

PROTECTING

Feral Cats

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN

WHILE YOU'RE OUT ENJOYING A WALK IN the park on a beautiful summer day, you suddenly spot two untamed and owner-less cats living in the bushes. You want to help them, but how?

If you ask feline advocates or rescuers, they'll tell you that the most effective and humane way to help is to trap-neuter-return (TNR) the cats. You're probably asking yourself if it's really the best solution, why sterilization improves their lives, or how in the world you're supposed to catch cats that can't even be touched. If you look at the benefits and alternatives, you'll see why TNR is such a widely accepted and successful way to help free-roaming cats. And once you try it, you'll find that it's actually so simple and safe that anyone from age 9 to 90 can do it. So, let's take a closer look at TNR.





Now that they've been trapped, neutered and returned, these two community cats are happy and healthy.

How It Works

The basic goal of TNR is to spay/neuter community cats, such as those feral felines you spotted in the park, so they can no longer reproduce. It prevents future generations from being introduced and provides a host of benefits to the sterilized felines.

A recent veterinary study by researchers from Florida and Rhode Island found that once community cats are sterilized, they become healthier, gain weight and enjoy an increased lifespan, which applies to cats from coast to coast. It also improves the lives of the people who live near them because sterilization curbs nuisance behaviors, such as howling, fighting and endless litters of kittens.

“Neutering is the best thing we can do to help these cats,” says Becky Robinson, president of Alley Cat Allies, a national organization that promotes and expands humane care for cats. “TNR is in the best interest of the cats and really helps them, and it improves the community, too.”

TNR works on individual cats as well as large numbers of felines living in colonies. TNR can safely be used on felines as young as 8 weeks of age and even on nursing mother cats. The technique has been used with great success on cats living in neighborhoods, behind restaurants, on college campuses and even in parks. It's also worked for entire communities, such as in Jacksonville, Fla., which has implemented a highly successful citywide TNR program.

Eventually, as spayed/neutered feral cats age, they pass away and the colonies in which they live dwindle naturally. But



IF YOU FOUND A
FREE-ROAMING
CAT, WHAT
WOULD YOU DO
TO HELP HER?

while they're alive, cats that are trapped, neutered and returned can live in peace and good health without adding additional feral cats to the community.

Are There Alternatives to TNR?

When you stumbled upon those two free-roaming cats in the park, chances are that your first thought about how to help them was adopting them or dropping them off at a shelter. Unfortunately, because they're frightened by humans, feral cats are not easily tamed, so rehoming them indoors isn't an option for most.

“All across the country, shelters are filled,” says Sherry Woodard, an animal behavior consultant with Best Friends Animal Society, an international organization dedicated to reducing pet homelessness. “A lot of people think that they're rescuing a community cat when they take it off the street to a shelter, but what people don't realize is that the cats are often euthanized because they're considered unadoptable.” And sanctuaries aren't an option either because most are full.

Some birding and wildlife groups oppose TNR because they believe that felines are responsible for the decline of bird populations and think that community



Using a humane trap that's triggered by a trip-plate, you can safely and easily catch community cats for spaying/neutering.

READY TO TNR CATS IN YOUR AREA? CHECK OUT OUR TNR GUIDE WITH ESSENTIALS, RESOURCES AND CHECKLISTS AT CATCHANNEL.COM/EXCLUSIVES



cats should be killed. However, animal advocates believe that's inhumane and that the bird population decline is mostly caused by other reasons, such as pollution, loss of habitat and climate change.

Feline advocates also cite studies which indicate that killing community cats doesn't solve the problem.

"Catching and killing cats will temporarily reduce the number of cats," Robinson says. "But then intact survivors breed to fill the void and other cats move in — it's called the vacuum effect — so it doesn't actually reduce their numbers in the long term."

Because TNR stabilizes community cat populations through sterilization and eventually reduces their numbers through natural attrition, animal welfare experts believe TNR is the right solution.

