

TNR FAQs

WHAT IS A FERAL CAT?

The official definition of feral is, “living in a wild state after domestication”. We consider that feral simply denotes unsocial behavior toward people. Behaviors can be modified, and some feral cats become tame. Regardless of whether a cat loves people or fears them, any outdoor, unaltered cat reproduces and contributes to the homeless cat problem.

We think “free-roaming” best describes what most people call “feral cats”, because free-roaming includes lost, abandoned, loosely-owned and stray cats in addition to “feral”. People feed and care about all the cats.

WHY DO WE SPAY/NEUTER FREE-ROAMING CATS?

All unaltered cats contribute to the pool of unadopted kittens and cats euthanized in shelters every day. If we magically altered every free-roaming cat today, more would be born tomorrow from unaltered pet cats. Tame pet cats are the original source of all free-roaming cats. So, whether a cat is a tame pet, feral, shy, friendly, semi-feral, stray or something else, just doesn't matter. We need to spay/neuter all of them, because it changes their lives forever.

HOW DOES SPAY/NEUTER CHANGE THE LIVES OF FREE-ROAMING CATS?

Body condition is a reliable indicator of health, that is, a robust cat is a healthy cat. Scientifically conducted studies reveal that altered free-roaming cats gain weight after altering. This makes sense considering that females no longer endure pregnancy and raise kittens. The risk of uterine infection and mammary infection disappears after spay surgery. Neutered male cats stop vying for breeding and fight less resulting in a healthier lifestyle.

GOOD PHYSICAL HEALTH

Free-roaming cats may be euthanized for medical reasons, because we do not want to release an unhealthy cat with no access to medical care. We assess every cat for whether we believe it can humanely live an outdoor-lifestyle. The vast majority is in good physical health.

HOW DOES ALTERING A FREE-ROAMING CAT SAVE THE LIVES OF SHELTER CATS/KITTENS?

A scientific study revealed that about 85% of pet cats are altered while only 2% of free-roaming cats are altered. Population projections estimate 33 million kittens/year come from pet cats and 147 million come from free-roaming cats.

Every time a litter is born, it lowers the odds that others will be adopted. Competition for homes increases. What happens to the cats and kittens that aren't adopted? They are euthanized. But with spay/neuter, fewer kittens are born, competition for homes is reduced and lives are saved through prevention.

ARE FREE-ROAMING AND FERAL-BEHAVING CATS SUFFERING?

Consider this: Think of an animal that finds shelter, finds food, avoids people, avoids or fights off predators and is more likely to die from natural causes than by euthanasia at a shelter.

Did you think of a free-roaming cat? Or did you think of a squirrel, raccoon, bald eagle or white-tailed deer? If living under these circumstances is inhumane, then one could argue that all wildlife is suffering. Simply because free-roaming cats are tame, or have tame ancestors, does not mean they do not deserve to live or that their quality of life should be held to a higher standard.

THE DOUBLE STANDARD

Many people and organizations set a different standard for free-roaming cats than for other animals. They argue that any cat is better off dead than living a natural outdoor lifestyle. For example, they contend that a car may hit a free-roaming cat during its lifetime or it may be attacked by another animal, therefore, a more humane approach is to trap and kill the cat before that happens. If we expand that logic, we would need to kill every bird, mammal, fish, and insect – basically all life forms, to spare them the suffering of a natural lifestyle. Why kill an animal living a natural lifestyle simply because it isn't living a lifestyle with people?

IS HUMAN COMPANIONSHIP ESSENTIAL TO QUALITY OF LIFE?

Some people and organizations argue that any free-roaming cat without a human home should be euthanized, regardless of health. We emphatically disagree. Simply because a cat is tame or came from a tame ancestor is no evidence that human companionship is necessary for a humane quality of life. Lack of human contact or living without access to the inside of a human home is not justification for euthanasia.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF PET CATS

A major cause of pet cats being surrendered to shelters is behavior problems, especially, urinating outside the litter box. According to veterinary behaviorists, inappropriate urination in cats is almost exclusively stress-related in cats without urinary tract diseases. Conclusion: many pet cats are significantly stressed living their indoor-only lifestyle

DO FERAL CATS LIVE SHORT LIVES?

The lifespan of a feral cat is often stated as only 2-3 years. Not in our experience. Many caretakers know of free-roaming cats that reach 12 to 15 years of age. Long-term studies are underway to determine longevity. Preliminary data reveals that tom cats live the shortest, but neutering them increases their lifespan to that of a spayed female cat. Not all colony cats live to a ripe old age, but many live far longer than the urban myth projects.

