

Fact Sheet

WHY TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN FERAL CATS? THE CASE FOR TNR

What is Trap-Neuter-Return?

Trap-Neuter-Return is the humane and effective approach for stray and feral cats. Now in practice for decades in the US after being proven in Europe, scientific studies show that Trap-Neuter-Return improves the lives of feral cats, improves their relationships with the people who live near them, and decreases the size of colonies over time.

Trap-Neuter-Return is successfully practiced in hundreds of communities and in every landscape and setting. It is exactly what it sounds like: Cats are humanely trapped and taken to a veterinarian to be neutered and vaccinated. After recovery, the cats are returned to their home—their colony—outdoors. Kittens and cats who are friendly and socialized to people may be adopted into homes.

Grounded in science, TNR stops the breeding cycle of cats and therefore improves their lives while preventing reproduction. It is a fact that the removal and killing of



outdoor cats that animal control has been pursuing for decades is never ending and futile. Since feral cats are not adoptable, they are killed in pounds and shelters. With a successful program like Trap-Neuter-Return to turn to, it's hard to believe that animal control agencies continue to kill cats, even though that approach has shown zero results.

It is time to put an end to catch and kill. Trap-Neuter-Return provides a life-saving, effective solution for these beautiful, independent cats.

There are so many reasons to embrace and promote TNR! Trap-Neuter-Return:

- Stabilizes feral cat colonies
- Improves cats' lives
- Answers the needs of the community
- Protect cats' lives
- Works—other methods just don't

Trap-Neuter-Return Stabilizes Feral Cat Colonies

Colonies that are involved in TNR diminish in size over time.

- During an 11-year study of TNR at the University of Florida, the number of cats on campus declined by 66%, with no new kittens being born after the first four years of operation.¹
- A study of the impact of TNR on feral cat colonies in Rome, Italy, also observed colony size decrease between 16% and 32% over a 10-year period.

Trap-Neuter-Return quickly stabilizes feral cat populations by instantly ending reproduction and by removing socialized cats from the colony.

- A TNR program at the University of Texas A&M neutered 123 cats in its first year, and found no new litters of kittens the following year.
- Over the course of the same study, 20% of the cats trapped were found to be socialized stray cats and adopted.²

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Trap-Neuter-Return Improves Cats' Lives

Leaders of major humane programs all over America agree that cats live healthier, more peaceful lives after TNR. "It helps to stabilize the number of cats in the community," says Bonney Brown, executive director of the Nevada Humane Society in Reno, Nevada. "It keeps the cats healthy. They really have great lives out there doing their feral cat thing."

- **Trap-Neuter-Return relieves cats of the constant stresses of mating and pregnancy.**

"The obvious benefit of Trap-Neuter-Return to the cats is that the females don't go through cycles of producing more and more kittens. Their health is actually improved," says Rich Avanzino, longtime director of the San Francisco SPCA and current president of Maddie's Fund. Spaying and neutering also virtually eliminates the chance of cats developing mammary or testicular tumors.

- **Mating behaviors cease, like roaming, yowling, spraying, and fighting.**

In a 2002 study conducted by prominent researcher Julie Levy, DVM, caregivers reported that cats tended to roam less after neutering, which is beneficial for their safety and reduces conflict with neighbors.³

With decreased competition for mating, the cats are also less likely to suffer injuries. A study of a feral cat colony in London conducted by leading cat biologists and TNR pioneers Dr. Jenny Remfry and Peter Neville found that cats were more affectionate towards each other after neutering, spending more time in groups and fighting less.⁴

- **Cats' physical health improves.**

Studies have found that neutering improves feral cats' coat condition and helps them gain weight.⁵ "...[R]esearch at the University of Florida shows that they gain weight and stray less after they've been neutered, so that's a benefit to their welfare, as well," says Dr. Levy.

- **Cats are vaccinated against rabies.**

"The process of Trap-Neuter-Return has an immense benefit for the cats that are involved in these programs," explains Dr. Levy. "They're vaccinated, so they're less

susceptible to infectious diseases." Although feral cats are healthy, vaccinations given during TNR protect them even further and help put community members at ease.

- **Cats live long, healthy lives.**

At the conclusion of the 11-year study of the impact of TNR on feral cat colonies at the University of Florida, 83% of the cats in managed TNR colonies had been residing in those colonies for more than six years—indicating a lifespan comparable to the 7.1-year lifespan of pet cats.⁶ Learn more about feral cat health at www.alleycat.org/FeralCatHealth.

Trap-Neuter-Return Answers the Needs of the Community

"I think there are several amazing benefits for communities that arise after they embrace Trap-Neuter-Return," says Dr. Levy. "One of the most substantial ones is a resolution of the conflict that...[can] surround cats in neighborhoods. Once residents understand that something is being done to control the cat population, they usually embrace having a Trap-Neuter-Return program there."