"TNR is really the best way to humanely help community cats, and it saves a whole bunch of lives," Woodard says.

How To TNR

If you have a plan and follow a few basic steps, TNR can be fairly easy to do. So now that you're ready to TNR those cats in the park, here's how to do it:

1 Make sure that the cats are not someone's pets. Also check to make sure that the cats do not have "ear-nips," a small slice off the top of the ear, the international symbol of a sterilized feral cat.

2 Plan ahead for trapping, transport and surgery. Determine how many cats will need spay/neuter appointments, where and when you will take them for the

An "ear nip," a small slice off the top of the ear, is the international symbol for a feral cat that has been sterilized.

surgery and how many traps you'll need. Contact your local feline rescue group, Humane Society or SPCA to find a nearby low-cost or free spay/neuter clinic and where to borrow trapping equipment.

3 Trap the cats. Withhold food from the cats for 24 hours and then set the humane traps with tempting treats, such as wet food. Once caught, cover the traps entirely with old sheets or towels to calm the cats.

4 Transport the cats to the spay/neuter clinic. Many spay/neuter clinics take cats by appointment only, so plan ahead.

5 Recover the cats post-surgery. Keep the cats in their covered traps at all times and make sure that they are kept in a safe, dry location. Watch for signs of illness or surgical complications (which are rare).

6 Return the cats. After the cats have recovered, return them to the exact location where they were originally caught.

You Did It!

Now that you've used TNR to help those cats in the park, they'll be healthier, happier and won't have any kittens. And next time you're on a walk and see the cats, you'll feel good for having helped them. 🐾

Cimeron Morrissey is an animal rescuer, an award-winning writer and Animal Planet's 2007 Cat Hero of the Year.

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**INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS
GIVE FERAL CATS JOBS
AND PROVE THEIR
VALUE TO SOCIETY.**

FERAL CATS ARE domestic cats that were born without human contact or handling. If these cats do not receive human contact within their first 8 weeks, humans will have a hard time taming them.

According to the ASPCA, there are tens of millions of feral cats in the United States. For decades, these cats were seen as pests by some, and many were caught and killed.

But in the 1990s, a movement began. Advocates such as Alley Cat Allies, the Feral Cat Coalition and Alley Cat Rescue (who also feed feral cats) began using trap-neuter-return (TNR), which stops the growth of a colony's size and allows the cats to live out their lives in dignity.

Feral Cats Go To Work

In 1999, Voice for the Animals Foundation (VFATA) in Venice, Calif., took another bold step. It realized that feral cats are part of our ecosystem and play an important role in controlling rodent populations and stopping the spread of diseases carried by rodents. If VFATA could find areas that needed rodent control, it could provide that area with feral cats, which would save the cats' lives and protect humans from rodents.

VFATA's first project was the Flower Market in Los Angeles, where it offered to provide feral cats as a way of taking care of the market's rodent problem. It worked.

"A lot of people who worked at the flower market didn't like cats," says Melya Kaplan, founder and executive director of VFATA. "The flower market has a big aisle down the center leading into the loading dock. One day there was a huge cat which we had put in, and he was chasing a rat right down the center aisle. Everyone started applauding. It has actually changed peoples' views of both ferals and cats in general."

By taking ferals out of shelters, VFATA both unburdens the shelters and saves cats' lives.

"When we hear about a colony we always try to keep that colony intact where it is," Kaplan says. "I don't believe in uprooting a colony."

Kaplan explains that re-colonizing the ferals is a very meticulous process. Staff members go to shelters and pick healthy ferals. Then they have them neutered, make sure they get all of



Feral cats have helped decrease the rodent population in Los Angeles flower markets.

their shots and have them microchipped. Then they take the cats to the new location and keep them in a large holding cage for a month, feeding them in these cages so the cats can get used to the smells, sounds and sights of the area. This way, when they are released they will view the area as their new territory and remain there.

