



# The Feral Guide

2021 edition



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# Chapter one

## Introduction

### **Welcome to Cats Protection's Feral Guide.**

Every year Cats Protection (CP) helps over 20,000 feral cats. While this may seem a large number, it is only the tip of the iceberg. Our current research findings suggest there are approximately 250,000 unowned cats living within urban areas in the UK, with further more inhabiting rural regions. Ongoing research is important to enable us to measure the impact of our work and help us understand the magnitude and geographic distribution of unowned cats. This will provide us with the means to make evidence-based decisions and to help cats most in need.

Feral cats are free-living, unsocialised cats; they will have had little or no positive human interaction during their socialisation period of two to seven weeks of age. Subsequently they are fearful of humans and their behaviour is that of a wild animal. Attempts to touch, handle or confine them can be dangerous and will significantly compromise their emotional welfare. Their welfare can also be compromised by overpopulation, injury and disease, lack of and competition for resources, lack of understanding, persecution and inappropriate culling. Cats Protection is concerned about all cats of the species *Felis catus* and so improving the welfare of feral cats in the UK is clearly within our objectives and is the underlying principle of this guide.

Their welfare needs differ from socialised, owned cats and should be considered from their perspective. Loving homes with an abundance of human attention might be great for friendly, socialised cats but are not what ferals require and would have a negative effect on their welfare. As such the mainstay of our work with feral cats is trap, neuter and return (TNR) and much of this guide concentrates on doing that well. TNR is the most humane and effective way of managing feral cats and is also the safest way for people to handle them. However, it is stressful for cats to undergo this process and it compromises their welfare but in balance this is a short-term negative for improved welfare in the longer term. It is still important to minimise this stress as much as possible.



Within the total cat population there are owned, feral, community and stray cats but these are not isolated sub-groups. There are complex inter-relationships and fluidity between these groups; for example, the offspring of a stray cat that is not handled appropriately during the socialisation period will be feral. Conversely some kittens born to a feral mother can be socialised if taken into care early enough and can make pet cats although this is sometimes challenging. This means that TNR is not only beneficial to the individual cat in terms of better health but also to their colonies and the cat population as a whole. If we do not tackle the neutering of feral cats, we will never get the UK's cat population to a stable level where all cats have a good quality of life in an appropriate environment.

There are also benefits to people as neutered colonies are less noisy and messy than unneutered ones and pose less risk of infectious disease transmission to both owned cats and humans.

Education of the public is vital to improving feral cat welfare and developing great empathy for them, for example getting them to understand what a feral is and that having a stable feral colony in an area is preferable to culling as this leaves an environmental vacuum. If resources such as food and shelter are still available more cats will move in, which the stable colony would prevent to a great extent.

Trapping cats means that we can do more to help them than simply neutering, enabling us to give them treatment for minor ailments and appropriate preventative care.

This guide has been written using the most up-to-date research and theories about feral cats. Unfortunately, the research is limited and there is still a great deal about feral cats that is not fully understood. We must all be open to learning more and adapting our approach as new scientific evidence emerges.

Across Cats Protection we have a huge amount of experience in dealing with feral cats but we also have new and more inexperienced would-be trappers. This guide has been written to provide comprehensive information to anyone interested in ferals. Hopefully this guide will help us to help feral cats better, even if we are very experienced. Their wellbeing is just as important as that of pet cats and they deserve to lead happy and healthy lives.

# Chapter two

## Definitions

### Types of domestic cats

**Feral cat** – Feral cats are the same domesticated species of cat as pet cats (*Felis catus*), but are not socialised to humans or habituated to the domestic environment ie they have had little or no positive human interaction during their socialisation period of two to seven weeks of age. They are generally free-living as single or colony cats with little or no direct human interaction or dependency and often avoid direct human contact. They essentially behave as wild animals.

**Street or community cats** – free-living as single or colony cats. Usually they have some direct human contact and tolerance and a limited degree of socialisation. They are usually fed and provided for to some extent.

**Stray or abandoned cats** – cats that are socialised and previously have been pets, cared for by humans (typically in a home) but now free-living. They have some direct human contact and tolerance and may be fed and provided for to some extent.

**Pet or household cats** – Socialised cats living with and cared for by humans, typically spending some or all of their time in a human home.

It must be appreciated that there is a spectrum of socialisation rather than discrete categories depending on the degree of socialisation and the amount of human contact an individual cat experiences.

There is movement between the categories ie feral and pet cats interbreed freely and form a single population, from a genetic perspective. Feral toms can sire kittens born in households to pet queens, and it is possible to socialise kittens born to feral queens. Abandoned socialised cats will produce feral kittens if they are not socialised.



## Tips to help you determine if a cat is a feral, street/community cat, stray/abandoned or a pet cat

It may not always be easy to determine whether a cat is a feral cat, street/community cat, stray/abandoned cat or a pet cat. At times you may question your decisions on assessing whether a cat would be suited to a particular environment and you may later decide that you made the wrong choice for that cat. If that is the case it's fine to change your approach and rectify this. Determining the sociability of cats is not an exact science but here are some handy hints:

### Feral cats

Feral cats will be fearful of humans and will not approach even if encouraged. Feral cats will generally not be found close to people or homes and will not allow themselves to be touched or handled. Feral cats may be solitary or part of a colony and will tend to be leaner in appearance than pet cats.

### Street/community cats

These cats are found living in urban areas and may have differing levels of socialisation. Some may be abandoned pet cats and some may have been born outdoors within the community and have had a level of human interaction. They may form attachments to their caretaker or feeder and so may approach them for attention. If unsocialised they are unlikely to approach a stranger unless they are offering food. Some community cats have many carers within the community and, even if they are considered to be socialised, if their health and welfare needs are being met they should be trapped, neutered and returned to their community.

See page eight for a case study of a community cat who is well cared for and happier living in the community.

### Stray/abandoned cats

A stray or abandoned cat may appear to be underweight and may be dirty with an unkempt coat. The cat may have recently appeared within the area and may look distressed or lost. The cat may also stay in the same place for a period of time. Stray cats may be alone or they may become part of a colony. If straying for quite some time the cat may initially appear to be fearful but given time may be friendly. They may not be willing to be picked up so using trapping equipment may be appropriate.



# CASE *study*

A much loved community cat, who prefers his freedom and is cared for by the community.



**Kirstie** • 3 February  
Everton Cat Watch  
Anyone lost this little guy he has no collar and his left ear looks clipped followed me home from Kemp Avenue L5 super friendly can anyone come and scan him

**Julie** Looks like Onyx. He lives around Kemp / Maslin. Has he got a small bit of white on his chest?  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Julie** This is Onyx. Resembles the cat in your post.



Like · Reply · 11w

**Kirstie** Is Onyx chipped do you know?  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Julie** Yes he's chipped. My friend took him on. Lives in Maslin but Onyx likes to wander and is super friendly.  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Kirstie** I live off Venmore. He's currently in my house scoffing cat treats and playing with the kids. I don't know what to do. Don't want to just turf him out into the garden with all the horrible people about lately.  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Julie** Can't you drop him off in Maslin? He knows his way around but Venmore is a bit far from where he usually hangs out.  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Kirstie** Am on the 1 side of the school and Maslin is the other. He followed us from Domingo Vale. End will be OK if I just pop him back on Maslin next to the school.  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Julie** Onyx belongs to Kevin from our group.  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Kirstie** Yes he's just finishing some treat and I will pop him in the cat carrier and walk back through Greedy Boy.  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Rachele Follini** Thank you.  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Lynney** Ahhh Onyx, we haven't seen him for ages!  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Kirstie** Dropped him back onto Maslin but he's followed me back through and gone into the building site on Venmore.  
Like · Reply · 11w

**Julie** He will find his way back.  
Like · Reply · 11w

Write a reply...

**Julie** Spoke to Onyx's daddy today. He was back home on Sunday afternoon. Thanks for taking him back to Maslin. Try not to feed Onyx as he will constantly follow you if you show him any attention. He's a gorgeous big handsome boy and tends to charm the ladies (human girls not felines).  
Haha · Reply · 10w

**Rachele** Admin · 2 March at 19:01

For everyone who doesn't already know him, please meet Onyx. He's one of our much loved community cats who has been taken in by a Cat Watch member. Having been straying with multiple feeders for some time, Onyx becomes very stressed when he's confined, he's much happier with freedom to come and go. Despite being in excellent condition (and at 6.5kgs a little overweight) he often begs for food and has been known to follow people home in an attempt to sweet talk the ladies into giving him food. If you see him please don't worry about him, he has a lovely home and plenty of other caregivers who will happily open a pouch for him. He is sometimes mistaken for a pregnant female but he just has a big tummy. He also has an ear tip on his left ear to show he's been neutered. So if you see him please say Hello but don't encourage him to follow you home.





### **Pet cats**

Owned pet cats will generally look in a good condition, be well groomed and a healthy weight and they will likely be seen regularly within the vicinity. The exception to this may be elderly cats or those with health issues. Pet cats will likely be alone and are generally friendly and may approach you for attention. Some cats are very effective at displaying behaviours that result in people feeding them but this alone does not mean that the cat is a stray. If you are concerned then check the cat for a microchip and put on a paper collar.



### **A change of approach - sore paw ginge (Panga)**

Our Liverpool community neutering team were made aware of an elderly couple that had been feeding a stray ginger cat called Panga for a few months. The couple noticed that the cat had started limping in the last couple of weeks. They could stroke the cat who apparently was previously a pet having belonged to a family nearby but they had moved and left him behind. He was trapped to be taken to the vets for his sore paw to be assessed. While at the vets for treatment, the vets were also able to stroke him, although he was a little fearful, but a decision was made that it was worth trying him for rehoming. He was taken into St Helens but after 10 days in the centre he was really struggling. He didn't want to interact, couldn't be handled and was not coping with being in that environment and was starting to shut down so a decision was made to return him to the feeders with their agreement. He has been returned to site where he is much happier and is being cared for by the couple and he often goes into their house for a sleep on the sofa.

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## Definitions of terms used in this guide

**Affiliative behaviour** – social interactions that function to reinforce social bonds within a group or which are of mutual benefit to all animals involved in the interaction.

**Anthropomorphism** – attributing human characteristics, behaviour or emotions to gods, animals or inanimate objects.

**Crepuscular** – animals that are most active at dawn and dusk or twilight.

**Feral** – in a wild state, an animal of a normally domesticated species that has reverted to the wild or untamed state.

**Feral colony** – a group of feral cats that live together in one territory, often near food sources and shelter. They are usually related females and their offspring, with males being ousted or living on the periphery of the colony once sexually mature. The cats do not hunt cooperatively and if the source of food is removed they will disperse. However there are social bonds between most of the cats as they have grown up in the sight, sound and smell of these relatives. There is sometimes cross-suckling of kittens when there are multiple lactating queens so an individual can hunt for food while their young kittens are cared for.

**Flooding** – repeated exposure to something the cat finds very distressing without opportunity to escape or hide. This severely compromises welfare and must be avoided.

**Fomite** – an inanimate object such as clothing or equipment that, when contaminated with or exposed to infectious agents (such as bacteria, viruses or fungi), can transfer disease to another animal or person.

**Habituation** – the process of learning what is not harmful or threatening in the environment and therefore can be ignored.

**Innate behaviour** – a genetically hard-wired behaviour which can be performed without any previous experience or learning.

**Learned helplessness** – the lack of response to something unavoidable and aversive which an animal has learned they cannot escape from, and therefore stops attempting to avoid it.

**Pre-pubertal neutering** – neutering before reaching puberty and becoming sexually active. In cats this is usually done at four months or younger.

**Queen** – an unneutered female cat that is capable of breeding.

**Socialisation** – the process by which cats learn how to interact with people, cats or other animals that may be found in their environment and any threats they may pose. There is a distinct period where kittens are sensitive to socialisation between two to seven weeks of age.

**Tom** – a male cat, usually described as entire if unneutered.

**Zoonosis** – an infectious disease that can be transmitted from animals to humans. A reverse zoonosis is an infectious disease that can be transmitted from humans to animals.



## Abbreviations

**TNR** – trap, neuter and return is a programme where cats are humanely trapped, anaesthetised, neutered (and may undergo other medical procedures at the same time) and returned to their original site. NB it is not trap, neuter and release.

**FCV** – feline calicivirus

**FeLV** – feline leukaemia virus

**FHV** – feline herpesvirus

**FIP** – feline infectious peritonitis

**FIV** – feline immunodeficiency virus

**FPV** – feline parvovirus

**GA** – general anaesthesia

**NS** – Nature Scot (previously Scottish Natural Heritage, SNH)

**TTR** – trap transfer restrainer or restrainer-container (previously crush cage)



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# Chapter three

## The welfare needs of feral cats

### Feral cats and the law

Feral cats are legally 'protected animals' in each of the UK jurisdictions; this is because cats are a species which is commonly domesticated in the UK. It is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to protected animals including feral cats. The duty to ensure welfare applies to animals for which 'a person is responsible' on a permanent or temporary basis so those who feed feral cats might be said to have assumed responsibility for the care of such cats and, if so, will be subject to a duty to ensure welfare. However, feeding feral cats does not confer ownership on the feeder; under common law, it is not possible to own feral animals unless they have been tamed.

