their territory to search for new food sources. Instead, they tend to move closer to homes and businesses as they grow hungrier and more desperate. In addition, the cats will continue to reproduce despite the effort to "starve them out," resulting in the visible deaths of many kittens. Feeding bans are also rarely effective because there may be more than one feeder; feeders will resist no matter the threatened penalties; enforcement is difficult and unpopular with caring citizens; and there are other sources of food, including dumpsters, garbage cans, and wildlife.

As a result, enforced feeding bans tend to make the situation much worse instead of better.

### Helping Community Cats

Many people who see a community cat put out food to help the animal. If you're feeding cats, we hope you will do more—and do it quickly.



If a cat is tame, take steps to find his owner. Report the cat to the agency in your community that handles animal care and control because a desperate owner may be searching for her cat, and it's likely that she'll contact that agency. If the owner isn't found or doesn't want the cat back, you can keep the cat or take steps to find a permanent home for him.

If the cat is feral (i.e., unapproachable and wary after several days of feeding) and not ear tipped (the sign of a sterilized feral cat), it is critical to get her/him spayed or neutered to stop reproduction and improve the quality of life for cats, wildlife, and people. Many organizations, agencies, and veterinary clinics offer low-cost or free spay/neuter for feral cats. Remember, cats can reproduce quickly. Don't wait for the two cats you've been feeding to become so many mouths that you're overwhelmed. Helping feral cats can be very rewarding. There are many ways for you to be involved, but it's a good idea to start by learning as much as you can about feral cats and TNR.

Check for organizations and agencies in your area that support TNR. If you can't find help locally, read *Neighborhood Cats' TNR Handbook* and/or take The HSUS's self-paced online cat-caretaker course before you trap the cats.

### Common Questions

*Can I get financial assistance to care for my community cats?*

Check our list of organizations, agencies and spay/neuter clinics and veterinary hospitals that help cats. Some indicate that they provide food. Even if an organization doesn't indicate that it helps caretakers with food, it never hurts to ask.

Your local humane society may have surplus food or know of other agencies in your community that provide food. Pet-supply stores and supermarkets may be willing to donate dented cans of cat food and torn packages or out-of-date food. Work on holding a food drive with a local youth group or service organization or hold your own. Place an ad in your newspaper with the details of the drive.



If you're on your own, ask that friends, family, and co-workers celebrate your birthday or other holidays by giving you money or gift cards to pet-supply stores instead of regular gifts. If you can put aside some money each month, it may help you if an unexpected expense occurs. Also, find out if your veterinarian will set up a payment plan.

*Can feral cats be tamed and adopted?*

Feral kittens younger than 8 weeks (and sometimes older) can be socialized. However, because they have not had contact with humans at an early age, adult feral cats can seldom be adopted as pets. They will almost always view contact with people as frightening and will avoid it. Cats who have spent their entire lives outdoors can sometimes adapt to indoor life, but it is usually a very slow, stressful process. In addition, attempts to tame adult feral cats divert time and energy from the most important objective of TNR: sterilizing the feral cat population.

*How do I estimate the number of outdoor cats in my community?*

Based on studies of households that admit feeding cats they do not own (including both friendly strays and pet cats), feral cat expert Dr. Julie Levy uses the following calculation to estimate the number of cats in a community: divide the number of humans in the community by six. However, this estimate does not count cats who are not fed by someone. It also over-estimates the number of cats since the same cat is often fed by more than one person.

Currently, PetSmart Charities divides the human population by 15 to predict a target number of cat sterilizations when awarding their targeted spay/neuter grants. However, other population estimates in colder climates show that this formula may predict too large a population in those regions owing to harsh winters and predation.

**Overcoming Common Obstacles**

Helping community cats can be very challenging. In some municipalities, there are laws hindering TNR, such as outdoor-feeding bans or limits on the number of animals a resident can "own" (with "ownership" defined by whether a person feeds a cat). Running a wide scale TNR project in places where laws (or lack of laws) make it very difficult may require changing those laws.



You probably will be safe if you're trapping on property you own. However, if the cats you've been feeding are not on your property, obtain the permission of the owner of any property to which you'll



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need access in order to care for the cats. This will be much easier than trespassing and trying not to be spotted.

