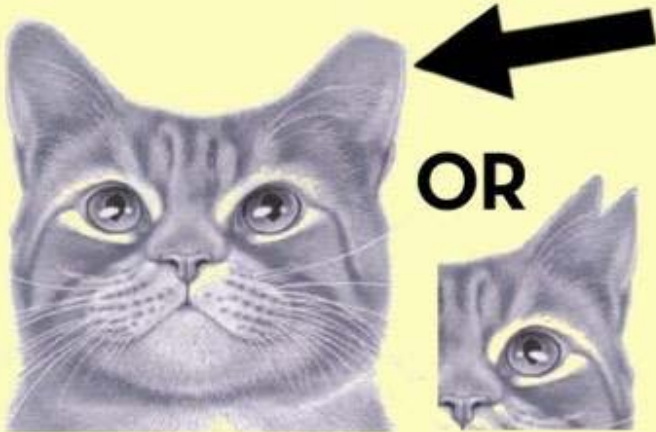


# FERAL CATS - A BRIEF GUIDE

**Have you seen cats with ears like this?**



These cats have been “ear-tipped” or “notched”. This is a surgical alteration showing that a free-living cat has been spayed/neutered. It's part of “TNR”, which means “Trap”, “Neuter”, “Return”.

These cats should never be re-trapped or brought to a shelter, unless sick. Instead, they should be left in their neighborhood to provide cat population control. Studies have shown by just being there, they prevent other cats from moving into the area. And, because they have been fixed, they will never have litters of kittens.

Even if you don't like cats, TNR ear-tipped cats have an important job to do in keeping your neighborhood a nice place to live.

## [How did the feral cat problem start?](#)

Irresponsible owners, who do not spay or neuter their cats, are the problem. More cats are born than there are caring homes.

## [Why are they feral?](#)

If they don't have early contact with people, the kittens of stray or feral cats will become feral, too fearful to be handled or adopted. A female cat can become pregnant as early as five months of age. The number of feral cats in a neighborhood can increase quickly if cats aren't spayed or neutered by responsible owners.

## [Where do community \(feral and stray\) cats live?](#)

Community cats typically live in a colony—a group of related cats. The colony occupies and defends a specific territory where they can find food (a restaurant dumpster or a person who feeds them) and shelter (beneath a porch, in an abandoned building, etc). People who feed feral cats are aware of their movements, but strangers may never see them or realize that feral cats are living nearby. Stray cats tend to be much more visible and may vocalize, and may approach people for food or shelter. Stray cats may join a colony or defend a territory of their own.

## [Why do people consider outdoor cats a problem?](#)

- Frequent, loud noises that are part of the fighting and mating behavior of unsterilized cats;
- Strong, foul odors left by unneutered male cats spraying urine to mark their territory;
- Flea infestations;
- Visible suffering from dying kittens and injured adults;
- The death of wild animals who are cats' prey;
- Overpopulation: the continual cycle of regular pregnancies resulting in more kittens;
- Nuisance behaviors, such as urinating and defecating in someone's garden, digging in someone's garden, jumping on cars, and upsetting an owned cat;

- Costs associated with trapping, caring for and/or euthanizing feral cats.

### How does "trap-neuter-return" (TNR) solve feral cat problems?

- When feral cats are trapped, neutered and returned to their territory, they no longer breed;
- When breeding stops, there is no noise associated with mating behavior, and almost no fighting;
- Neutered feral cats roam much less and become less likely to be injured by cars;
- Neutered male cats don't make bad smells because they no longer produce testosterone (which mixes with urine to cause a strong, pungent smell when spraying);
- When a colony is monitored by a caretaker who removes and/or TNRs any newly arrived cats, the population stabilizes and gradually declines over time.

### What is "trap-neuter-return" (TNR)?

TNR is a strategy for reducing the number of community cats (feral and stray) and improving the quality of life for cats, wildlife, and people. Basically TNR involves:

- Humanely trapping community cats;
- Spaying or neutering them;
- Vaccinating them against rabies;
- Surgically removing the tip of one ear (a "tipped" ear is the universally-recognized sign of a cat who has been spayed or neutered);
- Returning the cats to their colony.

### How can people take care of community (feral and stray) cats?

Many people start feeding a cat that seems to be homeless. It is *more helpful* to the cat, if:

- *Tame*: first try to find the cat's owner. If the owner can't be found, step two is to try to find a permanent home for the cat;
- *Feral*, unapproachable, and wary after several days of feeding: find out if there are any groups doing TNR in the community so at least the cat will be spayed or neutered.

### Why can't animal shelters rescue feral cats?

- *Too many animals*: Animal shelters already care for and try to find homes for many thousands of lost, injured, and abandoned animals, including pet cats whose owners are unable or unwilling to keep them.
- *Insufficient resources*: Many animal shelters don't have the staff or money to do TNR. However, shelters that receive calls of complaint or concern from the public may attempt to humanely trap and remove feral cats. They may provide information and loan traps to citizens interested in humanely trapping feral cats. If there is a local group helping feral cats, the shelter may refer callers to that group.
- *Too wild to keep*: Because feral cats are so scared of people and usually cannot be adopted, those who are brought to a shelter, especially cats who cannot be identified as members of a known TNR-ed colony, are likely to be euthanized either right away or after a holding period. It's a complicated situation: while it is difficult to accurately identify a feral cat without observing him or her during a holding period, safely caring for a feral cat in a typical shelter cage is terribly stressful for the cat. In addition, if cage space is limited at the shelter, an adoptable cat may have to be euthanized to make room to hold a feral cat.