Cats which have a degree of socialisation such as farm and community cats may be owned. A landowner might claim ownership of a farm cat. Regarding a previously owned community cat, feeding them does not confer ownership; the original owner would still be regarded as the owner.

It is not an offence to kill a feral cat if it were necessary to do so (eg they were suffering or ill) and the cat was euthanased in a competent and humane way eg by a vet.

While feral cats are in the care of charities or vets, it is prudent to assume that the duty to ensure welfare applies to the charity or vet. In Scotland, anyone carrying out TNR work must obtain a licence under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 from NatureScot (previously known as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)) before releasing cats back into the wild after they have been neutered on the basis that cats (*Felis catus*) are a non-native species. Cats Protection holds one licence for the whole charity but every cat that is neutered via TNR in Scotland must be recorded so that the data can be collated and sent to NatureScot each year as a condition of the licence.

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## The five welfare needs

As with all animals, feral cats' welfare needs are:

- the need for a suitable environment
- the need for a suitable diet
- the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- any need to be with or apart from other animals
- the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Feral cats have the same fundamental welfare needs as domesticated pet cats; however, these needs have to be met in feral-specific ways, which are often very different to domestic cats.

## Environment

Feral cats are essentially wild animals and should be free-living. As much as we may feel the need to give these cats a home and bring them into a domestic environment, this is not in the cats' best interest.

Feral cats are extremely adaptable and can live in almost any external environment where they have adequate resources, especially food, water and shelter. They can be found in rural areas such as farms, urban and sub-urban residential areas, around hospitals, prisons, factories and other large establishments, near restaurants, markets and ports – anywhere in fact where there is food available in terms of prey, human food waste or deliberate feeding. Shelter is also important – this can be a barn, stable, shed, garage, warehouse or anywhere where they have privacy and easy access.

Feral cats are highly territorial and quickly adapt to their specific environment. They are acutely aware of what goes on around

them and will know where resources are to be found and know hiding places, escape routes, safe raised areas and places to rest. This familiarity makes feral cats feel in control, it gives them choice and reduces their stress levels. Providing appropriate shelter for groups of feral cats is a good idea, assuming these areas are easily accessible, dry and clean. There is information in chapter 4 'Monitoring the colony' about appropriate shelters.

On the contrary, bringing them into a domestic home, adoption centre or fenced area causes them stress and fear due to their lack of socialisation and habituation and the lack of control and choice.

Moving feral cats into a different environment, even a highly suitable one, isn't ideal as they are so territorial and should not be undertaken lightly. There is more information on relocation in chapter four.

Confinement in a pen or cage is totally contrary to their welfare other than for the briefest possible time during the TNR process.

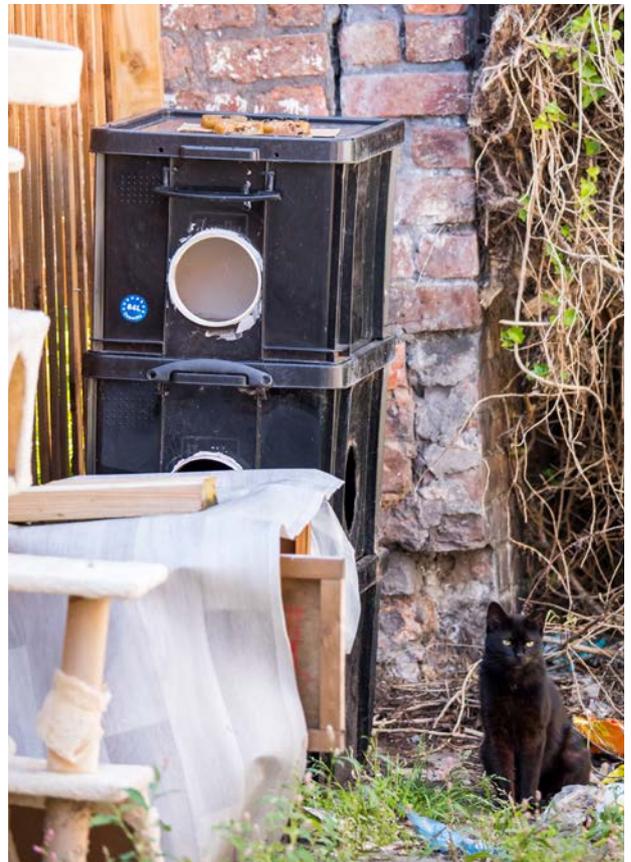
## Diet

Cats are highly food-motivated and resourceful and therefore feral colonies tend to exist in areas where food is available. This may be a rodent population such as in barns and stables and as this is a natural diet for cats, it is perfectly adequate and often an incentive for people to take on feral cats as environmentally friendly rodent control. Many live off human food waste, especially around factories and restaurants. This may or may not supply a balanced diet and can be hazardous in terms of injuries on tins, broken glass, plastics or toxicity etc. However many cats thrive on this diet.

Some are fed by feeders and this may be on a casual basis such as diners at outdoor restaurants or on a regular basis. Active feeding of feral colonies should only be undertaken when a neutering programme is in place. Once a reliable food source is available, it affects the cats' behaviour and reproductive ability, leading to more kittens being born and surviving. This in turn leads to a significant increase in the number of cats in the colony, which leads to fewer resources available for each cat, resulting in fighting, injury, infectious disease outbreaks and often poorer welfare overall.

If feeding feral cats is undertaken, a complete and balanced diet should be fed. As with all cats, they are obligate carnivores and a commercially available, good quality cat food is most appropriate. Human 'leftovers', treats and other complementary foods do not provide the required nutrition for a cat and should be avoided.

Dry food is less likely to spoil or attract flies and helps maintain tooth and gum health. Home-cooked food such as chicken and fish will lead to nutritional deficiencies if given as the only food long term. It often spoils rapidly and attracts other animals such as foxes. Wet food (canned or pouches) can be fed, and does provide a balanced diet but will also spoil rapidly. A mixture of wet and dry is ideal. Particularly attractive foods such as pilchards should be reserved for trapping, as they are more likely to tempt a cat into the trap.





Feral cats depend on their physical fitness and agility to hunt, enabling them to move around their territory and escape any threats or dangers. They are usually physically slimmer compared to the average pet cat, which have a greater tendency to be overweight. It is vitally important to resist the temptation to overfeed feral cats. An overweight feral cat will be less agile and mobile and may be unable to escape an attack or defend themselves. They also do not have access to veterinary care should they suffer from conditions that are caused or worsened by being overweight such as diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, skin issues, mobility problems and if unneutered, complications during kittening. Feral cats should be fed good quality food in appropriate amounts. Always remember that being neutered reduces their energy requirements and cats are more likely to gain bodyweight post neutering.



If feeding a colony it is ideal to provide multiple bowls to reduce competition. Remember they do not hunt cooperatively and prefer to eat separately. They will eat together from larger bowls and trays because of the strong drive to eat but it is not their preferred method and smaller or weaker cats may miss out.

Water is also essential; most cats are good at finding a water source but providing fresh, clean water in suitable wide, shallow bowls can be beneficial to a colony. Milk is best avoided as many cats become intolerant to it (especially cows' milk) when they mature.

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## Exhibiting normal behaviour

### What is normal behaviour for a feral cat?

The behaviour of a feral cat is not dissimilar to the behaviour of a pet cat, in the sense that both feral and non-feral cats have retained much of the same behaviours as their wild ancestor, the African wildcat. The primary difference in behaviour with feral cats compared to pet cats is that they will be fearful of people, or at the very least, they will not seek out social interaction from humans.

It is important to remember that while feral cats are the same species as our pet cats, *Felis catus*, they are effectively wild animals and should be treated as such. The inherent difference between feral cats and our pet cats is that the feral cat is so because they did not receive enough positive interactions with humans during their sensitive socialisation period (see page 64 for more on feral kittens). It is in this socialisation period that cats learn to recognise humans as part of their world. If they do not have access to humans at this stage, then they will not only not seek them out later in life but they are likely to be actively fearful of their presence. It is important to remember that cats, of any origin, are not born needing human interaction.

It is important to note that heightened levels of aggression is not a specific characteristic of a feral cat. Typically, cats that show aggressive-type behaviours are often described as 'going feral'; this is a misnomer. Like all animals, feral cats have a potential to show aggression when put into a position that they find fearful or threatening. For feral cats, this can include being confined or restricted by humans

or in the human environment. They show the aggressive-type behaviour only because of a heightened sense of threat or fear due to this alien environment. They have not evolved to show more aggression than pet cats.

The behaviour an individual cat shows can lead to difficulty when ascertaining the status of a cat eg feral or stray, as behaviours can vary on initial approach by people. When left to their own free choice, the proximity of feral cats to humans can vary greatly. Some feral cats will be fearful and avoid humans throughout their lifetime. Other cats may be tolerant of human presence at a distance. Here are some factors to be aware of that can make it difficult to decide if a cat is feral:

### The cat is not a feral cat

As per the definitions in a previous chapter, cats will fall into different categories. Sometimes a stray cat can be mistaken for a feral cat due to poor physical condition but if the individual interacts with people showing affiliative behaviours they are probably not feral.

### A low level of exposure to humans during an individual cat's sensitive socialisation period

A kitten may have got used to the presence of people that were feeding the mother and as such, had some socialisation to people; not enough to ensure the cat would cope in a human environment but enough that they may be more tolerant of human presence later in life than a feral kitten that had absolutely no interaction with people during their socialisation period.

### Genetics will always play a role in behaviours a cat shows throughout their life

Traits for boldness and confidence have been identified as being passed down through the male. A feral cat that is genetically more confident will give the appearance of being more relaxed in the presence of people; however, this is still not enough for the cat to want a 'pet' lifestyle and they are likely to avoid people who force interaction.

### Building a positive association

Some feral cats have shown a level of habituation to the presence of people who provide food for them. Not all feral cats will build this association. Some will avoid humans, even those bringing food, and instead will attempt to get access to the food after the humans have gone. A feral cat that approaches a person that has food should not be mistaken for a cat that likes people. Much in the same way, a duck that approaches a person at a local pond anticipating food would not be considered anything other than a wild animal that has learnt there are benefits that come with the presence of people. However, should food not be forthcoming or the person gets too close to the duck, they will remove themselves from the situation as it is not beneficial. Feral cats that approach feeders should not be considered any differently.

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While all of these factors play a role in creating a variance of behaviour which feral cats show in the presence of people, they should never be misinterpreted as a feral cat that needs to be brought into a domestic setting. What typifies any interaction with feral cats and people is that they only remain comfortable as long as they have control and choice throughout the interaction. As soon as a feral cat no longer has that choice, the fearful behaviours they display will increase dramatically.

Feral cats can form groups or colonies with other feral cats, usually related females and their offspring, in areas where resources are plentiful, primarily food and shelter. Feral cats can either hunt for food, scavenge or they will take food from human feeders if they live in the proximity of people who are happy to provide food. Cats have evolved from a solitary hunter and this remains the same with our modern day cat, even ones in a colony. Feral cats will hunt alone and do not hunt as part of a group or a pack.

Cats are crepuscular, meaning that they are generally more active at dawn and dusk. This is true for feral cats who will be more active at these times and sleep through the majority of the day. These periods of activity align with when their prey is most active, thus making hunting easier.

Fighting between cats can be problematic. Unneutered males have large territories and a restriction on space or need to access resources can cause cats to be involved in conflict. This will be especially true in urban areas where space is limited. Fighting will lead to injuries and possible disease transmission; this territorial behaviour is reduced but not totally eliminated by neutering.

### **Why attempts to confine or tame feral cats are wrong**

Cats Protection strongly advocates against confining feral cats, with the aim to tame, after the age of eight weeks old ie the end of the socialisation period, as it is contrary to their natural behaviour and optimum welfare. Fundamentally, if a cat has not experienced people in a repeated and positive way prior to being eight weeks old then they will be fearful of people and the domestic environment. In order to attempt to 'tame' the feral cat it would require confining the cat to a home, pen or garden setting, which would be stressful for the cat. Further to this, repeatedly exposing the confined feral cat to the presence of people will be incredibly stressful for the individual. It is not good for a feral cat's welfare to be exposed to that level of stress over an extended period of time and would have serious negative effects on their mental and physical wellbeing. In fact, confining a feral cat is the polar opposite of

good welfare. Not only does it force the cat to endure or interact with stimuli that they are fearful of, including people, it takes away opportunities for the feral cat to display their natural behaviours and their ability to choose. This removal of choice in itself is highly stressful.

The desire to tame a feral cat comes from a place of human bias. Typically we are programmed to see a feral cat the same way we would see a pet animal and assume that they need a domestic setting and an abundance of human interaction. It is important to avoid anthropomorphism such as thinking that a feral cat needs to be in a home with social companionship, as this is what people need. It is always important to remember that cats have different welfare needs to humans and as such, forcing perceived human needs onto cats arbitrarily can be damaging to the welfare of the cat.