Feeding and care, too, are simpler and more reliable when you have the property owner's support (as opposed to hoping no one in authority cracks down on you or throws away the food). Releasing cats back onto property where the residents know what you're doing and approve of TNR is much safer for the cats than putting them back into an uncertain situation and hoping for the best.

Colonies that are located on government-owned or managed property and areas where rare, threatened, and endangered wildlife live require special consideration. Collaborating with other interest groups to reach a common goal—protecting both cats and wildlife—will be more productive than continuing the “cats versus birds” debate.

If you are fortunate and have a feral cat group or knowledgeable individual in your community, he or she may have traps that you can borrow. Animal shelters, humane societies, and rescue groups may also have traps that you can borrow as well. If all else fails, you may be able to purchase traps at feed or garden stores and online.

Ideally you will have more traps than cats, so you can trap most cats in the colony in a few days. It's much easier to catch a couple of cats with ten traps strategically located, than with only two. Note: If there is no organization to help you, only start trapping once you've learned how to safely trap feral cats and have lined up a veterinarian who is willing to work with feral cats. It's



critical that a veterinarian knows how to work with feral cats before you bring her one. If you need to find a veterinarian, start with your own.

It's important to understand how to approach veterinarians because they may not know how, or may not want, to work with feral cats. There are several reasons veterinarians may not work with feral cats. They:

- Haven't been involved with TNR and don't understand it or support it.
- May not have the approval of the clinic owner.
- Aren't familiar with spaying or neutering young kittens.

- Have had bad experiences with other feral cat caretakers.

You can increase your chances of finding a veterinarian to work with you by appreciating his or her point of view. A well-written letter to veterinarians in your community may gain you a few allies.

Even if you're not involved with a colony of cats, you can still help the cats in your community. Volunteers are the life line of many groups, organizations, and agencies that help community cats. You may consider hands-on help, including: trapping other caretakers' cats, transporting cats to and from the veterinarian, providing a recovery space, assisting at a spay/neuter event, and fostering and socializing kittens. Expertise in marketing, fundraising, volunteer programs, website development, and writing can all help. Check with local organizations or agencies to see how your skills can make a difference. Monetary donations are always helpful, and many organizations have a "wish list" that indicates what items they really need.

### **Mobilizing Support**

If the colony you want to trap is a neighborhood colony and is not on your property, start by gathering information. Walk around and talk with anyone who might have knowledge of the cats. (This is a method particularly suited to densely populated areas where people are easily encountered going about their day.) How do they feel about the cats? Do they know who feeds them? If so, when, where, and how often? How many cats are there? How did the situation start? Has anyone done anything in terms of rescue or removal? The more you learn, the better your plan of action will be.

If you come across someone friendly, try to exchange contact information—you never know when you might need their help, even if it involves just finding out whether they've seen a particular cat. Stay alert for volunteers who might help feed, trap, or donate food or money. It's always better if you have others to share the work of caretaking. That way you won't become overburdened and the cats will have a stronger support network.

During this "get acquainted" phase, have literature on hand, such as a one-page flyer that describes TNR's benefits ("no more kittens, noise, or odor; continued rodent control") and your plan to organize a project, plus your contact information. You can also include information about low-cost sterilization programs for owned cats. Hand out your flyer and post it throughout the area. Refer people to informative websites, so they can learn more on their own. If you can, make up business cards. Dress neatly and businesslike—the more professional you appear, the better received your message will be.



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In many cities, there are neighborhood organizations such as community boards or block, town, or village associations that meet regularly and are open to the public. Go to one of the meetings, calling up ahead of time to get the cats on the agenda. Then make a brief presentation, ask for help, and bring a sign-up brochure for volunteers listing possible tasks, such as trapping, providing holding space (like a garage), feeding, or providing information about the cats' whereabouts.

**ARE YOU FEEDING OUTSIDE CATS?**

**"FERAL CAT FORUM"**

Every year, hundreds of unwanted cats are euthanized at our local shelter. There is a humane "no-kill" option for outside cat control that stops the breeding AND saves taxpayer dollars!