ARE FREE-ROAMING CATS RESERVOIRS OF DISEASES TRANSMISSIBLE TO PET CATS?

A large-scale study published by the American Veterinary Medical Association proves otherwise. Rates of common, infectious diseases were similar in pet cats and free-roaming cats. In some cases, pet cats had higher disease rates than free-roaming cats. Because Mother Nature selects the healthiest animals, it is perfectly logical that free-roaming cats are very healthy.

ARE FERAL CATS VICIOUS AND MEAN?

From a feral cat's point of view, they are the potential prey and people are predators. A healthy free-roaming cat will not stalk and attack a person. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Cats remain quiet and hide from view when unfamiliar people approach. When feral cats are caged at a shelter, they still try to hide. They don't leap at people, growl, strike or hiss; they keep a low profile. However, if provoked or given a chance to escape, a free-roaming cat puts all its energy into defense. The cat understandably risks everything, biting and scratching to get away, as any animal would who is frightened. They are not vicious and mean, but will fight for their lives, if threatened. However, you should never attempt to touch or handle a feral cat, as they can and will hurt you. To be safe, you should treat all free-roaming cats as if they were feral.

WHERE DO FERAL CATS AND PET CATS COME FROM?

A large scientific study revealed that free-roaming cats (tame, stray, feral and in-between) are largely responsible for the homeless tame cat population in shelters. Therefore, spay/neuter aimed only at the owned cat population will not sufficiently reduce shelter intake. Focusing widespread spay/neuter on free-roaming cat populations should make the greatest, most immediate impact on shelter intakes and euthanasia.

WHAT IS THE NUMBER ONE CAUSE OF DEATH OF HEALTHY PET CATS IN THE USA?

A preventable condition: overpopulation. Approximately 25,000 healthy cats die in shelters each day awaiting the adoption that never comes. If a single disease were this devastating, it would be headline news. Fortunately, prevention is simple: spay/neuter.

WHAT IS A CAT COLONY?

A cat colony is a group of free-roaming cats that live in close proximity to each other. Colonies are often formed around shelter and a food source.

WHERE DO FREE-ROAMING CATS COME FROM?

The source of free-roaming cats is endless. The main source of free-roaming cats come from unaltered indoor/outdoor pet cats or outdoor pet cats. All free roaming cats are the descendants of unaltered tame cats somewhere in their ancestry line.

WHAT HAPPENS TO FERAL CATS IN A SHELTER?

Sadly, each year shelters receive more cats than they are able to adopt. As a result shelter employees must assess each cat to determine the probability of it being adopted. Cats who express feral behavior are considered poor prospects and are euthanized. In most cases it is impossible to determine if a cat is simply frightened in a shelter environment or if it has lived without human interaction. As a result it is a sad fact that many frightened tame cats are euthanized under the label of "feral". The Campbell County Animal Shelter staff was tired of this outdated method. That is why we have implemented our TNR program.

WHAT IS TNR?

Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) is a program that allows free roaming cats to live out their lives without adding to the homeless cat population. Cats are humanely trapped, evaluated to ensure they are healthy enough to live a free-roaming lifestyle, vaccinated, spayed/neutered, ear tipped to identify them as being altered and released back to their familiar environment. After spay/neuter surgery cat's live healthier lives and many of the unpopular behavioral problems associated with unaltered cats will dissipate

WHY DO WE EAR TIP CATS?

Ear tipping identifies free-roaming cats that have been sterilized. Ear tipping is completely safe and it is performed under general anesthetic. Ear tipping provides immediate visual identification, which alerts animal control and the public that a cat has been TNRed. It also helps colony caretakers track which cats have been trapped and altered, and identify newcomers who have not. Once a cat is trapped, the trapper should look for an ear tip. If the cat has an ear tip it should be released immediately.

WHAT IS A COLONY CARETAKER?

A caretaker is someone who monitors a colony to ensure any new cats that appear in the colony are altered. The caretaker provides food and water for the cats, making their lives a little easier. Some caretakers may feed an entire colony of free-roaming cats, other may only care for a single cat. But often, if you start feeding one cat, more will follow. Cats are very smart and know how to locate food sources. If you become a food source for one cat, you will likely become a food source for many.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING A CARETAKER CAN DO TO HELP FREE-ROAMING CATS?

Spay or neuter the entire colony and continue to monitor the colony to ensure any newcomers into the colony are also altered.