From a behavioural welfare point of view, TNR is the best option as it works to humanely reduce the unowned cat population while allowing the cats the freedom to exhibit their normal behaviours without being confined, other than the brief time for neutering. Working with feral cats needs to be done with an objective approach; a consideration for what is normal behaviour for a feral cat, not a pet cat, is imperative.



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## **Flooding and learned helplessness**

Flooding is a behavioural term used to describe a situation where an animal has forced exposure to a fear-eliciting stimulus without having the opportunity to escape. Traditionally, flooding was frequently used as a training method for animals, for example, if a dog was fearful of other dogs a muzzle would be placed over their mouth and they would be forced into a space with a large number of dogs that they could not escape from. Due to serious ethical concerns and limited efficacy, flooding is now not seen as an appropriate way to train animals; in fact it is incredibly stressful. Although most people do not consciously try to flood animals now, it may still happen inadvertently. Sometimes it is unavoidable and necessary when weighed up against overall welfare, but we should strive to avoid or at least minimise it as much as possible. Specifically pertaining to feral cats, if we remove them from their territory and put them in confinement, this is flooding as the cat will be fearful of the environment with which they are not accustomed and cannot escape.

Flooding occurs when a cat is trapped for TNR; however, the cat is confined for approximately 24 hours and is then released. Weighing up the long-term benefits for the individual and the cat population, this relatively small amount of flooding is acceptable. However, having a feral cat that is being confined and thus flooded for weeks, months or years on end does not balance out as good welfare overall.

Animals that find themselves in situations of extreme stress resulting from fear or anxiety can display a behaviour known as learned

helplessness. This is where an animal is repeatedly or continually exposed to an aversive stimuli to which none of the behaviours the animal offers reduces the potency of the aversive stimuli. Subsequently, the animal stops offering behaviours simply because the animal has learnt that they do not work. The misinterpretation arises here when people observing the animal confuse learned helplessness with acceptance. The animal still finds the stimuli stressful, aversive and it will be causing the animal continual stress but the animal has quite literally given up. This is similar to a situation in humans where someone is held prisoner or tortured and in the end gives up and shows passive acceptance to their captor.

Learned helplessness is displayed by many feral cats that are forced into confinement, particularly for extended periods of time. A feral cat, in the first instance, may attempt to escape by climbing the pen or showing aggressive behaviours when people approach. If these behaviours prove to be ineffective or, even worse, if they are punished, the cat will eventually learn to stop displaying these behaviours. For some feral cats learned helplessness can set in quickly, in other cats it can take weeks or even months. Unfortunately, as soon as a cat starts displaying learned helplessness people confuse this for the cat becoming more 'tame', for example when repeatedly stroking a feral cat with a gloved hand in the hope that this will teach the cat that humans can be trusted and we mean well. Initially, the feral cat will repeatedly display aggressive-type behaviours. However, after a certain period of time, the cat will stop showing the aggression. This is often misinterpreted as the cat accepting the handling.

Instead, the cat has just learnt that offering aggressive-type behaviours is ineffective in deterring the scary stimulus so the cat becomes helpless and doesn't offer any behaviour. This does not mean that the cat is any less stressed or fearful when displaying learned helplessness than they were when they were showing aggressive-type behaviours. Unfortunately though, as the cat is not showing overt, observable behaviours, the stress affecting the cat often goes unnoticed. Cats that display learned helplessness can often suppress natural behaviours for as long as they are forced to be in an environment that they find fearful. This can in turn lead to other abnormal behaviours such as overgrooming or even lead to medical conditions such as stress cystitis.

## **Hoarding and multi-cat households**

Situations arise whereby a kitten is born into a domestic home environment but due to a lack of any form of socialisation or even social interaction within the first eight weeks of their life, the kitten grows to display behaviours more typically associated with feral cats.

Cases like these most often arise in houses where owners have large multi-cat households or when the owner suffers from mental health issues which result in cat hoarding. This leaves a unique situation where the cat has some minor socialisation to the domestic setting, albeit not a normal one, but the kitten may have had little or no interaction with people. In some hoarding situations, owners aren't even necessarily aware that the kittens have been born, let alone appropriately socialised them. These cats can be completely fearful of people, like a feral cat, but without

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the experience of living outdoors. It is best to address these situations on a case-by-case basis. Cats Protection's Behaviour team can be contacted by emailing [behaviour@cats.org.uk](mailto:behaviour@cats.org.uk) for support on working with these non-socialised, indoor cats.

## Companionship

### Companionship with cats

Although cats typically live a solitary life, feral cats can come together to form loose groups which are often referred to as colonies. These colonies of feral cats typically form based around the availability of resources. This is often primarily a food resource however it can also include places of shelter and safety. While cats in colonies can form social groups, it is not a certainty that all cats that exist within, or around a colony, perceive themselves as being in the same social group.

Cats in the same social group are typically defined as showing a number of affiliative behaviours including grooming each other (allogrooming), rubbing against each other (allorubbing), and sleeping touching each other.

These activities demonstrate a social bond and also help maintain a similar scent profile within members of the social group. Scent is particularly important for cats in terms of communication. Colonies are commonly formed of related females and their kittens. Male feral cats are typically more independent; primarily searching for opportunities for procreation and once male kittens mature they are usually pushed out of the colony to avoid inbreeding. However, even neutered males are not likely to spend much time within a group or colony situation and may live on the periphery.

While cats live in a colony, they still retain a lot of their independent behaviours. Cats are solitary hunters, they do not engage in group hunting or eating activities. One behaviour that is displayed in a colony that could be considered an aspect of more social, group living is that queens will often allow kittens to cross-suckle, ie a queen with her own litter will often allow kittens of another litter to suckle. This gives lactating queens the opportunity to hunt or seek out food, while another queen is looking after her kittens thus increasing the chance of the kittens' survival.

While cats that grow up with their littermates can typically stay bonded, it is important to remember that cats do go through social maturity where they may no longer perceive themselves as being in the same social group as cats they have grown up with. Typically, sexually active males will leave the colony and go in search of opportunities to procreate.

Feral cat colonies can become very big and can last for many generations; however this is always dependent on the availability of resources. The cats are not drawn together due to a need for companionship. While there may be some benefits for some of the feral cats to group living, if the food source were to be removed the colony would disperse.

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## Companionship with humans

As discussed previously, feral cats display behaviours akin to wild animals and do not seek out social relationships with people. However the relationship between feral cats and humans can take several forms.

- Feral cats can happily and successfully live completely independently of humans. They will remain fearful and avoidant of people
- Feral cats can establish commensal relationships with humans; receiving benefits from humans, such as food and shelter, with no benefit or impact for the humans feeding them. These humans simply feed the feral cats with no direct personal gain other than altruism
- Feral cats can enter into a mutualistic relationship with humans whereby they get access to food and shelter, however they also hunt and remove pests which can be to the benefit of the humans. It is important to remember that this type of mutualistic relationship was how the domestication process of the African wildcat began. As the feral cats are of benefit to the humans in this relationship, the humans may make an effort to keep them around thus providing the cats with shelter and food to supplement their hunting

It is important to note that none of these relationships are based on any element of social interaction with humans.

While some people seek to engage with and help feral cats, conversely a large section of the human population perceive feral cats as a problem. People often cite issues of hygiene and cleanliness when colonies start to form. In colonies

with a number of unneutered cats there is always going to be an issue with urine spraying which can cause a very pungent aroma and the noise of cats calling to each other. There can also be negative social connotations around an area that has a large number of feral cats. Even if the cats are not directly causing any tangible problems, the perception of them could cause local people to take issue with them. Pet cat owners can also become uncomfortable around the perceived or real threat from ferals due to fears over fighting and the transfer of infectious disease to their own cat. Engaging with communities before undertaking TNR projects helps local people to see the benefits of these programmes.

## Protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease

As descendants of the African wildcat, feral cats are hardy and perfectly adapted to a solitary life in the wild. Despite this, feral colonies form where cats live alongside each other in close proximity due to the access to resources. This can lead to an increased level of tension and stress regarding the sharing of available, yet often limited, resources such as food. Fighting will occur among entire toms in particular during the mating season. Infectious diseases are easily spread when cats are living in close contact; even more so if they are undernourished, unvaccinated, pregnant or lactating, particularly if they are young or old.

Regular health care is impossible in feral cats, as this would require repeated trapping and anaesthesia of the cats. The best way to improve the general health of a feral cat colony is to neuter as many individual cats as possible – ideally all. This will lead to a more stable population within the colony, less

competition for resources, reduced fighting and associated stress and illnesses; it will lead to a healthier colony overall and improve the welfare of the cats within it.

As part of TNR programmes, it is practical to give each cat a health check while anaesthetised, vaccinate, give parasite control and treat minor ailments (see chapter five on page 49). Cats whose illness or injury requires more complicated or repeated treatments or hospitalisation should be euthanased as it is not in their welfare interests to be confined and handled excessively. Remember that mental suffering is just as important as physical suffering.

As with a pet cat it is an offence to deliberately cause suffering to a feral cat but it is legal to euthanase them humanely to prevent suffering.



# Chapter four

## Trap, neuter and return

As discussed previously, the most effective and humane method of managing feral cats is to carry out trap, neuter and return (TNR) programmes. It is important to work in a methodical way, planning each project carefully, and neutering all the cats in a group or colony wherever possible, or there will not be any long-term benefit and it will waste valuable resources.

### Before you get started

It is very important to think carefully before TNR work is undertaken and fully understand what is involved. The overall aim is to control the population of feral cats in a particular area and to improve the health and welfare of individual cats. Here are the fundamental points to consider.

The priorities when undertaking TNR are:

- the cats' welfare and safety of the trappers must be the most important considerations
- cats should be in and out of the TNR programme as fast as possible as it is very stressful for them, however well it is managed
- surgery needs to go smoothly with minimal complications as there will be little opportunity for aftercare and cats are not easy to catch twice
- a colony needs to be neutered quickly and effectively – neutering the whole colony faster than the cats can reproduce is the only way that TNR can be effective
- TNR is most effective when working appropriately and considerately with feeders, residents and landowners and allaying their fears about what will happen to the cats



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### **This can be achieved by:**

- selecting and using the appropriate equipment
- making sure the equipment is safe and in good working order
- using the equipment appropriately
- using the right methods for each group of cats rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach
- being adequately prepared for the work including planning for the unexpected
- communicating well with the people involved, using appropriate explanations and clear processes. This will also reduce the number of situations where cats have to be relocated away from the original site
- cleaning and disinfecting the equipment and ourselves between animals

### **Desired outcomes:**

- stabilise and then reduce the colony size
- the cats are not injured during the process
- minimise stress, fear and trauma to the cats
- maintain the reputation of our organisation
- the trappers are safe

### **Recruiting and training TNR volunteers**

Making sure that we're recruiting the right volunteers for TNR is very important. The TNR role is suited to those with an ability to deal with challenging situations. Someone who has both patience and an ability to take a pragmatic approach is also essential for this role. Volunteers must be willing to work in alignment with our feral policy as well as follow all of our health and safety guidance.

Once recruited volunteers will be required to take part in our online Cat Welfare Learning TNR workshops. These workshops will support volunteers in developing their knowledge of the theory behind TNR as well as give an overview of our work with unowned cats. Following the completion of the TNR workshops the volunteers should then spend time shadowing with an experienced trapper who will support them in developing their practical skills in trapping and all of the TNR associated activities.

## **Engaging with communities**

Please refer to our branch neutering toolkit for a more detailed description of the process of community engagement and how taking this approach supports the success of our neutering activities both for unowned and owned cats.

Engaging with local communities will be hugely important to the success of TNR programmes. Neutering all of the cats but prioritising the females will be crucial to prevent the population from exploding again. The community can help to locate the cats and assist with long-term monitoring and reporting of new cats entering the area.

Once a colony of feral or community cats requiring TNR intervention is identified it is necessary to spend time and have presence in the area. Gaining trust and understanding in this way will enable good access to the cats and their caretakers.

### **Engaging before embarking on TNR**

- Talk to stakeholders in the community. The agencies will be different in every community but examples are other animal welfare charities, housing associations, resident associations and neighbourhood groups, youth groups, community workers and leaders of existing community projects, shops or businesses that may be near potential TNR sites. Anyone who already has strong links with the community is important to liaise with. In rural areas it is vital to talk to farmers and landowners
- If the community is also culturally, ethnically and/or religiously diverse, it is important to gain knowledge of their beliefs and attitudes and take time to understand their perspective. Many religions and cultures that express concerns about neutering do so on perceived welfare grounds. Taking time to engage and message about the benefits of neutering for cats' long-term health and welfare will often overcome this issue
- If possible, attend or hold community events
- Spend time assessing the streets or areas you will be working in and get to know who and where the cat caretakers are. Consider utilising social media networks to gather intelligence. Observe the cats seen and make records
- The above activity should allow some mapping of where the cat hotspots are, giving insight into the wider population issue and not just the known cats or colonies

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## Actions to take before starting to trap

- Inform residents when the TNR programme will be starting, how long for and what they can do to make their pets identifiable. See more details in the 'planning' section below
- It is a good idea to let the council, relevant housing associations, dog/animal wardens and community police aware too
- Ensure the cat caretakers and feeders are fully on-board with the trapping plans. They need to be aware that any sick cats may be euthanased on welfare grounds, and any friendly, socialised community cats may be candidates for rehoming rather than being returned to the community (see TNR factsheet for caretakers in the resources section on page 78). However, many friendly community cats are very well looked after and much loved by their residents. A better welfare outcome might be for them to be returned, as some may not settle well as a pet cat. Therefore, each case should be considered individually.

