



Understanding TNR: Trap-Neuter-Return

The issue of pet overpopulation is not just visible in the hundreds of animal shelters across the US, but also in the millions of community cats which live short lives in this country. CFC blankets are only provided to animal shelters and foster care systems, but understanding TNR programs (a close cousin to the shelter system) can allow us to help these other homeless cats in our community.

Strays versus Feral Cats...

“Strays” are cats who were once pets, but are now living in the wild because they are lost or were abandoned. While they may be fearful, they are used to people and are generally tame. You’ll typically find these cats attempting to live near humans - in backyards, under porches, behind garages, etc.

Feral cats are wild and much too scared to be handled or adopted by people. They hide during the day and may only come out at night. They are offspring of other feral cats or of strays. As a kitten they can be rescued by an animal shelter and gradually socialized to live with people. However, if they are not taken in as a young kitten, and they spend too many months without direct human contact, it is very difficult, if not impossible for them to become pets.

Community cats in your community...

Cats living without human companionship are sometimes called “community cats”. They can be strays or feral cats. Community cats live in colonies, which is a geographic area that provides them with food, water and shelter. Their lives are often quite short, often only 2-3 years.

In the US it is estimated that only 2% of the 30-40 million community cats have been spayed or neutered. These cats end up producing around 80% of all the kittens, which also end up homeless and in time, feral.

Trap-Neuter-Return

There is some debate on this topic, but for most areas Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the best solution to cat overpopulation. It is endorsed by both the ASPCA and Humane Society of the US. TNR is a nonlethal way of reducing the community cat population over time, while also greatly enhancing the lives of the cats in the colonies, as well as the people who live in the area.

TNR workers humanely trap the community cats, spay or neuter them (while also vaccinating them) and then return them to their home in the wild. Many programs also surgically remove the very tip of one ear, as a universal signal that the cat has been altered.

Once this is done for the entire colony, a “caretaker” is assigned to the group. This volunteer provides food, water and shelter. They also check for any signs of illness or injury, they watch for new entries to the colony (so they can be altered) and for kittens (which up to 8 weeks old can often be socialized and adopted into families). Cats in a managed colony can live up to 12 years old, a huge improvement in lifespan!

These caretakers do find that the colony experiences a better life, after TNR. Most cats gain a bit of weight and due to the better food and vaccinations, they have fewer health issues. There are fewer cat fights and the risks which go along with pregnancy are eliminated.

Everyone Can Help...

It should go without saying that as responsible pet parents we should always spay and neuter our own pets. It's also a good idea to keep our pets indoors, or on a leash if they want to go outside. If you are concerned about community cats in your area, contact your local animal shelter or humane society to see if they have a TNR program. You may also consider a \$20 donation to the shelter, which will likely cover their cost to spay or neuter the cat. Your donation will greatly enhance the life of the cat and help your community!

You can also volunteer your time with a TNR program, since most are volunteer-run, and organized around a local area. You can help trap and transport cats, or even become a colony caretaker! Although it's a big job, since the colony will depend on you as much as your own kitties do, knowing how many lives your extending, and enhancing, can make it all worthwhile.