



SAN FRANCISCO
SPCA

San Francisco SPCA Feral Cat Assistance Program

TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN

What is Trap-Neuter-Return?

Trap-Neuter-Return is widely recognized as the most humane and effective strategy for reducing feral cat populations. It involves humanely trapping feral cats and transporting them to a veterinary clinic where they are spayed or neutered. After surgery, cats recuperate for a day or two and are then returned to their colony habitat where they live out their natural life. Since the cats are no longer reproducing, colonies gradually diminish in size. And by reducing or eliminating mating, fighting and wandering, Trap-Neuter-Return makes colonies more stable, impacts the influx of newcomers and improves the health of the cats.

Trap and Kill

As a general rule, feral cats cannot be adopted into human homes, and relocating them to another area is extremely difficult. In most cases, if feral cats are taken to an animal shelter instead of being altered and returned, they will be killed. Besides being inhumane, trap-and-remove is only a temporary "solution." It creates a void that unaltered cats will eventually fill, starting the breeding cycle all over again. Trap-and-remove is an endless cycle of breeding and killing, while Trap-Neuter-Return is a lifesaving and permanent solution.

Case Studies

An informal survey of feral cat caregivers conducted by the San Francisco SPCA found that every caregiver who implemented a Trap-Neuter-Return program saw their colony stabilize or decrease in size. In San Francisco's Golden

Gate Park, one feral cat colony was reduced from 85 cats to two through Trap-Neuter-Return. In the Presidio, a managed feral colony was reduced from eight cats to two.

After caregivers at Stanford University started a successful Trap-Neuter-Return program, the campus cat population reached zero population growth almost immediately. Through natural attrition and adoption of tame cats, the colony has decreased by more than 50 percent.

In contrast, Sonoma State University implemented a trap and kill program over the objections of feral cat caregivers. Less than one year after the cats were removed, more cats were again making their home on campus. Georgetown University trapped feral cats and took them to the local animal control agency, where the cats were killed. Less than six months later, 10 new unaltered cats and 20 kittens appeared on the campus.

One of the primary misconceptions about feral cat caregivers is that they "establish" cat colonies.

In fact, the opposite is true. Feral cat caregivers are helping cats who are already there. And by working to feed and alter the cats, the caregivers are improving the lives of the cats and reducing potential problems. Through TNR, the caregivers are actively helping the cats and working to reduce their numbers over time. By feeding the cats, they are reducing wandering and other behaviors that may lead to "conflicts" with others.

How You Can Help

While it is advisable to provide food and water on a daily basis, for those who do not wish to take these steps, just having the cats altered will help a great deal. Here are five good reasons to get started with TNR:

1. **It's effective.** Having the cats altered and returning them to their habitats is the quickest way to permanently reduce feral cat populations.
2. **It's easy.** If you live in San Francisco, we will lend you a trap and show you how. We also have volunteers available to help trap, provide a ride to our Spay/Neuter Clinic, and to provide post-surgery recovery for the cats.
3. **It's free.** In San Francisco, we will actually perform the surgery for free for all San Francisco based feral cats. Not only will we perform the surgery for free, we will also provide a free vaccination to ensure that the feral cat you bring in has a better chance for survival.
4. **It's humane.** There are very few feral cat sanctuaries and even fewer volunteers seeking to adopt feral cats. If you trap the cats and take them to animal control shelters, they will be killed since feral cats cannot be adopted into homes.
5. **You'll be in good company.** Tens of thousands of compassionate people are helping ferals by having them spayed or neutered. Join the crowd!

SF/SPCA Resources

- Fact sheets including "The Care and Feeding of Feral Cats," "Post-Surgery Recovery Care," "Basic Kitten Care," and more available online at <http://www.sfspca.org/feral/factsheets.shtml>
- Lifeline for Feral Cats (415) 554-3071. We can provide advice specific to your situation.
- Feral Cat Video Series.
- The SF/SPCA Feral Fix Program provides free spay/neuter for San Francisco feral cats, no appointment necessary.