## Planning

Before trapping begins on any colony there needs to be careful planning to ensure success. To begin, the following questions should be considered:

- how many cats are there?
- who feeds them, when and how often?
- how did the situation start?
- has anyone tried to do anything before?
- how do people feel about the cats?
- are they feral?
- are any owned?
- is permission needed from the land owner?
- are there sufficient resources in terms of equipment and skilled people?
- is there the vet capacity to deal with all the cats that may be trapped?

To get a more accurate estimate of how many cats there are, the caretakers can set up a feeding station and set a regular feeding time each day. This will ensure cats will show up at the set time and can be counted and will make trapping easier as cats are creatures of habit.

Before starting to trap cats it is important to find local veterinary practices that are experienced at dealing with feral cats and will neuter and treat them in an appropriate manner. It is highly unlikely that the same cat can be trapped again if there are problems post-operatively.

It is very important to establish and maintain good working relationships with the vet practice.

They will not appreciate being contacted on the day of trapping; this needs to be planned with the vets well in advance including when the cats are likely to be coming in and approximate numbers. Remember that most vet practices are very busy with limited operating time slots.

It is also important that residents are informed of the TNR plans and dates to avoid owned cats being trapped. CP has produced amendable flyers that can be posted through doors of households close to the colony. They ask for pet cats to either be kept in the day of trapping or for their cat to be identified as owned with a microchip or collar. It is very important that the vet scans every cat for a microchip before they undergo any procedures.

Food should be withheld for 24 hours before trapping as it is easier if the cats are hungry and is preferable regarding the anaesthesia in adult cats to reduce the chance of them vomiting when not fully conscious. The importance of this should be discussed with caretakers and it is useful to remind them on the day not to feed.

If trapping kittens for pre-pubertal neutering, they should only be starved for a maximum of three hours before surgery so the timings of trapping them will need to be planned carefully.

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## Trapping equipment

It is important that a cat that has had limited or no socialisation is never handled directly to avoid people being badly bitten or scratched. Trapping is the most humane, effective and safe way of getting the cat to a vet practice for neutering and/or treatment.

For most trapping projects the following is needed:

- traps (automatic and/or manual)
- trap transfer restrainers (TTRs) – transfer baskets or restrainer-containers
- bait – strong-smelling food like sardines and tuna
- small paper/plastic plates
- water bowls
- large, reusable and cleanable shopping bags
- absorbable pads
- torch
- log sheets and pen
- old towels, newspaper and/or sheets
- CP identification badge
- mobile phone (fully charged and on silent)
- plastic bags, kitchen roll and disposable gloves
- risk assessment to be completed for each trapping job

### Types of traps

The purpose of a trap is to capture a cat that either cannot be physically handled or cannot be approached. It therefore needs to be safe, effective, easy to clean, easy to use, easily portable and strong enough to resist the knocks and scrapes it will receive.

Traps take two forms – automatic, where the trap has a mechanism that closes automatically when the cat enters it or manual, where the trapper closes the door once the cat has gone in by remote control or via a cord. All can be used to transfer cats into transfer baskets for transportation.



*MDC EeziSet Cat Trap*



*MDC Eezicatch Cat Trap*



*MDC MAC Trap*



Trapman Multi-cat Drop Trap



MDC Multi-Catch Cat Trap



Dropper basket aka 'nurse's best friend'

## Automatic traps

The traditional automatic trap eg MDC's EeziSet is a self-activating trap designed to catch a single cat. The cage is made with heavy gauge wire mesh and has a solid metal floor. The mechanism comprises a spring-loaded, self-locking trap door which is released by the action of the cat's weight on a solid treadle plate. A polyglass access door at the rear of the cage allows bait to be placed and metal plates are strategically located on the sides to prevent the bait being accessed from outside. The bait door may also serve to lessen the natural suspicions of the approaching cat.

The trap has a good catch rate; its drawbacks are that it is heavy and noisy (this can be cured by padding the door frame with foam or sticky pads). The trap can be used manually either by using a long stick pushed through the hole in the mechanism where the latch sits; or also by using the sliding transfer door as a drop-door type. An extended length version is also available.

## The EeziCatch

Traditional traps are robust but can be quite heavy so lighter versions are available, such as the EeziCatch trap. This is a lighter weight trap with an external hung door. The door closes from the outside, removing the risk of the door 'catching' on the cat's back as in some other types of trap. The door mechanism closes almost silently. The EeziCatch is also available with a solid floor and can also be used as a manual trap.

## Manual traps

Traditional manual traps were usually made of wood and wire mesh and worked rather like a castle drawbridge. There are disadvantages to this type of trap, for example, even made of treated wood it is difficult to clean, maintain in good condition and disinfect thoroughly. Also the door is pulled shut by the string but needs the trapper or an assistant to lock the door in place.

The MAC Trap is a manual trap and has the advantage that both end doors can be removed enabling the cat to walk through the trap, thereby becoming familiar with the cage before trapping begins. Operated by means of a pull cord, the trapper is able to select which cat to trap and this proves particularly useful when catching a mother and kittens.

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## Drop-door manual type

The door is held open by a pin or nail which fits through a hole drilled in the bottom of the door. The pin is attached to a length of string, which, when pulled, withdraws the pin, dropping the door. The door is lightweight, made out of Perspex and so drops fairly slowly and will not injure the cat's tail if accidentally caught. Once the door drops, it remains in place itself.

Some are now commercially available eg the MAC Trap, illustrated on page 28 or automatic traps can be adapted – the transfer ends of many automatic traps have runners on each side for a sliding door, and these can be used this way (the glazing may have to be replaced with a thinner Perspex).

Some multi-catch ones are available and can be especially useful for trapping a queen and her kittens. The multi-catch traps come with a solid floor as shown in the photograph or with a mesh floor.

## Multi-cat drop trap

Drop traps are manual traps that are propped up by a prop that is pulled away using a string once a cat is underneath it. This can be good for cats that will not enter a standard box trap.

## Dropper basket or cage or 'nurse's best friend'

A dropper basket is useful for dropping over and catching less timid cats.

## When should each type of trap be used?

There are advantages and disadvantages of all types of traps and so it is important to use what is most appropriate for each particular case. Simple homemade traps may be cheaper but cannot be disinfected well and are hard to maintain so generally it is better and safer to buy commercial traps designed for TNR.



*Drop-door manual trap*

## Automatic trap alarm

The SmartAlarm is designed to work with automatic traps. You simply attach the alarm to the top of the trap and then a string to the trap door. The string has a magnetic disc attached and when set this is then stuck to the alarm. When the trap goes off the magnetic disc is pulled away by the door closing and the alarm notifies you. Up to 15 people can be linked to the SmartAlarm meaning you can choose multiple people to receive the notification. The trap alarm can be used in any location as it doesn't need WiFi. It is very robust and weatherproof and also records the temperature.

The Community Neutering team have used the trap alarm when trapping particularly shy cats and cats that are not always turning up for feeding at regular times. Using the trap alarm for those very shy cats is excellent, you don't have to keep disturbing the area by checking the trap. When the trap is set off you will get an alert immediately. It was useful for the team when trapping a cat who didn't like to keep a routine and would often turn up at random times. Prior to using the trap alarm this would have meant the team needed to wait for several hours. Instead with the SmartAlarm they were able to set the trap in a secure location and leave it there knowing that when the cat went in they would be notified. This allowed the team to have a trap set and to get on with other work in an area close by.

## Pros and cons of different types of trap

| Trap type | Pros  | Cons   |
|-----------|---|--|
| Automatic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful for trapping one or two cats</li> <li>• Good to trap first or last cat</li> <li>• Trappers don't have to stay with the trap all the time</li> <li>• Good for shy cats that will not come out when a trapper is near</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No control over what is trapped once set</li> <li>• Can catch wrong cat/species</li> <li>• Loud and can make other cats trap shy</li> <li>• Usually only catches one cat at a time</li> <li>• Tends to trap confident cats first</li> <li>• Cannot leave for long periods of time once set</li> </ul> |
| Manual    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traps only the cats you want to trap thus quicker overall</li> <li>• Easy to prioritise the most important cats first (females, pregnant etc)</li> <li>• The cat doesn't need to stand on a pedal to activate the trap. Sometimes cats are wary of the pedal on the automatic trap and will reach over it to eat the bait</li> <li>• Cats which are already neutered can exit the trap without triggering it. This is good to gain trust with the shyer cats</li> <li>• Can catch more than one cat and even more in a multi-catch cat trap</li> <li>• Can be easier to trap injured cats</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The user will need to be in sight of the trap in order to activate. Some cats can be very wary of this and may avoid coming close to the trap</li> <li>• The trapper cannot leave the trap at all</li> </ul>  |

### Whatever type of trap is used:

- always make sure they are clean, and do not smell as this will be a deterrent to the cats
- position them somewhere stable so they don't wobble
- check the mechanism before you go out trapping
- always cover traps and cages once cats are in them
- always label traps so that they are identified as CP traps (new ones are supplied labelled; spare labels are available from the CP Warehouse team)



SmartAlarm

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## Covers

Trap and trap transfer covers can be purchased or homemade, or towels or blankets can be used.



## Transferring equipment

### Trap transfer carrier

Cats are transferred into these baskets so they can be transported more easily to the veterinary practice. There is a slide-up door at one end for transfer of the cat from the trap. The trap can then be cleaned and re-set.

### Trap transfer restrainers (TTRs) – restrainer-container

These are similar to the transfer baskets but they have a movable internal partition (squeeze panel) at the back which is used to restrain the cat for injection to sedate them.

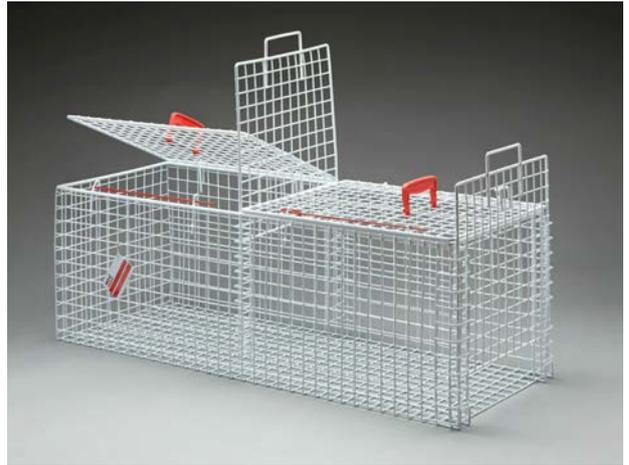
The hospitalisation carrier basket can be used to hold cats short-term pre or post neuter if needed. An end door panel allows the transfer of the cat from a trap transfer basket or restraining carrier. Once safely inside, the cat can be confined to one half of the carrier by means of a divider panel. This allows the other half of the carrier to be cleaned and food, water, litter replaced etc. The top opening is divided to allow this access. These features eliminate the need for any contact between the cat and the attendant so that both can remain calm and safe at all times.

### Restrainer forks (also known as trap isolator, trap divider or trap comb)

These are metal forks which slot into any basket or trap and can be used to restrain a cat for injection (more than one fork can be used) or contain the cat in one end of a cage while the remainder of the cage is serviced. For best containment, it should be pushed through one side of the cage and out through the bars on the other side.



*MDC Trap Transfer Carrier*



*MDC Hospitalisation Carrier*



*MDC Restrainer Container*



*Restrainer fork/comb*



*Cat approaching manual trap*



## The process of trapping

### Acclimatisation

Most cats are wary of traps so it is best to begin feeding near or next to a trap so the cats begin to understand that the trap is not a threat. Once the cats are less wary of the trap the next stage is to progress to placing food inside an unset trap to get them used to nothing happening when they enter. The next stage is to set the trap and this gradual process improves trapping success by 50-60%.

### Trap shyness

Cats have the ability to learn quickly from their experiences and this applies when trapping feral cats. This varies between individual cats but generally cats will very quickly develop a negative view of traps and become scared of entering them. In the TNR world this is known as 'trap shyness' or 'cage shyness'.

There is no such thing as an uncatchable cat; the only reason that cats will become uncatchable is because insufficient care is taken in the trapping process.

