

Feral Facts

- Feral cats live in family groups called "colonies."
- Depending on availability of food, these colonies can vary in size from two cats to 200 or more.
- The average lifespan of a feral cat is approximately three years.
- Although the incidence of disease in feral cats is not higher than in tame or owned cats, they are at much greater risk of being hit by cars, injured by other cats, or attacked by predators.
- They are especially numerous on college campuses and military bases where pet cats, many of whom are not spayed or neutered, are sometimes abandoned when their owners must relocate.
- Early efforts to control feral cats were done by permanently removing them from their colonies. This technique did not reduce feral cat populations. Instead, it left space in the environment for new cats to move in and reproduce. This is called the "vacuum effect".



Thousands of feral cats are euthanized in animal shelters every year.



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Feral Cats

Understanding the Issues.
Creating Solutions.

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What is a Feral Cat?

The word feral means "gone wild." Feral cats are domestic cats who have run away or have been abandoned and have "gone wild" to survive without human care. When stray or feral cats reproduce, their kittens are fearful of humans and can seldom be tamed enough to become pets.

Why are they a problem?

- When colonies are left unmanaged, the cats constantly produce more and more kittens.
- Un-neutered male cats create a noxious odor by spraying their territory and can be loud when fighting or mating.
- In suburban areas, the cats dig up gardens and can be a nuisance for residents.
- Feral cats living in rural areas typically rely on wild birds, rodents and other native species to survive.
- People who feed groups of unaltered feral cats without having them spayed/neutered allow the colony to continue to grow and compound the problem.

What are the Answers?

TNR clinics: Trap-Neuter-Return

Trap-Neuter-Return is a humane and effective alternative that controls feral cat colonies and improves the health and well-being of the colony cats. They are trapped, vaccinated and spayed or neutered and then returned home to their colony.

A good way to know if a cat is part of a managed colony is to look for a tipped ear. While the cat is under anesthesia for a spay/neuter, a vet clips the tip of its ear.



TNR, coupled with colony management that includes regular monitoring and feeding by volunteers, keeps feral cat populations healthier and less dependent on wildlife for their survival. Once all cats in the colony have been spayed/neutered, animal control complaints tend to be less frequent.

Humane Trap used in TNR



Responsible Animal Ownership

Stray cats, feral cats and owned cats that are let out are generally called "outside cats". If you have pet cats that you let out, have them spayed or neutered. Kittens as young as nine weeks can be spayed and neutered. Ask your vet if he/she performs early age spay/neuters.

If you are feeding any stray or feral cats that do not belong to you, have them spayed or neutered.

Although male cats are not burdened with kittens, they still contribute to the problem.

How Can I Help?

Efforts big and small are needed to help manage feral cats.

Here are some ways to help:

- If you know of an unmanaged colony contact your local feral cat group.
- Volunteer your time to feral cat management. You can help monitor a colony or lend a hand at a TNR clinic.
- Make a monetary donation to a TNR clinic. Your donation will be used to cover surgical costs, medicine, and/or food for the cats.
- Think about joining a local feral cat group, such as Knoxville Feral Cat Friends (www.knoxvilleferalcatfriends.org).
- Stay informed about the national feral cat effort by visiting www.alleycatalles.org
- Pay the spay/neuter fee for someone who can't afford it. To locate a subsidized spay/neuter clinic in East Tennessee call (865) 974-6464.