It's called TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN.

Join us to hear the benefits of Trap-Neuter-Return and assistance that may be available to you!

**"FERAL CAT FORUM"**  
When: Tues., June 29 at 6 p.m.  
Where: Waco-McLennan County Central Library  
1717 Austin Ave. in Waco (A free public information event)

For more information, visit [www.HOTFeralFriends.com](http://www.HOTFeralFriends.com)  
Heart of Texas Feral Friends is a program of the Waco Humane Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Feral Cat Program  
Waco Humane Society, 1717 Austin Ave.  
Waco, TX 76798-4000  
www.wacohumane.org

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You can also hold your own "cat meeting." Post flyers around the area announcing a meeting at a local coffee shop. Invite "everyone concerned about the outdoor cats in our neighborhood." You want residents to come who might help you, as well as residents who don't like the cats. The chance to hear them out and provide information about TNR could result in an unexpected ally, or at least a more tolerant attitude. Provide a sign-up sheet for people who would like to support your efforts. Leading community organizations, such as churches or civic groups, can be approached for support, as well as the offices of local government officials (assuming all is well with your local laws and policies).

Try to make appointments with co-op boards, landlords, and building and workplace managers—anyone whose permission you need or who has the ability to make your work easier or more difficult. Don't base your argument for starting a TNR program on compassion for the cats; just present the benefits of TNR. Be especially prepared at these types of meetings to talk about how TNR will improve community welfare and why other methods of managing the outdoor cat population won't work. Visit our FAQs for more information.

One technique for mobilizing community support is to write a letter describing your TNR plan and give a copy to everyone in the neighborhood; you can either mail it or slip it under doors. (CAUTION: Do not place anything inside mailboxes, as this is a violation of federal law!)

Undoubtedly, you will think of more ways to reach out and provide information. Always remember that TNR is not only about working with the cats; you need people skills as well; outdoor cats are a community issue and require a community solution. Don't bite off more than you can handle. Start small, achieve success, and build on it.



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## Trapping Cats: Who and When

### *Mother Cats*

If you're thinking of trapping a mother cat and are fortunate to have a local TNR group's assistance, follow their protocols. If you're on your own, you'll have many things to consider, including the trapping of kittens.



Cats with nursing kittens can be spayed by veterinarians familiar with working on them. If you know that a female cat is nursing young kittens, it's best to delay trapping her until the kittens start showing up at the food bowl and the whole family can be trapped at the same time. Pediatric spay and neuter has been performed in animal shelters for more than 25 years on kittens as young as 2 months or who weigh at least two pounds. Studies of pediatric spay and neuter have shown that there are no behavioral differences, changes in growth, or any risk of future medical problems when compared to traditional spay and neuter at 6 to 8 months of age. Be sure to read about trapping kittens safely in the Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook.

If a nursing female goes into your trap, let her go if you know her kittens are alive and less than a few weeks old. Do this immediately so she does not develop too much fear of the trap. If you know that the kittens are more than a few weeks old, you could have the cat spayed as soon as possible and then release her the day after surgery if she appears alert and there are no signs of post-surgical complications. While this may be sooner than a cat would normally be released, the risk is justified by giving her kittens a better chance to survive. Contrary to popular belief, a spayed female cat can still nurse.

If you trap a nursing mother cat and don't know how old the kittens are, you could let her go, knowing you may never catch her again and she may go on to have more litters.

### *Winter Trapping*

People may be concerned about trapping during winter because the females will have their stomachs shaved for surgery. However, winter trapping has its advantages. There are far fewer pregnancies, so difficulties with young kittens and nursing mothers can be largely avoided. Plus you can get a step ahead of the spring kitten season. Before any winter trapping is



done, be sure that the cats will have adequate shelter when they are returned to their territory.

### Common Questions

*Is there a contraceptive for community cats?*

The Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs is a non-profit organization, supported by The HSUS and others, that is working hard to find non-surgical sterilants for cats and dogs. Check ACCD's website for the latest information.