DO PEOPLE BOND WITH THEIR FREE-ROAMING CATS?

Absolutely! People bond with the cats and the cats bond with their caretaker. Many of the cats that are cared for by a caretaker know their feeding schedule and will wait at a designated area for their caretaker to bring them food and water. Others may recognize the sound of their caretaker's car and wait until they hear the familiar sound before appearing from their safe hiding spots. Free-roaming cats tend to bond with their caretakers. Some feral cats may even allow them to get within a few feet of them or eventually touch them. Otherwise, they are fairly reclusive. Another thing you should note, free-roaming cats may have many caretakers that are unaware of each other and who are all bonded to the same cat(s). This is why it is important to return and leave the cats in the environment with which they are familiar. If a free-roaming cat loses one caretaker, they often have another in the area.

WHAT IF A FREE-ROAMING CAT DOES NOT HAVE A CARETAKER?

Most free-roaming cats have a caretaker, even if you don't know about them or see them. Tons of people feed outdoor cats. When outdoor cats are brought to the shelter, they generally have a good body condition. So they are getting food from somewhere. It could be a caretaker, or another food source. It is rare to see a cat come in who is starving. Many people think that outdoor cats are too skinny. But that is often because they are used to seeing indoor-only cats who are spayed/neutered, don't get as much exercise and may be overfed.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT A FREE-ROAMING CAT AROUND MY HOUSE?

First you must ask yourself, why is this cat here in the first place? Did you start feeding the cat because you felt bad for it? If yes, just stop feeding the cat. It will get the hint and go find a new food source somewhere else. Do you have an indoor/outdoor or outdoor-only cat that you feed and a new cat has shown up? If yes, try feeding your cat inside. If you put food outside for your cat, other cats will find that food.

I AM NOT FEEDING FREE-ROAMING CATS AND THEY ARE STILL HERE, WHAT CAN I DO?

If you are not feeding cats outside and you still have unwanted cats hanging around, it just means that there is probably a food source near by. This could be a neighbor or something else. Consider trying some cat deterrents. There are many resources online depending on the behavior and situation. Do a quick search and see if you can find a solution that is right for you. The best solution for unwanted cat behavior, and unwanted cats for that matter, is TNR. If all of the cats in the area are spayed/neutered, they won't reproduce and create a larger problem. Spaying/neutering also reduces many "nuisance behaviors" such as, spraying, fighting, yowling, ect... Do not attempt to harm or relocate the cats. Your efforts will be in vain due to the vacuum effect.

WHAT IS THE “VACUUM EFFECT”?

Well-documented among biologists, the vacuum effect describes what happens when even a portion of an animal population is permanently removed from its home range. Sooner or later, the empty habitat attracts other members of the species from neighboring areas, who move in to take advantage of the same resources that attracted the first group (like shelter and food). Killing or removing the original population does nothing to eliminate these resources; it only creates a “vacuum” that will inevitably draw in other animals living nearby. A habitat will support a population of a certain size. No matter how many animals are removed, if the resources remain, the population will eventually recover. Any cats remaining after a catch and kill effort will produce more kittens and at a higher survival rate, filling the habitat to capacity. As one study found, “populations greatly reduced by culling are likely to rebound quickly.” The number of cats in an area where a cat colony has been killed or relocated will simply recover and return to its original size.

HOW DO I TRAP A CAT?

Cats can be trapped using a humane trap. The trap has a door on one end, which can be lifted up and set in place with a small catch. The door is connected to a flat metal trip plate on the bottom of the trap. The trip plate is set far enough back in the trap so that the animal's tail won't get caught in the door when it slams shut. A small amount of aromatic food is placed in the back of the trap, past the trip plate. With kittens and very small cats, it is important to set the food all the way at the far end of the trap so the kitten or cat will be forced to put its full body weight on the trip plate, thus setting it off. The door will spring shut behind the cat as soon as a paw hits the trip plate. These traps can be rented at the animal shelter with a \$50 deposit that is refunded after the trap is brought back.

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE THE CAT MORE COMFORTABLE WHILE IN THE TRAP?

Before trapping the cat, you can let the cat become familiar with the trap by placing it, unset, in the cat's environment. Usually around a food source. You should also cover the trap with a towel or sheet, allowing only the door of the trap to remain uncovered. This is often more appealing to cats. It gives them a place to hide and is less scary than a metal cage. Do not leave a cat in a trap for more than 24 hours. Make sure you have a plan to have the cat altered and returned as quickly as possible before you begin trapping.