

## Effective TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return)

*Most of us would save every cat in the world if given the chance. Yet with a significant rate of outdoor cats winding up in shelters and on death row every day, the most practical solution is working on the root of the problem – controlling the cat population.*

These so called “feral” or “community” cats are not socialized as pets, but are used to living outside in colonies. One solution is Trap-Neuter-Return or TNR. This humane and effective approach is a practical way to save the lives of more cats in our local communities.

When beginning a TNR program, it is important to have a plan. The following is a step-by-step guide to help you successfully care for the cats in your community while keeping the cats and neighborhood safe and peaceful.

### Inform the Neighborhood

If you are taking on this project, likely others in your neighborhood have noticed there are outdoor cats. If you are leading a TNR program, you will want to educate the community about your plan to care for the cats. There may be several people feeding the cats so you need to coordinate – particularly before trapping. Some people may feel all cats should be taken to a shelter without realizing that cats have an ability thrive outdoors and neutering them actually improves their lives by adjusting their behavior and preventing litters of unwanted kittens. Educating the neighborhood is the most important thing you can do before you start TNR. Consider a neighborhood meeting, door hangers, or a short informational pamphlet to get people onboard.

### Evaluate the Cats

When you or others in the neighborhood feed the cats, log each one you see, indicating cat or kitten. This will help you determine the number of traps you will need. Assessing the cats may also give you an idea of their personalities and determine if any might be neighbors’ pets or particularly good for adoption. If they are friendly to humans, you may find that fostering might be a good route to go after neutering. Most of all, get to know the colony and the

description of the cats. Note any cats that are hurt, pregnant/nursing, or especially young/old.

### Develop a Feeding Schedule

For approximately two weeks prior to trapping, develop a feeding schedule so the cats develop a routine. This will encourage them to come out and eat while you are there. Do not leave the food out for more than 30 minutes. This will help the cats to adapt to not only a set feeding time, but also feeling more comfortable with you there. If possible, feed near or slightly inside unset traps. This will help the cats develop a sense of security around the traps. Of course, always remove the traps when you remove the food.

### Know Your Vet

Because there will be a lot of cats neutered at once, find a feral friendly animal hospital. Confirm that only dissolvable sutures will be used so the cats will not need to return to the vet for follow-up. Line up the appointments prior to trapping. The worst scenario would be trapping the cats and not having a place for them to go. Also, you will need to have a recovery area for the cats once they have had their surgeries. Choose a safe, dry, and comfortable area such as a basement, garage, or even overnight at the vet’s office so the cats can recover.

### Traps

There are a variety of humane traps that are good for feral cats, including Safeguard, Tomahawk, and Tru-Catch brands. Traps with a “rear door release” are preferable to the one-sided traps found at hardware stores. Have more traps than cats since you will not be sure right away which area will be most attractive to the cats. There should be at least one trap per cat. Kittens may follow each other into a single trap - do not try to separate them without the help of

an experienced trapper or veterinarian. A trap divider is essential when working with very stressed cats. Traps should be bleached before and after the trapping job to prevent disease transmission.

## Prepare and Set the Traps

Line the traps with newspapers so the cats' paws are protected. Bait the traps with a strong smelling food such as tuna or sardines. Any wet cat food also works. Put the traps out but also keep an eye on them. You do not want to leave a cat unattended in the trap too long or it may become stressed and cause injury if they throw themselves against the cage. If dealing with a large colony, enlist help so there are plenty of people to take care of traps when cats start to come.

## After Trapping

Once a cat is trapped, cover the entire trap with a sheet or large towel to calm the cat. Move the trap to a quiet, safe location to avoid interfering with trapping other cats. Do not worry if the cat thrashes against the cage. This is quite normal and you should not feel as though you need to release the cat. Once the trap is covered the cat will calm down. Do not feel tempted to let them go – after all, you are doing this for their own good. Plus, if you let them go, you may not be able to trap them again. Most injuries caused from thrashing their bodies against the trap are minor. DO NOT OPEN THE TRAP.

## Go to the Vet

Your trapping should coincide with the appointment so that the cats do not have to stay in the trap too long. It is important to know that a cat can die from hypothermia or heat stroke if confined to a trap outside. Be sure that if the cat has to stay in the trap, it is in a comfortable location away from danger of any kind.

When transporting the traps, do not put the cat in a trunk or open bed of a pickup truck. Do not stack traps in the vehicle unless they are completely secured with bungee cords or other practical restraints. If you stack the traps be sure to place newspaper in between the traps to avoid friction. If the cages seem wobbly when stacked on each other, do not take any chances. Enlist another vehicle or take two trips.

## Recuperate the Cats

After surgery the cats will need to be held for at least 24 hours. You should have already secured a space prior to trapping. A basement, bathroom, garage or veterinary office are good locations. Keep the cat in his trap with clean newspaper and put food and water at one end (preferably with a sliding door). If you are trapping multiple cats over several days, hold the cats until all the cats are caught. At least once daily, replace the newspaper and refresh food and water.

## Return the Cats

As long as the cats are fully awake and do not require further medical attention, they can be returned to the trapping site 24 hours post-surgery. Some females may need 48 hours, but the vet will discuss their individual needs with you. They can be held for several days if you are still in the process of trapping in the colony. It is important to return the cats to the exact location where they were trapped; this is their home and they know where to go from here.

Trap-neuter-return is a fantastic program that not only improves the well-being of cats, but also prevents over-population of these animals in the community. Reach out to your local rescue group for loan of traps and more information. In Mercer County, please contact EASEL.

### Additional resources (click on links for more info)

Neighborhood Cats:

[http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/HOW\\_TO\\_WHAT\\_IS\\_TNR](http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/HOW_TO_WHAT_IS_TNR)

Alley Cat Allies:

<http://www.alleycat.org/Trap-Neuter-Return>