*What if there is no feral cat caretaker or person to foster feral kittens?*

The HSUS believes that in an ideal world, TNR'd colonies would have caretakers. Unfortunately, there are many colonies that do not have caretakers. Of the three to four million cats cared for yearly in animal shelters, approximately half are euthanized. Euthanizing healthy feral cats because they don't have a caretaker is not a life-saving strategy.

Also, in an ideal world, kittens young enough to be taught to like people would be removed from a feral colony and evaluated for adoption. However, it may not be possible to find homes for socialized feral kittens when resources are limited and millions of already-tame kittens need homes. In addition, the resources put into socialization and adoption may be better used to spay and neuter as many feral cats as possible to prevent the birth of more kittens.

### Testing for FeLV and FIV

The rate of FeLV (Feline Leukemia Virus) and FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) in community cats is about the same as that of owned cats. Some private veterinarians only test community cats for these viruses if the caretaker requests it, while others insist on testing and euthanizing all cats who test positive, even if they are currently healthy. Some TNR programs test all cats, some only test sick cats, and others only test adoptable cats. Although cost is certainly important, other factors should be considered as well.

There are several reasons why groups do not routinely test healthy colony cats. The first is logistics: An accurate diagnosis requires two tests at least one month apart to rule out false positives and false negatives. In addition, a cat who initially tests positive for feline leukemia has about a 30 percent chance of later testing negative due to his immune response to the initial infection. Moreover, what do you do with a feral cat awaiting his second







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test—cage him for a month, or let him go and try to trap him again? Returning a healthy cat to the colony after TNR makes sense since, given the close living situation of cats in colonies, most other healthy members of the colony have probably already been exposed to diseases carried by the members and developed immunity.

FeLV is shed in very high quantities in saliva and nasal secretions, as well as urine, feces, and milk from infected cats. Cat-to-cat transfer of the virus may occur from a bite, during mutual grooming, from shared dishes, or from an infected mother cat to her kittens, either before or after their birth. Spaying and neutering community cats will eliminate reproduction and the spread of FeLV from mother cats to kittens. Spaying and neutering will also decrease aggression and the spread of FeLV through bite wounds.

Most cats with FeLV are asymptomatic. If an infected cat exhibits symptoms of the disease such as poor coat, weakness, and weight loss, the caretaker should make every effort to re-trap the cat. In this situation, a FeLV/FIV test would help distinguish whether the cat is suffering from end-stage feline leukemia or something like a bad upper respiratory infection that a week or two of antibiotics would treat. Depending on the illness and your ability, you may decide to treat the cat. However, if the cat's quality of life is poor, euthanasia should be considered.

FIV is not very contagious and generally requires deep bites to be transmitted. Most transmission is associated with mating behaviors (males fighting with other males or males biting females while mating). Once cats are spayed and neutered, transmission is much less likely. Most cats with FIV don't have symptoms. If symptoms such as non-healing wounds and increased susceptibility to other diseases appear, the caretaker should try to re-trap the cat for veterinary treatment, as discussed in the previous paragraph.

### **Sheltering and Feeding**

Keeping community cats healthy begins with TNR, but it doesn't stop there. Community cats will appreciate a warm, dry shelter during cold, wet, or windy weather. You may find inexpensive or free materials by asking building supply stores or contractors if they have scrap lumber. A fun activity is to have a shelter building party.



You can also ask friends, neighbors, and co-workers for used dog houses, which can be modified to serve as good shelters. Contact local youth groups to find out if they would help build shelters as a service project. A lot of excellent information is

included on Neighborhood Cats' website, including ideas for making shelters and keeping water from freezing.

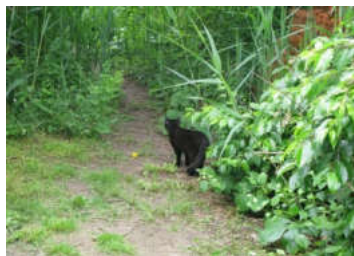
If you're trying to keep ants and other insects from getting into the cats' food, you can create a little moat by putting the food bowl into a larger container. Then add about one-half inch of water in the larger bowl. The water surrounding the smaller bowl will prevent ants from reaching the food, but the cats can still lean over and eat. If you are feeding many cats, provide an adequate number of bowls to allow more than one cat to eat at a time. Providing several bowls may also help cats who might be last to the food bowl get their share.

