



Trap Neuter Return Tips & Tricks



The Facts About Feral Cats

If you look for them, you can see cats everywhere! Descended from the beautiful and regal cats of Egypt and transported by humans to every corner of our planet, cats are the most common furry house pet in the world! Almost 100 million cats are kept as pets in the US alone.

Not all felines are loved house pets, however. These cats, still *felis catus*, are strays, born wild or were lost cats. Many call these cats “feral,” meaning wild and untamed. We prefer to call them community cats, as they live in well-ordered colonies or communities, and because they belong to all of us!

Unlike most of our beloved kitties, community cats aren’t pampered lap kitties. These cats are truly wild; they hunt for their food, raise their young and fight for territory and mates. These cats live lives parallel to human civilization without being a part of it.

These cats, all precious and amazing, need our help! Not only are they at risk for illnesses, injury and death, they perpetuate the cycle of repeated kitten births, litter after litter each year.

Surely these regal animals deserve more, but what can we do? We can practice TNR, and this booklet can help!



The Facts About TNR

Although originally started around 1980, TNR (trap-neuter-return) didn't get much traction until the early part of the 21st century. In the past ten years, TNR has become a byword for managing community cats, rather than removing "unwanted cats."

What is it?

TNR, trap-neuter-return, also called trap-test-vaccinate-alter-return (TTVAR) and a myriad other abbreviations means trapping a cat in a humane trap; transportation to a veterinary clinic to be spayed or neutered, vaccinated and ear-tipped; and then released back where they were originally trapped.

Why do it?

TNR is best utilized for feral (community) cats and unsocialized strays in order to prevent uncontrolled breeding. We know that community cats are not social and cannot be "turned" into house cats. These cats are truly wild and placing them in a shelter or private home causes them a great deal of distress.

Why can't we just trap and remove them?

The cats living in that territory are there for the same reasons humans live where we live: food, shelter and family. The cats have a source of food, whether it is caring humans providing kibble, a good supply of mice and rodents and good water. They have shelter, even if it's only the branches of bushes and trees, and they have each other.

Removing them won't take away the lures, the food, shelter and water; so other cats will move in, this is called the vacuum effect. Nature will fill a vacuum.



The Traps

Traps are lightweight and made by Tomahawk, Havahart and many other companies. Live traps are generally about 30–36" x 11" x 11".

Individual traps vary among manufacturers, be sure to enclosed follow instructions.

However, each trap will consist of the following:



Feeder Door/Bait side—some traps have two openings; this is the side closest to the trip plate, place the bait here.

Trap side—this is the opening the cat must enter in order to trip the plate.

Trip Plate—the pressure of the cat stepping on the plate closes the trap-side door.

Latching mechanism—this is the hook used to set the trap, often they're shaped like one-half of a clothes pin.

Tip!

Stuck trap? Try cooking spray! It is safer for the kitties than WD-40 and easily washes off. Keep a pair of needle nose pliers handy, just in case!



It Takes A Village

Before you trap, you need community support.

Talk to your neighbors, see if they want to help. If they currently help you feed the kitties let them know your plan to trap the cats. It is important they know there will be periods of time when food will need to be withheld. Everyone should stop feeding the cats to make trapping a little easier.

Will your neighbours help you care for the kitties afterward? Don't be afraid to ask for help; so many animal lovers feel completely alone when they embark on TNR and other rescue work. We are certain many of your neighbours feel the same way you do.



Tip!

Find out if your city/municipality has leash laws for kitties. Be sure to learn the rules and regulations in your community regarding TNR. Some areas have made it illegal to practice TNR on any property except your own.

Do not be afraid to lobby your elected officials to change laws that are harmful! And do not be afraid to use your voice to create and work toward better laws.

How To Begin

As with many things, the prep work can be longer than the work itself. This can be the case in TNR. You will need to set aside about two weeks to observe and prepare before you start actively trapping.

Preparation:

- Get written permission from the owner of the property, if you do not own it.
- Observe the colony to get a good “ear count,” to know how many traps and vet appointments are needed.
- Get help if it is a large undertaking whether it is transportation, feeding during the management phase or any other details.
- Gather the necessary equipment and materials.
- Find veterinarians willing to help, or contact the local humane society to see if they have a TNR spay/neuter program.
- If you can, make notes about the kitties, (including photos, if possible) this will help you manage your colony after everyone has been altered.
- Set your feeding schedule; cats prefer to eat at dusk and dawn.

The Week Before:

- Make vet appointments, if necessary. Let them know you are one week away from beginning to trap.
- Maintain the feeding schedule; you can bait the traps without setting the trip plate to help the cats get accustomed to walking into the traps to eat.
- Make sure your volunteers are ready! Making a check list can be very helpful.
- Withhold food 24 hours before beginning to trap.