### The cat will become trap-shy on the basis of:

- the trap being seen as a foreign object and the cat will not walk into something they are suspicious of or is novel
- there is something about the specific trap that is deterring the cat eg it wobbles, smells or has been positioned in the wrong place for that cat
- the cat has seen other cats being trapped and knows that bad things happen to cats who walk inside a trap

### How can trap shyness be prevented?

- Acclimatise cats to the trap before beginning trapping
- Make sure traps do not smell (rinse thoroughly if disinfectant has been used)
- Make sure traps are placed steadily on even ground and are stable
- Position the trap near to where the cats normally feed, but move it from there after a few cats have been caught at that spot
- Use tasty bait
- After catching a cat, cover the trap over and remove it from site quickly. Minimise the length of time trapped cats can be seen by others in the colony
- Don't carry out the process of transferring from a trap to a cage at the spot where the cat was caught. Move the trap out of sight first
- Try using a different type of trap eg larger in size or a drop trap



Baiting a trap



Feral cat entering a trap

## Using an Eezicatch automatic trap

### Step 1: Baiting the trap

It is important to bait the trap with strong-smelling, enticing food such as sardines or tuna. The food should be placed at the rear end of the trap and also a very small amount of the food should be put at the front of the trap to lure the cat inside. Dishes should not be used as this may stop the trap from working or injure the cat once caught. The caretaker can be asked to make the same sounds they usually make when going out to feed.

### Step 2: Setting the trap

Ensure the trap is on even, solid ground. To set the trap, simply raise the two circles at the front of the trap to the top, this will allow the front door to be opened outwards. Next put the two bars against each other. The trapper should move away from the trap, preferably somewhere where they can't be seen by the cats so they may come over to investigate. See the 'resources' section on page 78 for more information on setting different types of traps.

As the cat enters the trap and steps on the mesh treadle plate, the door closes automatically, trapping the cat.

The trap must be checked at regular intervals (every 10-15 minutes ideally, but at least every half hour) to prevent injury to the cat. It must not be left overnight or when it can't be checked frequently.

### Step 3: Cover the trap once the cat is trapped

Once the trap goes off the whole trap must be covered with a sheet or towel as soon as possible. This will help the cat to stay calm and will prevent them becoming injured. Nobody must be allowed to touch or open the trap to avoid getting bitten, scratched or the cat getting away.

### Step 4: Transfer into a transfer basket

It is ideal to have someone to help the trapper to transfer the cat from trap to transfer basket, particularly when they are inexperienced. Before transferring the cat, the carrier should be lined with something absorbent such as a towel, newspapers or incontinence pad. Once the cat is in the basket the lid can be secured with the rod.



*Cat transfer*

To transfer the cat the transfer basket is placed against the rear end of the trap so both end opening panels are against each other. The other end of the trap can be pressed against a wall to aid this process. Both panels are pulled up while still keeping the transfer basket panel in position so that it can be put back down easily once the cat has transferred. Sometimes cats like to transfer into light so the transfer basket can remain uncovered. If the cat doesn't transfer the cover may be taken off the trap and placed on the transfer basket. It is important to be patient and not to frighten the cat. This transfer may be instant or can take several minutes. Once transferred into the transfer basket the end panel is secured with the rod and the basket is covered and placed away from the trapping site in a quiet area.

The cat should be given to the veterinary staff in this carrier so they can sedate the cat easily without having to handle them.

## Using a manual trap

- The trap works on the basis of a safe, lightweight dropping door held in place by a metal pin device. This is tied to a string, and when the string is pulled sharply, the door drops and the trap closes, catching the specific cat or cats required
- As with the automatic trap cats can be transferred into the transfer basket through the end opening panels in the same way

- There are two sizes of manual traps ordered through MDC (see pictures on page 28-29). The smaller one to catch 2-3 cats is the MAC Trap. The larger one is the Multi-Catch Cat Trap where several cats can be caught at once and is particularly useful for catching a queen and kittens
- The trap should be baited as for an automatic trap
- The trapper should hide behind something such as a door, tree, bush or car and should not look directly at the trap or the cat as eye contact can make the cat wary
- It is vital to remain as still as possible and only to look directly at the trap once the cat is entering it and they are facing away
- The MAC Trap has large holes each side and some cats place their paw around the side to take food out. Ensure that food is placed in the middle and cardboard can be attached either side to stop this from happening

## Using a dropper cage or basket (the 'nurse's best friend')

A dropper cage is a basket with a removable sliding floor which is dropped over a cat that will come near people but cannot be picked up. This means they are more useful for less timid, somewhat socialised cats rather than truly feral ones. The floor of the cage is replaced once the cat is inside, rather like catching a spider with a glass and a piece of card.

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The cat is lured to a particular flat piece of ground to eat. After waiting a minute or two for the cat to relax while they eat, the basket is dropped over them quickly. This can work better if the familiar caretaker can get close to the cats so they could be shown how to use this.

If this method fails, the cat will need to be trapped.

### Trapping tips

- Don't set traps in heavy rain or hot sun without adequate protection from the elements
- If a cat is trapped and it is suspected that they might be owned, scan for a microchip and if they are, note the number and release them. Paper collars can be used to try to locate the owner if they are not microchipped. **Remember – it is illegal to neuter an owned cat without the owner's consent and constitutes criminal damage as cats are classed as property in law.** Therefore, if in doubt do not go ahead with neutering
- Set traps near feeding sites if possible
- Ask the caretaker to make the noises and sounds they usually do when feeding the cats. If cats stop appearing after a few have been trapped, the caretaker can be asked to do this again
- Automatic traps should never be left unattended in open public spaces, and should always be checked ideally every 10-15 minutes or at least every 30 minutes. The trapper's or the organisation's name and phone number should be on the trap, and you may have to consider chaining it to a fence or other object depending on the location. If traps are being left in someone else's garden or yard, ensure they are observed regularly and that the landowner has your contact details
- Once trapped, covering the trap with a blanket, towel or purpose-made cover helps to calm the cat
- Once a cat has been trapped, they may never be trapped again so make the most of the opportunity. If a lactating queen is trapped without her kittens or if the kittens are not located, she should still be neutered and released as quickly as possible. There is evidence that nursing kittens may be cross-suckled by several females in feral colonies, so the danger to unweaned kittens while their mother is absent may not be as serious as previously thought. Ask the vet to do a flank spay if you suspect she is nursing kittens
- If there are tiny kittens to be picked up use gloves and place them in a wire basket and cover with a blanket. Older kittens may follow their mothers into a trap
- Take time to change clothes, clean and disinfect yourself before handling your own cats/pets/food



## Transportation to the vet practice

As with the transportation of all cats, care needs to be taken when transporting feral cats to the vets.

- The transfer cages/traps should be secured while in transit to ensure they are not moving around
- The transfer cages/traps should always be kept covered to minimise stress including during transit but make sure there is adequate ventilation
- During warmer weather, be aware that temperatures inside the vehicle can reach dangerous levels in less than 10 minutes. The temperature in the vehicle must not be allowed to exceed 30°C. If you need to park make sure it is in the shade and do not leave cats unattended
- Both travel and confinement are very stressful for feral cats and they should not be transported on journeys longer than two hours
- Ideally do not transport cats from different colonies in the same vehicle due to the risk of spreading disease
- Ensure a bin bag and cleaning materials are carried should a clean-up be needed between journeys
- If you are transporting multiple cats or are regularly transporting cats from different sources, care must be taken to avoid contaminating the vehicle with potential infectious agents. Use plastic sheeting to cover the load area, or consider using a commercial transporter vehicle that can be suitably disinfected after use
- If cats are being collected for admission into Cats Protection's care from different sources, consideration should be given to the vulnerability of the cats if having to share the same airspace. Do not transport pregnant or lactating cats and kittens, elderly cats and known FIV-positive cats in the same section of the vehicle as other cats from different sources if collected at the same time



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## Health and safety of trappers

The health and safety of our volunteers and employees is extremely important. Please refer to our health and safety branch manual which covers some TNR-related activities. In addition to following all of our health and safety guidance a TNR risk assessment must be completed for every trapping job. The risk assessment must be completed by everyone who is attending the trapping job and must also be signed off by the branch coordinator.

To enable you to carry out TNR activities safely the following equipment is advised: waterproof overcoat (weather dependent), high vis vest, protective footwear, PPE, first aid kit, personal alarm and a charged mobile phone.

**Please also refer to CP's lone working policy and accident reporting procedure. Please ensure you are up-to-date with all of our COVID-19 health and safety guidance.**

If there are any local or national situations such as disease outbreaks, any relevant restrictions must be followed.

### Feral cat handling

**Never handle a feral cat directly.** When dealing with feral cats trapping should always be considered as the primary strategy. These cats are wild and are afraid of humans; they often appear more docile when stressed but they should never be underestimated. They will bite and scratch if they feel threatened and can seriously injure people if attempts are made to restrain them manually.

Sometimes socialised stray cats may be picked up and put into a carrier or enticed into one using food. However just because the cat approaches people for food and allows them to stroke them, it does not mean the cat can be easily picked up and put into a carrier without escape or injury to the trapper or the cat. A top-opening basket should be used for these cats or a dropper basket. Cardboard carriers should never be used.

If anyone is bitten or badly scratched the wound should be washed and medical advice should be sought. Cat bites can be very serious and often become infected within 24 hours. There is also the risk of becoming infected with zoonotic diseases such as cat scratch disease or ringworm and so general hygiene is extremely important. See the 'cat handling' section in the health and safety manual on CatNav for further information.

### Other key safety points

- Work in pairs wherever possible
- Always have a fully charged mobile phone to hand
- If trapping in the evening use a headtorch and always trap in pairs after dark
- Ensure someone knows where you are and that you check in with them regularly and after trapping to let them know you have got home safely

- If you feel uncertain about entering the property for any reason then don't enter. Walk away
- Do not enter an abandoned building as it could be structurally unsafe. Try to entice the cats out of the building by placing food outside around the building
- Take into account what is known about the occupants or land owners (history of aggressive behaviour etc). Any occupant known to be high risk eg showing violent and aggressive behaviour or alcohol or drug misuse, must not be visited on their own. Discuss with your branch development manager (BDM) or manager and the Health & Safety team as to the best way of approaching such a visit. If in any doubt, do not attend
- Stay alert and watch for mood changes in a person. If you feel at risk or vulnerable, or if the occupant or other people start to become abusive or aggressive make an excuse to leave immediately
- If there is an accident or incident you must complete an accident report form and send to your BDM or manager and the Health & Safety team. See the accident reporting policy for more information
- Consider having a fully stocked first aid kit with you
- Ask that any dangerous, aggressive or unpredictable dogs or other animals are placed in a secure location during the visit
- Park your vehicle facing the road rather than a dead end as this will enable you to make a quick escape. Ensure vehicle keys can be accessed quickly and not placed at the bottom of a bag
- Park in a busy, well-lit area
- Avoid carrying valuables including expensive IT equipment
- During winter and colder months warm, waterproof clothing including gloves, hats and waterproof boots with non-slip soles should be worn
- During summer and warmer months wear lighter clothing with minimal skin exposure, sun hat and high factor sun cream
- During extremely hot days organise work activities so the hottest part of the day is spent out of the sun. Cats are likely to be sleeping or hiding away in the shade at these times anyway

## Releasing to site

All healthy, disease-free cats should be returned to their original site as soon as possible after surgery. This generally means that both males and female can be released 12–24 hours after surgery, but veterinary advice should be followed in individual cases where the release may have to be up to 48 hours after surgery. Any longer than this should be avoided if at all possible. Lactating queens where kittens have not been located should be returned at the earliest possible opportunity.

The door of the trap or carrier should be facing away from the trapper when the door is opened as the cat may bolt out. The cat should always be left to come out at their own pace. No attempts should be made to remove them manually.

## Relocation

Generally, trapping work should only go ahead if landowners or occupants agree in advance to have the cats back. It is vitally important that the cats are returned to the same site where they were trapped as this is their territory, where they feel most at home. Even if they are relocated they may try to get back to their original site.

Relocation of cats to another site should only be considered as an absolute last resort when all other options to enable the cats to stay in their original site are exhausted and the cats are no longer safe to remain where they are. Acceptable reasons for relocation may include the site is going to be demolished, the death of a caretaker with no one else nearby or willing to take on feeding responsibility, the cats are at risk of direct harm or at risk of being poisoned or dispatched by pest control companies. There may also be situations where cats have been taken into adoption centres but it has become clear that the cats are not suited to a domestic environment and would be better suited to living in an outdoor environment. In this case help may be sought to find suitable outdoor environments.

Cats relocated in a strange environment without proper management tend to leave the new site and may become distressed, injured or even starve. If landowners or occupants are not keen to have the cats back, explain to them about the vacuum effect ie if the resources to sustain a group of cats are still in the location, it is highly likely that other, non-neutered feral or stray cats will move into the area. It is preferable to have a controlled, managed, neutered colony of feral cats to prevent this. All it takes is for someone to start leaving food or an unsealed waste bag out for new cats



to appear again. If there is no alternative to relocation then an appropriate outdoor environment must be found. This needs to be found before trapping so once the cats have been neutered and they have recovered they can go directly from the vets to their new location. See information on page 38 on transportation to the vet.

### **Suitable relocation sites**

Any outdoor environment that has sufficient space, is safe and has places for the cats to shelter may be suitable.

- Farms/small holdings
- Stables
- Allotments
- Prison or hospital grounds
- Garden centres

### **Advertising for suitable sites**

Some trappers have been successful in finding places by advertising in the local press or on social media groups (such as Feral and Farm Cats UK) or approaching farmers, landowners and livery yards. Sometimes farm vet practices are willing to put flyers in with their accounts.