Since wildlife may also be interested in the food, keep the feeding area clean and free of trash. If another person is feeding the cats, ask him or her to do so as well. Avoid leaving more food than the cats can eat and remember to decrease the amount of food you provide as the colony size decreases, so that the surplus food doesn't attract wildlife. Because many of the wild animals who are attracted to cat food are nocturnal, feed during daylight and remove the food by dark.

Although there aren't any repellents registered for use on coyotes, some used for dogs and cats have been used with some success on coyotes. In addition, a technique used by ranchers to protect their cats is to provide a climbing pole that enables cats to escape when surprised in the open by a coyote. Feeding near an area with plenty of trees can offer escape routes and hiding places for cats. If you can provide an enclosure that keeps the cats out of harm's way, you may want to consider doing so. You can search the Internet for "cat enclosures" to see what's available or to get ideas about building your own.

### **Protecting Birds and Other Wildlife**

Although not all cats are skilled hunters, a common complaint about cats is that they kill birds and other wildlife. Studies show that most of the animals killed by cats are small mammals (such as rodents), and approximately 25 percent are birds, including ground-nesting species that are



vulnerable to cat attack. Even if the local bird population does not suffer because of cat predation, it certainly has a negative effect on the individual animal who suffers and/or dies. Often animals who appear to have escaped unscathed from a cat die later. Birds, for instance, may fly away but may be killed by an infection caused by bacteria on a cat's teeth or claws. Birds can also die from the stress of having been captured.



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However, the need to protect wildlife from cat predation and competition for food should not automatically result in trapping and killing outdoor cats. Cat and wildlife advocates should work together to protect both wildlife and cats. Non-lethal options include relocation and on-site confinement of cats.

Because there is no one formula that universally applies to all situations involving wildlife and community cats, the need for dialogue, open-mindedness, and collaboration is critical. Once a dialogue is under way, the unique circumstances of each situation can be assessed. Although it can be difficult for groups with seemingly competing interests to work together and build trust, it can be done if all parties keep common goals in mind and search for effective, non-lethal outcomes that protect cats and wildlife.

### **Advocating for Community Cats**

An animal's strongest advocate may be you. That's because you, as a citizen, have the power to influence your legislators—especially on a local level. You do not need any prior experience to help pass pro-animal legislation; all you need is the determination to communicate with those who represent you in your local, state, and federal governments.



The number of caretakers and organizations devoted to helping community cats is growing. As a result, some local governments now recognize that a comprehensive cat management strategy to combat cat overpopulation requires working with advocates.

When advocating for community cats on a wide scale, it's important to have an idea of the number of how many there are. Previously mentioned methods of determining cat populations devised by Dr. Julie Levy and PetSmart Charities can help you estimate the number of cats in your area who need your help. In addition, because officials and citizens are concerned about responsible fiscal management, estimating the cost of euthanizing community cats versus the cost of TNR can be useful. Your local animal care and control agency should be able to tell you the cost to hold, care for and euthanize a cat. The costs will vary from community to community because mandatory hold periods may exist and last for varying time periods. General operating expenses of the shelter may also influence the cost. If there's a low-cost spay/neuter in your community for pet cats, the cost to spay/neuter a community cat may be the same or less.

If you need to go the route of changing laws first, please consult with an organization with success in pro-TNR lobbying. This is very important, because it is not always apparent how to get



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the results you want. Organizations to consult may include a nearby community cat group that already got their town on board; a community cat-friendly local humane society, SPCA, rescue group or animal care and control agency; or organizations like The HSUS and Neighborhood Cats, which can provide advice and resources. For more details, see the Lobbying 101 for Feral Cat Advocates in the resource section.

### **Starting a Community TNR Program**

Now that you've gotten your feet wet with TNR, you may be interested in spreading the word about its benefits. If you're lucky and there is a local cat group helping community cats, you may want to volunteer for this group. If there isn't one in your community, you may be the one to start one! Remember the people you spoke to before you trapped your colony? They may be interested in being part of a larger effort to help more cats. You may also look for other like-minded people in the community on websites like Yahoo and Facebook.