Currently VFATA has 175 ferals working in 20 sites to eliminate rodents. By giving the feral cats jobs they are giving them security and saving them from extermination. They do not charge for the cats; they only require that the organization receiving the cats signs an agreement that it will feed the cats for life.

Cat Cops Catching Rats

One of the more interesting sites using working cats is at two Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) stations, where the cats are catching a different kind of criminal.

"The commanding officer at one LAPD station called me and said, 'Bring in the cats,'" Kaplan says. "He told me the rats were eating the criminal files, and in a couple of police stations they were running across officers' desks."

By preventing the destruction of criminal files these cat cops are helping to

COULD FERAL CATS HELP PREVENT A NATIONWIDE PANDEMIC?

An outbreak of the Hantavirus occurred in the southwestern United States in May 1993, infecting 53 people, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The virus is one of the most deadly in the world, and there is no known vaccine, cure or treatment. It can kill up to 35 percent of all those infected.

In 1993, unusually heavy rains swelled the deer mouse population, which carries the virus. People are easily infected by the Hantavirus because it is an airborne virus, and it can

be contracted by breathing it in. The CDC reports that 90 percent of cats are immune to the Hantavirus and the other 10 percent cannot pass it on to any other animal.

Cats, as rodent hunters, would seem a good defense from this virus. However, the CDC also points out that when a house cat kills a mouse, it first wants to bring it home to show its owner — not a good idea if the mouse is infected. Feral cats, however, would be able to hunt and kill the mice and would naturally avoid humans, helping to protect people from contracting the disease.

CAT FANCY consulted with James N. Mills, Ph.D., an

expert on the Hantavirus working at the CDC. Mills agreed that the idea of feral cats killing mice infected with the Hantavirus would work to protect people from an outbreak, because feral cats would not bring the mice back to people since they traditionally avoid humans.

So far, the Hantavirus has resulted in roughly 450 cases in the United States, 35 percent of them leading to death. Hopefully, it will not appear in large numbers again. If it does, feral cats may become extremely important to all people in the United States, both lifelong cat lovers and people who didn't like cats, but now realize their importance to our ecosystem and lives.



bring human criminals to justice. How are these cat cops doing?

“Well, I haven’t seen any rodents around yet,” says Officer Sandra Magdaleno, one of the cat coordinators at the LAPD. “They were only doing it at two stations, and now they are going to implement it at all police stations.”

Helping the Private Sector

At one development site, the ferals are helping businesses, both residential and retail, making the community livable for everyone.

“Everyone was complaining about the rats,” says Josh Elwell, a developer in Southern California. “There is an alley behind our building, which is the only access to the underground parking, and that alley had hundreds of rats. So we turned to VFTA to set up a program, and within 24 hours of having the cats there the rats were gone and never came back.”

The tenants and nearby properties love the cats.

“People have donated cat toys, food, litterboxes, even a carpeted cat tree,” Elwell says. “I have recommended the program to other

To learn more about Voice for the Animals Foundation and working feral cats, visit <http://vfta.foundation.org>.

By keeping the rodent population down, feral cats help make common areas more pleasant.



property management companies, and a lot of them were thrilled about it.” He says that many of his tenants who previously did not like cats have changed their tune. “Many people changed their attitudes toward the cats, seeing that they had a function and worth.”

The Next Step

Kaplan encourages other feral cat organizations to implement this type of program.

“I would love to get a grant and train other organizations because we have the whole system down,” Kaplan says. “There are so many parts of this program to protect the cats and to make it a success. You need to be thorough in the way you implement the program. It is a meticulous process.”

Kaplan would also like to expand their program.

“The more funding we get, the more we could spread this program out all over Los Angeles,” she says. 🐾

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Feral cats were called in to LAPD stations when rodents began eating criminal files.

Brad Kollus is a freelance writer specializing in the human-feline bond. He lives in New Jersey with his wife Elizabeth, son Dylan and their three cats.