All feral cats being relocated must be tested for FIV/FelV, vaccinated, neutered, ear tipped and receive parasite treatment. They do not need to be microchipped. See the 'at the vet' section on page 49.

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## Assessing a site for feral relocation

When deciding what a suitable relocation site may be there are a number of points that should be considered by the new caretaker based on the welfare needs of feral cats.

## The need for a suitable environment

Unlike socialised cats feral cats require an environment where they can maintain a safe distance from people. They will require somewhere to shelter from the elements and sleeping/hiding places where they can feel safe and secure. They will also require a feeding station that is protected from the rain and heat where the cats can be fed at regular intervals. This is especially important during the initial relocation phase as providing a food source at regular times in the same area helps build routine and should encourage the cats not to move on. The cats will also require a suitable toileting area.

## The need for a suitable diet

Although some of the cats will still hunt they should be provided with a good quality cat food as well as fresh water. This is especially important during the winter months when hunting opportunities may be limited. At times there may be cats relocated from urban environments where they will have been fed regularly by someone in the community. It is unlikely that these cats could survive on hunting alone. The new caretaker should ensure that there are enough resources for all of the cats.

## The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

Confinement for any period of time is extremely stressful for feral cats and must be kept to an absolute minimum. When the cats have just been relocated they should be held in an outbuilding such as a stable or shed or large outdoor enclosure for around one week. Ideally the holding area should have a safety door to allow safe feeding and cleaning. The cats should never be confined to a crate during this time as this is just too small and would be contrary to their welfare. The cats should be monitored for stress during this time. The holding environment should be protected from the elements and somewhere that is away from noisy machinery and other animals. The caretaker should ensure that the cats have somewhere within the enclosure that is suitable for the cats to sleep and hide. The cats should be provided with regular food and water during this time as this helps the cats to see this new site as their territory. Once released the cats should still continue to be able to access their shelter quarters and be fed in the same area.

## The need to be with or apart from other animals

Ideally feral cats from different colonies should not be mixed and relocated to the same environment. Cats can be territorial and newcomers may or may not be accepted by the existing colony and so this should be avoided. Consideration should also be given to other animals that may already be living within this environment, in particular if there are free-ranging dogs.

## The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

The cats that we have relocated will be neutered, will have had their first vaccinations and will have been treated for parasites. Once relocated the new caretaker should consider how they will provide any ongoing care such as parasite control or veterinary treatment if needed. Re-trapping and transporting the cats to the vets should this be needed must be considered by the new caretaker prior to the cats being relocated.

Even if we have followed relocation best practice, in some cases a feral cat may decide to leave the new environment. If this should happen there is likely nothing that could have been done to prevent this and we just have to accept on occasion this may happen.

This information is available as a separate document in the TNR Resources Library on CatNav and can be used to help guide conversations with new caretakers.

## Cleaning and disinfecting the equipment

Good hygiene is vitally important for ensuring that both the cats and people are protected from the risk of infectious disease. All traps, carriers and other equipment must be cleaned and disinfected after use. Full PPE should be worn while doing this. The traps should be cleaned first with soapy water and a wire brush to remove all organic matter and then disinfected using bleach diluted 1:10 or another CP recommended disinfectant at the appropriate dilution. They should then be left to stand for 10 minutes before rinsing well. Checks should be made to ensure the trapping equipment is in working order and repairs completed if necessary before storing. Once done, store the trap door closed to prevent fatigue of the working parts.

Any brushes or mops must be cleaned and disinfected after use. Trappers should change their clothes, wash their hands thoroughly using antibacterial hand wash before handling their own cats/pets/food. The vehicle

used for transportation of the traps will also need to be cleaned and disinfected. For more information on cleaning see 'resources' section.

### Once trapping has finished

- It is important to remain engaged with cat caretakers and any cat advocates that have been generated through the community engagement and trapping work. This can be done by retaining a soft presence in the area or through social media, email and phone channels. This helps to have a more sustainable project as they can report new cats in the area or they may be prepared to trap or help them
- If resources allow, consideration should be given to proactively addressing the neighbouring sites, so that TNR is done in a systematic way

### Monitoring the colony

Ideally someone should monitor the cats after a TNR programme has taken place so that:

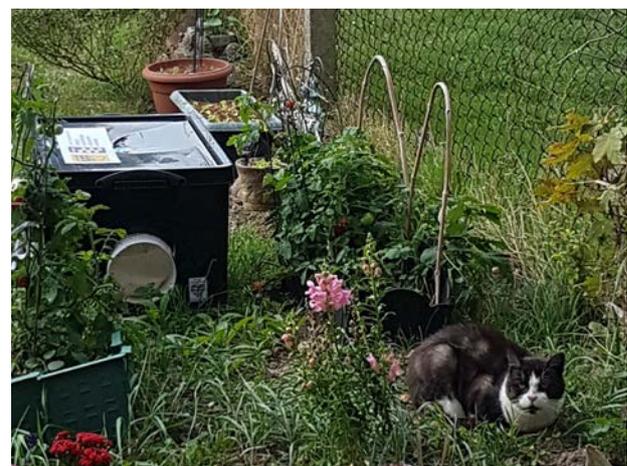
- any newcomers can be trapped and neutered, after checking they are not owned first
- the cats can be observed for health problems
- the numbers of cats can be noted to monitor the effectiveness of TNR programmes
- there is adequate supply of food provided if the cats cannot survive on hunting
- the cats have some outdoor shelter to ensure they are kept warm and dry and to improve the cats' health. Please remember that straw is the preferred material to help insulate outdoor shelters as other materials can absorb moisture. (see the 'resources' section on page 78 for more information on shelters)

Monitoring does not have to be done by Cats Protection employees or volunteers; it is ideal that the landowner, feeder or other local person monitors the colony. It is good to maintain links with them in case further assistance is needed and ensure the person monitoring has CP's number should they need it again.

### Feeding the colony after neutering

Many ferals are very good at looking after themselves through hunting and scavenging. It is not essential for someone to feed a colony to undertake TNR. However, it may be appropriate to supplement their feeding in some cases to keep them in good health and to encourage them to stay in the location – but there are several points to consider:

- never feed a feral colony unless a neutering programme is running concurrently. There is a close

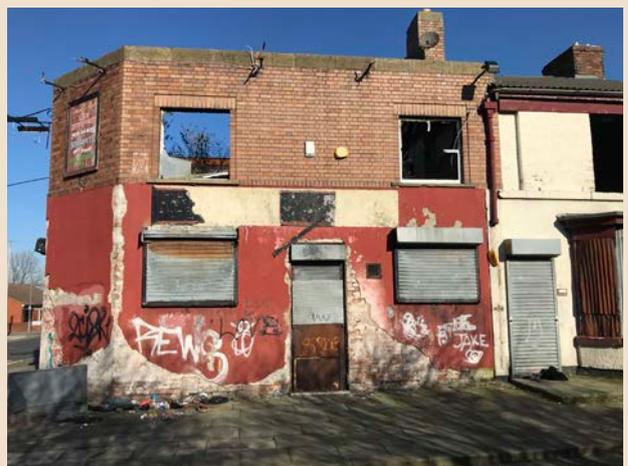


link between nutrition and reproduction in the cat, so feeding a colony will rapidly lead to an increase in numbers of viable kittens unless neutering is also carried out

- feed a balanced commercial diet
- do not over-feed the cats as obesity will affect the ability of a feral cat to climb and run, and therefore will affect their ability to survive (see more detail in the 'diet' section on page 14).

# CASE *study*

From the Community Neutering team



## Pre-trapping assessment

We were first alerted to this colony by a feeder who visited our information stand held at the local Asda. An initial site visit was done to capture as much information as possible regarding the cats including taking photographs. Body condition scores (BCS) were also recorded for all of the cats using the Purina body condition tool which describes how overweight or underweight the cat may be. This was done from a distance for the non-socialised cats. Overall cat condition and any concerns about individual cats were also noted.

The cats were residing in a burnt-out pub backing onto the alleyway behind the feeder's house; it wasn't safe to trap here as it had significant fire damage. We provided the feeder with shelters and explained how important a regular feeding pattern was.

A manual trap was also left at the site and the feeder was asked to start feeding the cats in it to begin the acclimatisation process.

We surveyed residents living on the feeder's street and the street behind to establish if there were other people feeding the cats. Before trapping started, we posted TNR information leaflets through each door with paper collars advising residents we were going to start trapping and if they owned pet cats to keep them in on the set dates or put a paper collar on them.

We also had discussions with the feeders regarding all potential outcomes for the cats to manage their expectations. We advised them that the cats would all be tested for FIV and FeLV and if the results were negative they would be neutered, vaccinated, given parasite treatment and be ear tipped. Any friendly cats would be considered for rehoming and the feeders gave their agreement.

## TNR

Regular communication was (and still is) maintained with the primary and secondary feeders and they were asked to withhold food the day before we started trapping. Females were targeted first and we gradually trapped all 11 feral cats living in the colony. Unfortunately, four of the cats tested positive for FIV and one for FIV and FeLV; these cats were all feral and had cat flu. One of the cats had an old fracture in his leg and so had to be euthanased.

Six of the cats tested negative for FIV/FeLV, three had mild flu and were treated with antibiotics and one was lactating but she was spayed early in the morning and returned to site the same day.

Four of the cats were very friendly so they were scanned for a microchip, paper collared for two weeks and advertised on lost and found sites before being taken in for rehoming.

## Post-trapping monitoring

The feeders regularly give us feedback on the cats' progress and we continue to make ad hoc site visits. Since the initial colony was trapped another two cats appeared who are now in the process of being trapped.

Cats are body condition scored on an ongoing basis to monitor progress.



# CASE *study*

From the Community Neutering team



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## Pre-trapping assessment

The team were contacted by a member of staff on a busy industrial site. He reported that there were numerous cats living under portacabins in one area of the site. There were also other cats living separately at different corners of the site.

The site itself housed lots of heavy machinery which was constantly on the move. There were lots of staff members who fed the cats and kept an eye on their welfare. Due to the ever increasing numbers, management on site were becoming concerned and were thinking of alternative options to get rid of the cats.

The cats appeared in good condition, with no immediate signs of injuries or obvious illness. Our two main staff contacts confirmed that they had rehomed a large number of kittens that were previously found on site.

Two members of staff were the direct contacts for our team and gave regular updates on the cats' condition. With them, we arranged to begin the TNR process.

As the area was a busy, working industrial site, the team all wore reflective clothing and appropriate PPE whenever on location.

## TNR

The team set traps in the area of the portacabins where a number of cats were staying. This area offered them the most regular feeders. Each individual cat could be more confident or very shy, so the confident cats were inevitably caught first. The team used a range of wet cat food as the cats were not fussy at all when it came to food.

One cat that had been TNRd very early on, was nicknamed Greedy Gonzales by the team because no matter what, he continued to eat all the trap food on a daily basis.

Using single manual traps and multi traps we could target specific cats who looked injured or pregnant. One cat had a limp but was very shy and particularly difficult to trap. Once finally trapped, they were health checked and given the all clear for TNR.

One of the staff members also used one of their own auto traps. Approximately seven kittens were rehomed by site staff during this TNR period.



25% of the colony were blood tested and fortunately all were negative for FIV and FeLV. During the process we had seven pregnant spays. At the end of the process, 25 adult cats were TNRd (five males and 20 females). Seven kittens were taken to the Nottingham (five) and Derby (two) adoption centres as they were young enough to socialise and rehome.

## Post-trapping monitoring

There is only one kitten left to TNR and the staff at the industrial site continue to feed all the cats and have contact details for our team should any new cats arrive.

The staff on site gave a huge donation of £500 to the team for all their hard work and care for the cats.

One of the staff members had previously removed approximately 70 kittens from the site for rehoming throughout his career there.

One staff member said: "This boy has become so friendly since he came back, he is all over me. All the cats seem really healthy and friendlier since being neutered."



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# Chapter five

## At the veterinary practice

This section is aimed at trappers undertaking TNR. Veterinary professional staff should refer to the chapter on feral cats in the *Cats Protection Veterinary Guide* or the 'For vets and nurses' section of the CP website [www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets](http://www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets) for further information.

### Working with vets

The veterinary practice is an integral part of any team working with feral cats and undertaking TNR projects. It is vital to build and maintain a good, long-term and mutually beneficial working relationship with a local practice that is happy and experienced enough working with feral cats to ensure TNR is run and managed effectively. The veterinary team needs to be flexible and have experience in the handling and welfare of ferals. Good communication is an integral part of this relationship and needs to be open and respectful on both sides. The common aim should always be borne in mind – the welfare of the feral cats.

Generally it is best to plan TNR in advance and discuss with the practice when and how many cats are likely to be trapped. Most vet practices are very busy with limited operating time slots and so they will appreciate being given as much notice as possible. It is worth bearing in mind that those practices that are treated considerately are more likely to help out with urgent cases.



### From trap site to veterinary practice

It is important to minimise the time that cats are confined in traps or baskets. Ideally they should have surgery either the same or the next day after trapping depending on the time they are caught. Generally it is best for the surgery to take place in the morning so the cats can be released later the same day if fit. Most practices tend to operate in the mornings routinely.