One of the first things you'll need to do is research the local laws, because the local Department of Health or animal care and control agency may have what amount to anti-TNR policies in place. For example, health officials may consider leaving out food for cats to be creating a public nuisance, whether or not the feeding site is kept clean. Or your local animal care and control agency may follow the practice of trying to trap and remove any outdoor cat spotted, neutered or not. The way to find out is call up the agency overseeing animal care and control and ask whether there is an official policy on outdoor cats and, if so, what it is. Typically, animal care and control may only respond to calls about nuisance, injured or dangerous cats.



The reason you want to find out about local laws and policies is simple: You don't want to go through the trouble and expense of setting up TNR programs for cat colonies, maintaining them for a time, and then be charged with some civil offense and have the cats taken away. If you are facing that possibility, then an effort to change the laws or policies should be attempted before anything else is done. (See previous section on lobbying.) In these instances, it is the town council, the mayor, the head of animal care and control, or the Commissioner of Public Health who you must convince. Once official approval has been gained, the strongest possible foundation for community-wide TNR has been built.

A couple of tips for TNR advocates: Focus on the population control aspect of TNR and its ability to reduce the number of cats. Don't try to persuade public officials with arguments that TNR is humane and the cats have a right to their lives and territory. Public officials will care much more



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about the impact of the cats on the community. A second tip, if you are meeting resistance, is to propose a pilot project rather than demand a complete change in the law. Then, if they agree, make sure the pilot succeeds.

If you are performing TNR in a legal vacuum – no laws or policies for or against – the day may come when municipal officials begin to take notice and show an interest in community cat policies. Prepare for that day by documenting your work, including veterinary records and colony tracking sheets, to be able to prove the benefits of TNR.

If you plan on working with community cats and practicing TNR on a large scale, forming a non-profit corporation has great advantages, especially when it comes to fundraising. When donations are given to non-profits approved by the IRS, they are tax-deductible, which may provide people with an added reason to give.



Perhaps as important is that an IRS-approved charity has credibility in the eyes of a potential donor as a viable organization worth supporting. Most foundations will provide grants only to IRS-approved charities. Furthermore, in many jurisdictions, only incorporated nonprofits can conduct direct mail solicitations, raffles, and other fundraising efforts. Forming

a nonprofit generally takes two steps: First, form a charitable corporation in your home state. Second, seek approval from the IRS for your corporation to obtain what is called "section 501(c)(3)" status. Once you receive this status, donations made to your organization become tax-deductible. If you are not already familiar with forming a charitable corporation and applying for 501(c)(3) status, it can be a difficult and time-consuming process—even for those with legal backgrounds. You may want to consider using an incorporation service that does almost all the paperwork and filing for you.

While the cost of using an incorporation service may seem like a lot of money when you're first starting out, it's a small price to pay compared to the time and effort involved in doing the whole thing yourself. Even if you have an attorney willing to assist you at no charge, if he or she is inexperienced in this area, it can dramatically slow down the process. In addition, most private attorneys, if they charge you the full price, will bill in the thousands of dollars for this same service. No matter which approach to incorporation you take, you'll still have to pay the government filing fees (which total in the hundreds of dollars).



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## Being a Responsible Cat Owner

### *Spaying and Neutering*

In addition to TNR for community cats, spaying and neutering your own cats is the most important thing you can do, both for your cat and the millions of cats who are euthanized every year. Afraid your cat will get fat, or his personality will change? Think it's not necessary because your cat never goes outdoors? Or maybe you just haven't gotten around to spaying your cat? Can't afford it? Do you think your cat is too young to get pregnant? Find the answers to your concerns, low-cost spay/neuter options, and more on The HSUS website.

### *Keeping Cats Indoors*



If you think it's cruel to keep your pet cat indoors, think again. Going outdoors is not a prerequisite for feline happiness. It's simple to keep your cat happy indoors through playtime every day, cat trees for climbing, and cat grass for an occasional snack. Indoor pets can have some outdoor time in a safe enclosure or on a harness and leash.