IMPORTANT - continue to provide water even during the food withholding period.



photo courtesy of History Safari Express

Trapping Day!

Prep your traps before you leave the house; make sure they are all oiled, if needed, and use a sheet or towel to cover each trap.

Place the traps, open the bait-side, and set out a small bowl of water.

Using small paper plates, set a couple tablespoons of smelly cat food, mackerel, boneless sardines or tuna in oil for the kitties.

Set the trap, make sure it is stable and then cover it up. Move to the next trap, and when they are all covered and set; walk away. Stay close—but not too close, otherwise the kitties won't eat. (Binoculars can help you watch them.)

Be patient, community cats are wary and it might take them a little while to investigate this new yummy smelling food.



photo courtesy of Lonely Miaow: Trapping Feral Cats

What Now?

The Cat is caught!

Move purposefully, don't run, when you hear the trap snap closed. Make sure the cage is covered. Then carefully carry the kitty in the trap to your vehicle (or to a safe, quiet place if you're trapping more than one.) Do not put them in the car if you'll be sitting for a little while, they will overheat.

When you have filled your traps, or if it is becoming late, gather the traps and place them in the car. Do not put them in the back of a truck, as the kitties will slide and could become injured. Use newspapers or a plastic tarp to protect your car seats. In addition, do not stack the cages. The cats could injure themselves, each other, or get out! You do not want a frightened community cat loose in your vehicle.

Go directly to the clinic! You can check the kitties in and the vet technicians will let you know when to pick them up.



Ear Tipping

This small snip of 1cm (about half an inch) from the tip of the left ear is a universal signifier that this kitty is fixed! Some places use notching (mostly in California,) but it is not as common as ear tipping. This is done while the kitties are sleeping during surgery and does not hurt any more than getting your ears pierced. The ear will heal quickly.

Surgery & After Care

At the vet clinic:

Bring any paperwork you may have. If you notice any of the cats have any pre-existing injuries be sure to tell the vet medical staff. If you are paying for the procedures, make sure you receive an estimate in advance to avoid any surprises.

Get your “after care” information sheets from the vet office so you can prepare. You will want to observe the kitties overnight as come out from under the anesthesia.

When you pick up the kitties, they will be back in the traps, altered, ear-tipped and groggy. Some vets will give them a little water or food—often they will tell you when they can be given food again.

Keep the kitties covered in their traps overnight, you can open the bait-side door, and slip food and water in to them without risking escape or injury to you.

During the next morning feeding time at the colony location, take these newly “fixed” kitties back to the trap site. Just open the bait side, and walk away. They will eventually creep out, and be on their way.

Gather your materials, clean and sanitize the traps, and you will be ready to go for another round!

Pat yourself and your helpers on the back! Everyone just saved lives!

Ingredients for Successful Trapping

- A companion to help! (Always important, not just for company, but another person can help you in case of emergency)
- A cell phone
- Bait for the traps; we recommend the smelliest fish you can find, especially mackerel, tuna in oil, or sardines
- Small paper plates and plastic bowls
- Plastic spoons (to portion the food)
- Water (you can reuse plastic milk jugs for this)
- Newspaper: you can line the bottom of the traps if you have a wiley kitty, or to protect their feet; also good to protect the upholstery in your vehicle
- Puppy pads, or plastic tarp to protect your seats (if not using newspaper)
- Sheets, blankets, towels to cover the traps
- Lids for your tins/cat food (if you do not use all of it)
- Trash bags
- Paper towels
- Dry and wet kitty food (if you are managing a colony)
- One pair of thick safety gloves per transporter. You can find leather or thick rubber gloves at feed stores or at stores that specialize in crafting.
- Antibacterial wipes, baby wipes, or other wet wipes for cleaning
- A first aid kit
- Bungee cords or straps, to “tie down” the cages in the car so they do not slide
- Flashlight, binoculars and a camera (if you desire.)

Helpful Resources

You can always contact The Hermitage for more information! We are here to help. Email us at info@hermitagecatshelter.org or call 520.571.7839.

More Information About Community Cats & TNR:

- Alley Cat Allies: www.alleycat.org
- Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project: www.feralcatproject.org
- The Humane Society of Southern Arizona: www.hssaz.org/our-services/trap-neuter-return/
- The Humane Society of the United States: www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral_cats/
- Tucson CARES: www.tucsoncares.org/trap-neuter-return/

Where to Purchase Live Traps:

- Ace Hardware
- Amazon.com
- Home Depot
- Tractor Supply

(Several organizations, like The Hermitage, will rent live traps; but you may decide to own traps if you are responsible for a large cat colony.)



"Herd of Cats" photo courtesy of Boksi

Our Mission

Advocating for animal rights and ending needless euthanasia of at-risk felines through protection, adoption and sanctuary.



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