- **The population stabilizes—no new kittens!**

Once TNR is in place, the cats will no longer reproduce. The population will stabilize and eventually decline.

- **Cats become better neighbors.**

Studies confirm that once TNR stops reproduction, and therefore mating behaviors, the cats' relationship with residents improves. Colonies become quieter as behaviors like yowling or fighting stop, calls to authorities about the cats decrease significantly, and community morale improves.^{7,8}

- **Trap-Neuter-Return creates opportunities for outreach, education, and cooperation.**

Trap-Neuter-Return does more than just produce immediate results and boost the cats' public image. As Alley Cat Allies has found in its 20 years of experience through such on-the-ground programs as DC Cat in Washington, DC, and the Meadows of Chantilly in

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Northern Virginia, this community program presents a great opportunity for educating and addressing any concerns neighbors may have. “Having an open dialogue with neighbors and providing an opportunity to listen to their concerns can make a huge difference to a successful TNR program,” said Becky Robinson, president of Alley Cat Allies.

“Usually, neighbors are relieved just to learn that something is being done to stabilize the cat population. Caregivers can also take further steps to address concerns, such as providing deterrents to keep cats out of neighbors’ yards or constructing discreet feeding stations and litter areas to gradually move cats out of areas they are not wanted.”⁹

The cats live in the neighborhood—they will be there whether they are cared for or not. Trap-Neuter-Return establishes a point of contact for concerns about the cats and for resolving any community concerns.

Download the Alley Cat Allies’ brochure “How to Live With Cats In Your Neighborhood” to help respond to concerns about cats. Visit www.alleycat.org/Deterrents.

Trap-Neuter-Return Protects Cats’ Lives

The number one documented cause of death for cats in America is being killed in shelters. Over 70% of cats entering shelters are killed—a figure that rises to nearly 100% for feral cats, who cannot be adopted. For decades, animal control policy has wasted millions of dollars catching and killing outdoor cats, but populations of cats are still there, just as they always have been. Clearly, this cruel and costly system has failed.

- **Trap-Neuter-Return is an essential and valuable component of shelter reform to save cats’ lives.**

When used as a part of overall shelter reform with policies including no longer accepting cats at the shelter, across the board, communities with TNR programs report a decline in shelter intake. Alongside a decrease in cat-related calls to animal control, researchers in Orange County, Florida, also found that the number of cats killed by animal control decreased in the six years after TNR was initiated.¹⁰

Who does Trap-Neuter-Return?

Trap-Neuter-Return has been practiced abroad for decades, and spread across the United States with the help of Alley Cat Allies in the 1990s. Since then, it has become the accepted approach for feral cats, supported by:

- Major cities including Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Austin, Jacksonville, Topeka, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Cook County, Illinois.
 - National organizations like the Humane Society of the United States, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA).
 - Colleges and Universities including Stanford, Texas A&M, North Carolina State, and the University of Florida.
 - Thriving destinations and businesses including Disneyland and Portland’s professional soccer stadium.
 - More than 260 registered nonprofit cat organizations nationwide.
 - Millions of Americans, from your friends and neighbors to some familiar famous faces.
- **Trap-Neuter-Return stops wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars.**

Catching and killing cats has been a futile effort used by animal control and shelters across the country for decades (see below). Continuing an approach that is clearly not working is not only a waste of taxpayer dollars, it also shows blatant disregard for efficiency and value—at a time when the economy is at the forefront of everybody’s mind.

Investing in spay/neuter and TNR is an investment in cats’ lives and cats’ health, and it demonstrates a socially-responsible (and compassionate) and efficient approach to serving the animals and the public.

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- **Americans want humane solutions—they want TNR.**

More than 80% of Americans believe it is more humane to leave a cat outside than to have her caught and killed, according to a 2007 study conducted by Harris Interactive for Alley Cat Allies. Unfortunately, many people don't realize that this is exactly what happens to feral cats—they are caught and killed. Trap-Neuter-Return reflects Americans' humane ethic that cats deserve to live out their lives in their outdoor homes.

Though Trap-Neuter-Return is practiced all around the country in hundreds of forward-thinking communities, catch and kill for feral cats is still the status quo in many cities. As the paradigm shifts to the lifesaving Trap-Neuter-Return approach, America's humane ethic is finally being reflected in animal control policies.

In 1993, San Francisco became one of the first American cities to embrace TNR. "Money, instead of being spent on killing, [i]s now being used to protect the animals, to basically support the colony caregivers and to provide the surgeries so that we [don't] see the wasted dollars, the waste of life, and the extra burden put on the cat-colony caregivers," says Avanzino. "It was a tragedy that needed to end, and Trap-Neuter-Return stopped it."