There are specially-constructed cat fences that are advertised as escape proof. Since these allow other animals to enter your yard and harm your cat, your cat should always be supervised when outdoors. If you allow your cat outdoors unsupervised for any part of the day or night, you're risking your cat's life. In addition, cats pose a risk to birds and other wildlife.

Stray or currently owned cats who have lived completely outdoors or spent some time outdoors can be transitioned to an indoor lifestyle as long as they are comfortable living with people.

Some indoor cats are put outside for various reasons. For example, if life changes due to moving in with a person who has allergies, becoming pregnant, or moving occur or your cat stops using his litter box, there are resources to help you resolve issues facing you and your cat. Check out our Cat Answer Tool for behavioral resources.

### *Providing a Collar and ID*

It's tragic that only 2-5% of cats in shelters are reunited with their families. A collar with visible identification is your cat's ticket home.





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Most pet owners think their cat will never get lost, but even strictly indoor cats need identification in case they escape during an emergency, through a torn screen or on their way to or from the veterinarian. You may be afraid to put a collar on your cat because you're worried he'll be injured or think that he won't tolerate a collar. But you can learn how to change his attitude—and yours—about wearing safety collars.

As a backup to visible identification, your cat can be microchipped. A microchip is about the size of a grain of rice and is implanted under the skin between the shoulders. The information the microchip contains includes the name of the microchip registry and your pet's unique registration number. Veterinarians and animal shelters use a special scanner to check lost pets for a microchip. The scanner reads information on the microchip, including the microchip registry and your pet's unique registration number. When the registry is informed that your pet has been found, the registry will contact you. It's vital that you keep the registry informed of your current contact information.

### Searching for Lost Pets

Searching for a lost cat is quite different from searching for a lost dog. Cat owners are often told to post flyers and to drive to animal shelters to check the cages, as one would do for a dog. However, these actions will not help you find your cat if she is trapped in a neighbor's shed or is injured and hiding in fear under a neighbor's deck. First, look in every nook and cranny in your house, around your yard, and in your immediate neighborhood.



Many pets who are thought to be lost are merely hiding or sleeping somewhere on your property: in cabinets, boxes, or closets; beneath blankets; on a pushed-in dining room chair; behind long curtains; in trees, garages, or crawl spaces; on roofs; and under decks and porches.

The primary method that you should use to find your lost cat is a thorough search of your cat's territory (for an outdoor-access cat) or humane trapping (for indoor-only cats who have escaped their home).

When an indoor-only cat escapes your home, he's likely hiding in fear near the escape point. That is because cats are territorial, and your cat's territory was the inside of your home. Once a cat escapes, he seeks shelter because he is afraid. Cats who are afraid (and cats who are injured) will often hide under a deck, a house, a porch or bushes. They will not meow; meowing would give up their location to a predator. This behavior has nothing to do with whether the cat loves you, recognizes your voice, or can smell you; it has



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everything to do with the instinct to survive. Don't delay your search and hope that your cat comes home on his own, although many cats do.

When an outdoor-access cat doesn't come home at the usual time, it means that something has happened. Because sick, injured, and trapped cats are often found within their territory, it's likely that your missing outdoor-access cat is somewhere within a 5-house radius of your home. Cats who have been chased may be several houses or a few blocks from home. Sometimes cats travel up to a mile (or more) from their territory, and those who end up many miles away, whether they were intentionally or unintentionally transported out of their territory, are the most difficult to find. Don't wait another day to start searching for your cat.

Time is of the essence in finding both indoor-only and outdoor-access cats. You don't want to stress out about what to do when you're already stressed out by the absence of your cat, so prepare a recovery kit in advance to enable you to start your search immediately. At a minimum, your recovery kit should include a flashlight and log sheets and pen to record sightings that could be your cat.

In addition to searching for your cat nearby and in the neighborhood, routinely check with your local animal shelter and also with any local rescue groups. Some groups list lost pets on their telephone messages or online, and keep information about lost and found pets. While some cats will end up in shelters the same day they vanished, others might not end up there for weeks or even months! Sometimes found cats end up being placed in feline rescue groups that place them in temporary foster homes until they can be adopted to a new family.