This means some cats will be caught in the afternoon or night before surgery and these cats may need to be kept in their traps or trap transfer restrainers (TTRs) overnight, either at the surgery or in a quiet room or outbuilding. Usually, the cats will have had enough water and food during the trapping process to safely sustain them prior to surgery. It is good practice to cover the traps or baskets with a large towel or purpose-made cover, being mindful to allow for appropriate ventilation. Keeping the cages in a quiet environment will help minimise stress for the trapped cats. Ideally the environmental temperature should be 15-26°C. If there are young kittens it should be at the higher end of this range.

### Confining in pens or cages at the veterinary practice

No attempt should be made to handle these animals manually unless they are anaesthetised for both the welfare of the cats and the health and safety of the handlers.

Generally feral cats should not be confined in pens or cages for longer than 24-48 hours in total and for the minimal time required for recovery after neutering. Cats' stress levels will be high throughout because of the ambient conditions in the average veterinary practice such as barking dogs, voices, unfamiliar smells, the radio etc.

Baskets or traps should be kept covered as above. In practical terms if a feral requires confinement for treatment for more than three to five days, euthanasia should be considered as a better welfare option.

### Anaesthetic agents and peri-operative pain relief

The bodyweight of each cat should be obtained as accurately as possible. To achieve this, all traps and cages used should be weighed prior to use and the weight of the empty trap/cage should be noted on a tag and attached to the trap/cage. Once a cat is inside the trap/cage, the cat and trap/cage are weighed and the weight of the trap/cage is subtracted from the total weight.

$(\text{Weight of cat} + \text{trap/cage}) - \text{trap/cage weight} = \text{weight of cat.}$



The cat is usually transferred from the trap to a trap transfer cage; this may have been done before the cat was brought to the practice. If not, this is a relatively straightforward process, but it's important to do so in an enclosed room, with the cage propped securely against a wall to stop it wobbling. The trap the cat is coming out from, or the cage that they're going into should be covered (the latter may be more successful as the cat goes to a 'hiding' area). Blowing on the cat will make them move quickly from one to the other – and works much better than prodding or shouting etc.

As the cats cannot be handled for anaesthesia, injectable agents must be used for induction ie to knock them out and render them unconscious. To do this safely a TTR must be used. This means the cat can be immobilised briefly and the vet can inject a combination of anaesthetic agents into the cat's muscle. Everything required should be ready in advance to reduce the time this process takes.

Once a general anaesthetic has been administered, it is essential to ensure the cat is kept in a quiet environment to allow induction (falling asleep) to occur, which usually happens within 10 minutes. It is best to cover the cage with a light blanket or towel, turn down the light and minimise noise. A further top-up of anaesthetic agents may be required in some cases if the cat is not sufficiently anaesthetised.

Once asleep, the cat can be carefully removed from the basket. Calm and gentle handling is helpful to further reduce any external stimuli.

Cats Protection recommends that female cats are intubated (have a tube placed in their windpipe) for neutering and maintained on oxygen gas. Males don't generally require intubation but it is good to have oxygen available via a mask if required. Once anaesthetised, feral cats should be monitored and kept warm exactly the same as any cat.

### General anaesthetic protocols

The vet undertaking the neutering procedure will select the combination of drugs that they deem most appropriate for each case. Generally for feral cats, one of the standard injectable combinations is used to reduce the risk of overdose with any one drug. It is rarely possible to get intravenous access (directly into a vein) in a conscious feral cat so the drugs are injected intramuscularly (into the muscle, often in the hind leg) as a single injection. The cat may be given an anaesthetic gas to maintain the required level of anaesthesia for surgery in addition to this. It is also ideal to use drugs that can be reversed so the cat wakes up more quickly.

Analgesia (pain relief) should also be given at the time of surgery to help the cat's recovery and ability to cope when returned to site. This is given as a separate, subcutaneous injection.

Information about suitable combinations is available for veterinary professionals in *The Veterinary Guide* and on the Cat-Kind at [www.cat-kind.org.uk](http://www.cat-kind.org.uk)

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## Health checks

Initially, a quick visual assessment can be made while the cat is in the trap or cage. It is always worth checking for collars or tattoos, as pet cats get trapped on occasion. A feral that has clearly been ear-tipped indicates that they have already been neutered and should be re-released on site, reducing any further stress.

All feral cats must receive a full examination, but this should only be performed under general anaesthesia (GA). This is essential for the welfare of the cat as they will find any physical contact, and in particular an examination, extremely stressful.

When a feral cat is anaesthetised for neutering, the opportunity should be taken to do as much for the cat as possible while the cat is asleep. It is important to check again for signs of ownership and to scan for a microchip. A thorough health check should be carried out by the vet before surgery commences, including an in-house blood test for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) if this is to be undertaken (see 'blood testing for FeLV and FIV' section).

The health check should include:

- checking all orifices for discharges
- examining the mouth to assess the teeth and look for lesions such as ulcers or tumours
- auscultating (listening with a stethoscope) the heart and lungs for abnormal sounds

- palpating (feeling) the abdomen to assess for pregnancy, lactation or any signs of illness eg masses
- examining the feet, ears and eyes for any wounds or discharges
- checking the coat and skin for parasites and lesions
- examining the limbs for obvious abnormalities
- checking the sex and in males ensuring both testicles are descended and present in the scrotum
- gently expressing the bladder while the cat is asleep; this will make surgery easier in female cats and will make recovery more comfortable as well

Decisions regarding the treatment of any obviously sick or injured cats should be made immediately, prior to neutering or recovery from GA. This includes euthanasia if required on welfare grounds. See the 'treatment of illness and injury' section on page 59 for more detail.

## Blood testing for FeLV and FIV

All feral cats that are sick or where the vet has suspicion of infection must be tested for FeLV and FIV under GA using in-house test kits. Ideally all feral cats should be tested, however if funds will be significantly stretched by doing this, or working in areas with very low levels of these diseases, it is advised that a sample of about 25% of a colony should be tested. If the test results are all negative, the rest of the colony does not need to be tested apart from any sick or injured ferals. If there are any positives, all cats should be tested.

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Test kits that can be used at the vet practice can be ordered through the CP wholesaler scheme. The blood sample should be taken and the test carried out immediately while the cat remains under GA. If positive for either FeLV or FIV, feral cats should be euthanased without confirmatory blood tests as they would have to be confined for a period of time that would be stressful and contrary to their welfare. By removing feral cats testing positive for these diseases from the population, a better overall disease control of the colony can be achieved and the individuals do not have to undergo significant periods of being unwell and dying without treatment.

### **Reproductive cycle in the queen**

Female cats or queens can come into season (also called 'oestrus' or 'heat') from four months of age, depending on the time of year and the overall health of the female cat. Daylight length plays an important role and affects the onset of sexual activity. Cats are seasonally polyoestrus, meaning that they come into season repeatedly unless they become pregnant. They generally start to come into heat at around February and cycles are usually two to three weeks and continue until days become shorter again in September to December in the Northern hemisphere.

Most pregnancies last 63-65 days and a queen can have up to three litters during the breeding season. She will come into season again two to three weeks after her kittens have been weaned at around eight weeks of age. This may occur sooner if she has a smaller litter. It is easy to see that cats are very effective breeders

and that even just a single entire breeding pair left in a colony can lead to continuous growth of the feral cat population.

### **Neutering**

Cats Protection advocates neutering for all feral cats. As the cats are unlikely to be given post-operative checks, an analgesic injection (pain relief) should be given to every cat and all skin sutures or stitches should be dissolvable. The administration of antibiotics at the time of surgery are usually not necessary but may be given in the form of a long-acting injection if the attending vet deems this necessary for clinical reasons on a case-by-case basis. All feral cats that are neutered should be ear-tipped (see page 57).

### **Age of neutering**

Queens usually hide their young kittens away and it is unlikely that very young, unweaned kittens will be trapped.

Most kittens will be fully weaned around the age of six to eight weeks. Generally feral kittens over the age of eight weeks should not be taken into Cats Protection's care and in the interest of welfare, should be trapped, neutered and returned to their colony, to prevent the stress of confinement and forced close exposure to people. It is contrary to their welfare to be 'tamed' or 'brought round' after this age.



There is a great deal of scientific evidence that shows that cats can be safely neutered from six weeks of age and that there are no short or long-term negative consequences to carrying out the procedure at this age.

While feral kittens brought into the home environment during the socialisation period can become socialised with people, it is worth bearing in mind that genetic influence from the parents, hormonal influence from the queen and learnt responses before coming into human contact will play a role in the friendliness of the kitten in adulthood. See the sections in chapter six on behaviour and kitten socialisation for more detail.

A list of vets who are experienced and competent in kitten neutering can be found on the Cats Protection sister website, the Kitten Neutering Database (KiND) [www.cat-kind.org.uk](http://www.cat-kind.org.uk) along with technical information for veterinary professionals wishing to undertake the procedure.

### General principles when neutering young patients:

- younger animals have immature immune systems, so it is best to neuter them earlier in the day before other operations to avoid cross-infections
- withhold food for three hours only before surgery, as kittens are more likely to become hypoglycaemic (have low blood sugar). Offer food early in recovery
- do not withhold water to avoid dehydration
- keep littermates together, including during recovery and reduce stress from noise, handling etc

- weigh kittens accurately and calculate doses based on body surface area (details of suitable anaesthetic protocols are available on KiND)
- prevent hypothermia (low body temperature) by not clipping or wetting excessively when preparing for surgery, maintaining a warm ambient temperature at all times and using heated pads or 'hot hands' (surgical gloves with warm water in them) as necessary. Care must be taken not to overheat them either
- express the bladder for improved visualisation during surgery and a more comfortable recovery

### Neutering a female – spay

An ovariohysterectomy (spay) involves the removal of the uterus (womb) and the ovaries. Spays can be performed either using a flank incision (on the side) or midline (underneath on the belly) and different vets will favour one or the other, often based on their training. CP's view is that feral queens should be spayed by the left flank approach, with dissolvable skin sutures (stitches) wherever possible. The flank or side approach offers slightly increased surgical efficiency, a smaller incision and reduced risk of evisceration (breakdown of the wound and abdominal contents spilling out). The flank approach is also ideal for lactating cats. The flank incision can also be easily monitored by the caretaker following release to the colony. Female cats with advanced pregnancy are more easily spayed via a midline approach (see 'pregnant spays' section).



Because cats are released back to their colony soon after surgery, incisions should be as small as possible. Some vets will apply tissue glue over the wound as well as sutures to give an extra layer of protection.

### **Pregnant spays**

Spaying pregnant queens can be an emotive and controversial topic. Most experienced feral cat workers feel that in balance, it is best to spay all pregnant feral cats for their own welfare and to control a colony's population more effectively. Being pregnant and raising a litter is physically draining for the queen. Considering that a queen can potentially get pregnant from four months of age and can have up to three litters per breeding season, successive pregnancies will take their toll on them.

Any confinement is extremely stressful for feral cats and given that once trapped they are unlikely to be trapped again, pregnant feral cats should be spayed as late in gestation as the vet feels is safe. It is not acceptable from a welfare point of view to keep them penned for several weeks while they give birth and then wean their kittens. Confinement for that period will be extremely stressful for the queen as well as the kittens. Even during pregnancy, any stress experienced by the queen will affect the kittens as well. It also poses an increased risk of infectious diseases, as the queen will not have been vaccinated and any stress experienced further suppresses her immune system. Some queens kill and even cannibalise their kittens if stressed.

If the vet feels it is not safe to neuter a pregnant queen she should be returned to site as soon as possible and be allowed to give birth out of confinement. This does mean however, that re-trapping of the queen is required at a later date, which will be much more difficult as the queen is likely to be trap-averse. It also means that any kittens will have to be trapped and neutered as well to prevent further pregnancies. Unfortunately, the queen may be in heat or pregnant again the next time she is trapped – it can be difficult to find a perfect window to get her spayed.

### **Neutering lactating (nursing) queens**

As mentioned above, there is a very small window where a queen will neither be pregnant, lactating or in season. If lactating she should be trapped, neutered and returned to site as quickly as possible. It has been shown that the feeding of kittens in a colony is a shared activity among queens, who are usually related females. This means that kittens left without their mother are unlikely to starve and kitten mortality has not been seen to increase where lactating queens are neutered. However, it is still best that lactating queens should be neutered via a flank incision and released as soon as possible after they have been trapped. If anaesthetic agents can be reversed this should be done. Appropriate analgesia needs to be given to ensure continued pain relief. Fluid therapy may be indicated in these cases at the vet's discretion. In contrast to bitches, spaying a cat does not prolong lactation so there is no need to wait until the kittens are weaned.

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### Female cats already neutered

Some trapped females may appear to have been neutered already. This highlights the importance of ear tipping, as this clearly signifies that a cat has indeed been neutered and should prevent the cat from being trapped in the first place and avoid her being anaesthetised unnecessarily.