Trap-Neuter-Return Works—Other Methods Just Don't

Attempts to remove cats from an area always fail because of a natural and scientifically-documented phenomenon known as the vacuum effect. In basic terms, whenever cats are removed, new cats move in, or the surviving cats left

behind, breed to capacity. Learn more at www.alleycat.org/VacuumEffectScience.

As a result of the vacuum effect, other approaches to feral cats are not only cruel and pointless, they are also completely ineffective at stabilizing the cat population. These methods include:

Catch and Kill

The traditional and continued approach of animal control, this futile method has been used for decades to no avail. As the Humane Society of the Ochochos in Oregon, puts it: "...[W]e know now, that more than 30 years of trapping and killing cats has done nothing to reduce the feral cat population."¹¹ A former president of the National Animal Control Association echoes this sentiment recognizing the ineffectiveness of catch and kill and the prevalence of the vacuum effect: "What we're saying is the old standard isn't good enough anymore. As we've seen before, there's no department that I'm aware of that has enough money in their budget to simply practice the old capture and euthanize policy; nature just keeps having more kittens."¹²

Adoption

Some cats who have lived outside their entire life befriend their caregivers and make a slow steady transition to living indoors. This is not representative of the millions of cats who are not going to make the transition to living with people in homes. And, it is a time-consuming project with a very low rate of success. To suggest that all feral cats can go into homes lacks the big picture of the true behavior of cats who thrive and live their lives with their colony members. It also ignores the very real evidence that spending time doing Trap-Neuter-Return and fostering truly social cats will help a much greater number of cats. Learn more at www.alleycat.org/TNRnotTNA.

Relocation

While it sometimes seems like an attractive option, relocation is also ineffective for the same reasons: it puts the vacuum effect into motion. And, it endangers cats' lives and causes them undue stress and suffering. Instead of trying to uproot cats from their home, the education and community relations aspect of TNR addresses concerns within the community to reach a harmonious solution. Learn more at www.alleycat.org/Relocation.

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Cat Sanctuaries

While cat sanctuaries are usually well-meaning, they do nothing to stabilize the cat population in the community. There will simply never be enough sanctuaries to house every cat. What's more, feral cats who are used to living outdoors suffer from stress and disease in these facilities.

Trap-Neuter-Return Is the Solution That Works for Everyone

Cats have lived outdoors for thousands of years—in fact, keeping indoor-only cats only became possible in the mid-20th century. Outdoor cats are part of our natural landscape.

With Trap-Neuter-Return, you can stabilize the population humanely, improve the cats' lives, save taxpayer dollars, address neighbors' concerns, and help the entire community reach a solution that benefits everyone.

¹ Levy, Julie K., David W. Gale, and Leslie A. Gale. "Evaluation of the Effect of a Long-Term Trap-Neuter-Return and Adoption Program on a Free-Roaming Cat Population." *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 222, no. 1 (2003): 42-46.

² Kathy L. Hughes and Margaret R. Slater: Implementation of a Feral Cat Management Program on a University Campus (*JAAWS* Vol. 5 No. 1, 2002).

³ Scott, Karen C., Julie K. Levy, and Shawn P. Gorman. "Body Condition of Feral Cats and the Effect of Neutering." *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 5, no. 3 (2002): 203-213.

⁴ Neville, P.F. and J. Remfry. "Effect of Neutering on Two Groups of Feral Cats." *The Veterinary Record* 114 (1984): 447-450.

⁵ Scott, Karen C., Julie K. Levy, and Shawn P. Gorman. "Body Condition of Feral Cats and the Effect of Neutering." *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 5, no. 3 (2002): 203-213.

⁶ Levy, Julie K., David W. Gale, and Leslie A. Gale. "Evaluation of the Effect of a Long-Term Trap-Neuter-Return and Adoption Program on a Free-Roaming Cat Population." *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 222, no. 1 (2003): 42-46.

⁷ Hughes, Kathy L., Margaret R. Slater, and Linda Haller. "The Effects of Implementing a Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Program in a Florida County Animal Control Service." *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 5 (2002): 285-289.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Alley Cat Allies. (2009). *Community Relations: Protecting Cats with Outreach, Education, and Negotiation*. Washington, DC: Author.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Humane Society of the Ochochos. *Feral Cat Problem*. 2011 <http://www.humaneocietyochocos.com/Feral.html> (accessed February 10, 2011).

¹² "Taking a Broader View of Cats in the Community", *Animal Sheltering*, September/October 2008, http://www.animalsheltering.org/resource_library/magazine_articles/sep_oct_2008/broader_view_of_cats.pdf (accessed February 10, 2011).