Your local shelter should have a listing of the feline groups in your area. Take your pet's



photograph to local veterinary offices and leave a copy of your "lost pet" flyer with them.

Place a notice in the Lost Pets section of your local and/or community newspapers' classified section, and check every day for notices in the Found Pets section. Many newspapers now have classifieds listed online.

Alert your neighbors, as well as mail and newspaper carriers. You can even enlist the help of neighborhood children, who are often eager to assist. Children should avoid trying to handle your cat, but they can let you know if they've seen your cat. Online postings may

also be effective. Please see The Center for Lost Pets.





Thank you for your efforts to help cats and good luck.

### Resources at a glance

Check our [website](#) for the latest information and resources. Take our self-paced [online course](#) for feral cat caretakers through Humane Society University.

Examples of [Spanish language TNR resources](#) are available and [here](#), and The HSUS's handout about helping homeless cats, "[Buena Ciudadana](#)," is also available in Spanish.

An excellent website for all things feral is [Neighborhood Cats](#). You'll find information on the basics of TNR, safely socializing kittens, cat containment systems, trapping equipment, and more.

### Resources by topic

#### 1. Looking at the Big Picture

Watch The HSUS's 16-minute [video](#), "Trap-Neuter-Return: Fixing Feral Cat Overpopulation," and read our [FAQ](#) and [Position on Trap-Neuter-Return](#).

#### 2. Understanding Problems Associated with Outdoor Cats

Read articles about how the animal sheltering community is helping cats, including "[Taking a Broader View of Cats in the Community](#)," "[The Way to Tame a Feral Kitten's Heart](#)," "[Scaredy Cat or Feral Cat?](#)" and "[Returning Healthy Feral Cats](#)."

#### 3. Evaluating Solutions: Trap and Remove, Feeding Bans

Read about feeding bans and much more in "Implementing a Community Trap-Neuter-Return Program," [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

#### 4. Helping Feral Cats: Trap-Neuter-Return

For an in-depth overview of TNR, read "[The Neighborhood Cats' TNR Handbook](#): A Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return for the Feral Cat Caretaker."

Take a self-paced [online caretaker course](#) through Humane Society University.

View a comprehensive [list of local groups](#) to help you. You may also find experienced individuals on Yahoo and Facebook.



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#### 5. Overcoming Common Obstacles

Read a comprehensive book about implementing a community TNR program (see 3 above).

Read about [working with veterinarians and how veterinarians can help care for feral cats in the clinic.](#)

Download a [training video for veterinarians](#) on performing pediatric spay and neuter.

Revise [this letter to and these forms to recruit veterinarians in your community.](#)

Read about the [ins and outs of working with veterinarians.](#)

Visit the [Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs](#) to learn about the latest research to find non-surgical sterilants.

#### 6. Trapping: Who and When

Read about performing a [mass trapping](#) and more.

View Neighborhood Cats' 30-minute [video about performing mass trapping.](#)

#### 7. Testing for FeLV and FIV

Read about [returning healthy community cats](#) and [keeping community cats healthy.](#)

#### 8. Sheltering and Feeding

Read a [caretaker's tale](#) of providing shelters and learn how to [build the ultimate shelter.](#)

#### 9. Resolving Issues with Neighbors

Read about [peaceful co-existence](#) and how to keep cats out of yards and gardens in "[The Neighborhood Cats' TNR Handbook: A Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return for the Feral Cat Caretaker.](#)"

#### 10. Protecting Birds, Other Wildlife, and Cats

Read [more](#) about the importance of collaborating to find effective strategies for protecting birds, other wildlife, and cats.

#### 11. Advocating for Community Cats

Read a [brief overview of lobbying](#) on behalf of cats or download our in-depth "[Advocate Toolkit.](#)"



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## 12. Being a Responsible Cat Owner

Educating cat owners is an important responsibility of the veterinary community, but there is a lot of additional information out there to help you and your cat. You can [find pet-friendly rental housing](#), [resolve behavior issues](#), [protect your cat if she goes missing](#), and [purchase cat products](#) (including enclosures), to [entertain your cat](#) and [keep her safe](#). You can also learn how to [conduct an effective search](#) in the unfortunate event that your cat becomes lost.