### Would it be better if feral cats were euthanized?

- *No, euthanasia is more costly:* TNR improves the quality of life for existing colonies, prevents the birth of more cats and reduces the number of cats over time. It also may be more economical than euthanasia; many groups have calculated that the costs associated with TNR are considerably less than those associated with removal, shelter care and euthanasia of feral cats.
- *No, new cats will enter the territory:* Even if the shelter had enough people and money to remove and euthanize the feral cats in a community, other cats would move into the vacated territory to take advantage of the food sources and shelter. The new cats would continue to reproduce and complaint calls would continue. Euthanasia alone won't rid an area of feral cats, and killing animals to control their numbers is increasingly unpopular with the general public.
- *Rather take care of the community:* TNR and a dedicated caretaker is the best approach. Spayed or neutered feral cats are healthier because they no longer have kittens or fight over mates, and their nuisance behaviors are greatly reduced or eliminated. If the colony has a dedicated caretaker, he or she provides food, water, and shelter and watches over the cats' health and removes any newcomers for TNR (if feral) or adoption (if tame).

### Wouldn't it be better to remove community (stray and feral) cats from the area?

- *No, new cats will enter the territory:* Community (feral and stray) cats live at a certain location because it offers food and shelter. If a colony is removed, cats from surrounding colonies may move in to take advantage of the newly available food and shelter. The cycle of reproduction and nuisance behavior begins all over again;
- *No, the remaining cats will breed more:* If all the cats in a colony are not trapped, then the ones left behind will tend to have larger litters of kittens. The kittens are more likely to survive because there are fewer cats competing for food. The colony's population will continue to increase until it reaches the number that can be supported by the available food and shelter;
- *No cooperation from the cats' caretakers:* They are the only people who really know the cats' numbers and patterns and can control whether or not the cats are hungry enough to enter a baited trap;
- *No volunteers to trap cats:* Cat lovers will not help capture if the cats face an uncertain fate or death;
- *Not enough money or resources:* Animal control staff and money are in short supply;
- *Not a successful strategy:* It is difficult to catch all the cats in a colony;
- *No monitoring or follow-up:* No one watching out for pet cats who are lost or abandoned, aren't spayed or neutered and quickly and repopulate a vacated territory;
- *They are desperate to survive:* Cats are territorial animals and can survive for weeks without food and will not easily or quickly abandon their territory. As they grow hungrier and more desperate, they tend to venture closer to homes and businesses in search of food. Despite the effort to starve them out, the cats will also continue to reproduce, resulting in the deaths of many kittens.

[www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral\\_cats/ga/feral\\_cat\\_FAQs.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral_cats/ga/feral_cat_FAQs.html)



# GRAHAMSTOWN FERAL CAT PROJECT

**\*don't breed or buy while animals in shelters die \***

Caring members of the community - including Rhodes University staff and students - have been taking care of feral cats for many years in Grahamstown. These volunteer efforts are part of the Grahamstown Feral Cat Project (GFCP).

The project promotes responsible pet ownership. This includes proper care (feeding, vaccination and preventative treatment against parasites, etc.) and sterilisation to prevent unplanned kittens and reduce the number of homeless animals.

## What GFCP volunteers do

- *Trap, Neuter & Release (TNR):* Volunteers humanely trap feral cats, take them to the vet to be spayed or neutered; the right ear is "tipped" to identify those that have been sterilized. They then return the cats to their colonies to live out their lives. TNR is globally recognised as the most humane, least costly, most efficient and sustainable way of stabilizing feral cat populations.
- *Feral Cat Caretakers:* Volunteers may 'adopt a colony', provide food and adequate shelter, monitor the feral cats' health and TNR any new ferals that appear.

These humane actions are not linked to any other organisation. Grahamstown Feral Cat Project volunteers rely on the assistance of Grahamstown Veterinary Clinic and on donations from the public.

## What YOU can do

If you are a compassionate and caring person, and would like to relieve the difficult existence of feral cats, here are some ways to help:

- *Make regular donations:* All donations go to sterilization and a small portion to food and other supplies for foster kittens. Occasionally there are costs for veterinary care of ferals who are ill or injured, and of foster kittens. No donation is too small - or too big for that matter!
- *Banking details:* Grahamstown Veterinary Clinic  
Standard Bank Account: 282 625 054  
Branch Code: 050917  
Please add Reference: **WILDCAT + your name**, and email proof of payment to Lynne Grant [l.grant@nelm.org.za](mailto:l.grant@nelm.org.za) so that we can follow up donations in case of accidental misallocation.
- *Support us:*
  - ✓ TNR: Assist with Trap-Neuter-Release activities.
  - ✓ Caretaking: Become a cat colony caretaker.
  - ✓ Adopting: Foster or adopt feral kittens.
  - ✓ Role-modelling: Practice responsible pet ownership.
  - ✓ Awareness-raising: Raise public awareness about animal welfare.
  - ✓ Fundraising: Volunteer a little of your time to help raise funds.

[www.ru.ac.za/environment/resources/animalcare/feralcats](http://www.ru.ac.za/environment/resources/animalcare/feralcats)