Unfortunately, it does happen that a neutered female with an un-tipped ear is trapped. It is possible that this is an owned cat so it is wise to re-scan them. If no uterus is found, the wound should be closed and the cat woken up. If there was any sign of previous surgery (eg a faint spay wound on either the flank or midline), ear tipping should be carried out, provided the vet is certain the cat has been spayed and they are not thought to be an owned cat.

### Castration

During this procedure, both testicles are removed through incisions in the scrotum. Castration is a quick and easy procedure and it is not necessary to suture the scrotal wounds.

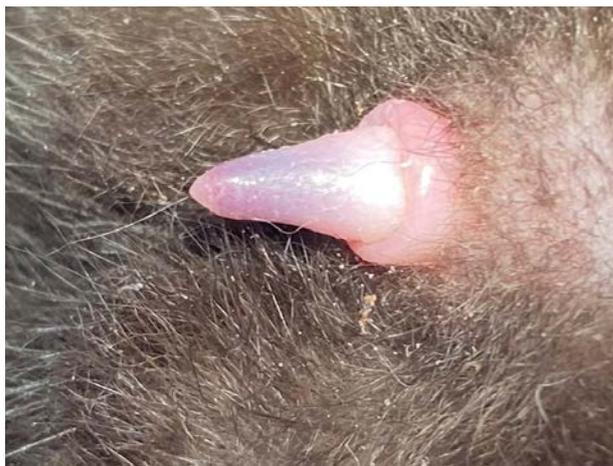
### Undescended testicles in male cats

This can be seen from time to time. A male can be a unilateral cryptorchid (only one testicle present in the scrotum, which is not uncommon), bilateral (neither one present) or anorchid, meaning the cat lacks testicles altogether (which is very rare).

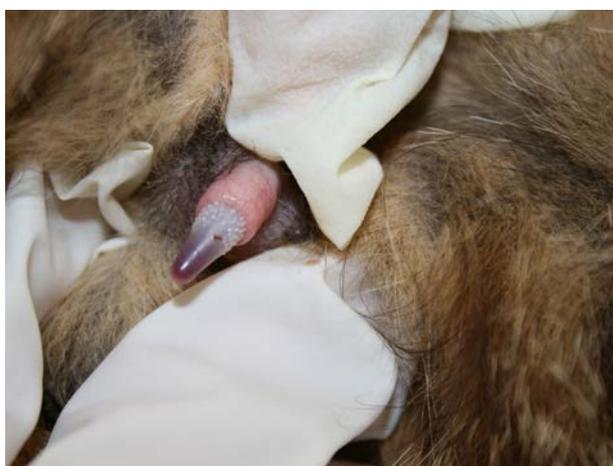
It may appear that bilateral cryptorchid or anorchid cats have already been neutered. Entire males or cats with any intact testicular material in their body will have spikey penile barbs due to the presence of the hormone testosterone. These can easily be seen on examination of the penis. The barbs usually develop at 12 weeks of age and are fully present by five to six months of age. Once a tom is neutered, they start to disappear within two weeks of neutering and are fully regressed six to eight weeks post-neutering. If the cat is cryptorchid and is in good health, exploratory surgery should be undertaken to find the missing testicle(s).

### Elderly cats

There is no reason why a healthy, older cat should not be trapped, neutered and returned safely. Fluid balance and potential side effects of certain drugs need to be carefully considered in these cases.



*Penis with no spines*



*Penis with spines*



### **Ear tipping**

All feral cats must be identified as neutered by 'ear tipping' to allow easy visual identification of neutered animals from a distance. This is performed under anaesthesia and entails the removal of a 10mm tip (5mm in small kittens) of the left ear with a straight and obviously surgical cut. Notches should be avoided as they might be hard to distinguish from tears that cats may have acquired from fighting. Ear tipping is legal and not classed as a mutilation in the UK and is an internationally recognised method of showing that the cat has been neutered.

If re-trapped, the cat can be released immediately rather than being anaesthetised again.

Ear tipping must be carried out on any feral cat neutered via a Cats Protection neutering grant or voucher as a condition of payment.

### **Microchipping**

Generally there is no benefit in microchipping feral cats as they are very difficult to scan and therefore it is a waste of charity money. All ferals should still be ear tipped, even if already microchipped.

### **Post-operative recovery**

In principle feral cats should not be confined to pens for prolonged periods. Feral cats should be allowed to recover in cleaned traps or TTRs, to avoid any extra handling. A warm, quiet room with low light levels is ideal, preferably at the vet practice as they shouldn't leave there until the vet is happy they are recovering well.

The cats will be groggy as they recover from anaesthesia and sometimes it can make them hypersensitive and overreact to normal stimulation or to become aggressive. The anaesthesia should have completely worn off after about four hours. There should be no signs of bleeding, vomiting, breathing difficulty or incomplete recovery from anaesthesia before leaving the vet practice. Depending on the timing of the surgery the cats may be taken from the vet practice to the release site on the same day or they may be kept in overnight either at the vet practice or at other quiet, warm accommodation. If the vets are unable to hold the cats then a shed or outhouse that is safe and quiet could be used to hold the cats for their recovery period. If the vets are unable to hold the cats and there is no suitable alternative then a different vet should be used or neutering should be carried out early enough to allow the cats to recover and to be released back at site. If they are staying in overnight it helps to place empty food and water bowls into the cage while the cat is still asleep. Once fully recovered, food can be placed into the bowl through the bars and a watering can may be used to fill up the water bowl.



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## Further routine veterinary care

### Parasite treatment

Feral cats are likely to be harbouring internal and external parasites such as ear mites, fleas, ticks, round and tapeworm. Sources of infection can include other animals, raw food, prey etc.

All feral cats should receive treatment for internal and external parasites while under general anaesthesia, using spot-on products as recommended by the Veterinary department. It is important to bear in mind that all such products will last for a maximum of one to three months. Where all-in-one topical treatment is unavailable or inadvisable, the vet will elect which alternative anti-parasitic may be most appropriate. Although treatment will only be for a limited time, it does help to improve the general health of the cat while recovering from surgery.

### Vaccination

Feral cats should receive a dose of the combined vaccine against feline parvovirus and cat flu (feline herpesvirus and calicivirus). There is no significant benefit to be gained by giving a FeLV vaccine. By vaccinating individual feral cats, the overall health of the colony will improve as the 'herd immunity' is increased. This will reduce the exposure of unvaccinated and susceptible cats to the infectious agents.

Although cats require two doses of vaccine to provide maximum cover, research shows that even a single dose can be protective, particularly against feline parvovirus. Although some vets avoid neutering and vaccinating at the same time, studies have shown that vaccination at the same time as neutering works effectively. It is therefore recommended that the first dose of the vaccine is given to a feral at neutering.



### Treatment of illness or injury

Once the cat is anaesthetised, they need to be assessed to determine whether or not they are suitable for neutering and to be returned to site or not. Minor conditions where a single treatment is feasible eg removing a loose tooth, cleaning a wound, treating a minor infection with long-acting antibiotic injections etc should be carried out under general anaesthesia. This should not compromise their ability to recover and thrive in their natural environment upon release. Treatments requiring repeated intervention or hospitalisation negatively affect feral cats' welfare. Veterinary advice should be sought on what is feasible and euthanasia should be considered for cats with conditions that cannot be resolved with one-off treatments. Treatments that will potentially handicap a cat such as limb amputation are not appropriate as this may affect the cat's ability to escape dangerous situations later.

For more information see 'treatment decisions for cats during community neutering' in the 'resources' section on page 78.

When considering treatment of any illness or injury, thought must be given to the following:

- aftercare required – keeping a feral cat in care for any time is stressful and the aim should always be to get the cat back to site within the shortest (safest) period of time. Also they will not tolerate dressings or head collars and are difficult to give repeated medications
- how an intervention will affect the ability of the cat to survive in their environment
- how this will affect the social status of the cat within a colony
- cost of treatment

### Conditions that can be treated at time of neutering

- Pyometra (infection of the uterus), provided the female cat appears to be well otherwise and there are no complications during surgery that would warrant prolonged aftercare
- Undescended testicles in males (cryptorchid/monorchid/anorchid)
- Umbilical hernias – females can be spayed via the midline and the hernia repaired at the same time. In males, larger hernias should be repaired
- Minor wounds, lacerations, cuts and abscesses
- Loose teeth can be removed
- Simple ear, eye or skin infections
- Simple lumps or growths can be removed

Other conditions requiring surgery may or may not be treated depending on the individual situation eg age, general health and temperament of the cat. It may be worth discussing this with the CP Veterinary team. Dissolvable sutures would have to be used and the cat would need to be kept in care for two to three days post-operatively.

- Tail amputation – if less than 60% of the tail has to be removed, this is feasible in some cases
- Ear tip – amputation in case of skin cancer (mostly white cats) can be considered

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### **Conditions where euthanasia should be performed on welfare grounds to reduce/prevent suffering**

- Malignant or large benign tumours
- Limb fractures, as amputations or fracture repairs require prolonged aftercare
- Soft tissue issues that would require major surgery, aftercare or prolonged treatment. The aim should always be to reduce the suffering for the affected cat
- Any cat unwell with an infectious disease eg cat flu or feline parvovirus – the risk of the animal not fully recovering post-neutering is increased and the affected cat will also be a source of infection for other cats in the colony
- Other serious clinical signs such as organ failure, emaciation, jaundice etc

### **Infectious diseases**

Many of the infectious diseases that affect pet cats can also be seen in feral cats. Diseases may even be more prevalent in a colony, due to cats living close together, being malnourished and an increased likelihood of fighting.

Diagnostic testing and treatment of feral cats for infectious diseases is often not practical. Infected cats act as a source of infection and the overall health of a feral cat population has to be taken into account and 'herd health' principles will need to be followed to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of cats over time. It is worth remembering that these diseases may also be passed on to pet cats in the local area, particularly those that have not been neutered and/or vaccinated.

Common infectious diseases found in the feral cat population in the UK include:

- cat flu – feline herpesvirus (FHV), feline calicivirus (FCV)
- feline parvovirus (FPV) aka feline enteritis or feline panleucopenia
- feline leukaemia virus (FeLV)
- feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)
- ringworm
- feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)

Outside the UK, the most significant infectious disease is rabies due to its zoonotic potential and this must be borne in mind if people are involved with TNR projects abroad.

Further information on these diseases is available on CatNav and in CP's veterinary guides.

In the majority of cases of these diseases euthanasia is the best option for the welfare of the individual and the protection of the rest of the colony. The exception is very mild cases of cat flu.

### **Release after neutering**

The timing of the release is dependent on practicalities such as current weather conditions, shelter available at the release location and veterinary advice for each individual case. Keeping feral cats in captivity for longer than recommended is not only stressful, but can also lead to reintegration issues when returning the cat to site. They may also refuse to eat, drink or toilet while being out of their usual territory.

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Both males and females should generally be released within 24 hours. Females may be held a little longer than males, depending on recovery and especially if they were pregnant or had a pyometra. Lactating queens where kittens have not been located should be returned at the earliest possible opportunity eg after 12 hours, provided the queen has recovered sufficiently.

Ideally, the cats should be returned to the same site where they were trapped as this is their territory.

Cats relocated in a strange environment without proper management tend to leave the new site and may become distressed, injured or even starve. See further details on relocation in chapter four.

## **Euthanasia**

As for other animals, the euthanasia of feral cats can be very emotive, especially with feeders and caretakers. It needs to be remembered that euthanasia means a 'good death' and its aim is to prevent present and future suffering of both the individual, but also the colony as a whole. However, it is important to discuss the possibility of some cats not being returned after TNR with relevant stakeholders to manage their expectations.

Feral cats do not receive regular veterinary care and as such any long-term or major illness cannot be treated, which will negatively impact that cat's welfare. Any infected cat can be a source of infection for other feral cats but also pet cats or even humans in the vicinity. Euthanasia must always be carried out by a vet and usually while the cat is under anaesthesia or sedation.

It has been shown that the social status of a cat within a colony depends on the cat's health. Hence, an ill cat's status will be affected negatively, particularly in males, which will lead to stress and possibly fighting.

It is helpful in these situations to have open discussions with the veterinary team to ensure that the best welfare outcome is achieved for every feral cat.



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# Chapter SIX

## Feral kittens

### **What should we do with them?**

One of the biggest conundrums in TNR is what to do with kittens. There is often the attitude that feral cats would be better off in conventional homes, rather than being free-living and this is even more so with young cats and kittens. Life can be very hard for feral cats but if they are neutered and monitored they can have a very good quality of life as they can fulfil their natural behaviours in a way that some pet cats can't. Certainly, for adult feral cats, confinement in a home is contrary to good welfare.

Mortality rates of young feral kittens can be high so there is a positive welfare benefit to socialising young kittens within their socialisation period. However, this is only positive if the socialisation is carried out thoroughly and if there are sufficient homes for the kittens. Doing partial socialisation leaves cats that are neither feral nor socialised and often prove to be a disappointment to their new owner if they can't be stroked or handled. In this case, they need to be found a suitable, mainly outdoor home such as a small holding or stable with an owner who understands they may want little close contact with people. If they are older than the socialisation period, they will not become suitable pets and so should be neutered and returned to their original site.

If there is an excess of kittens, with long average times to homing, the welfare of young cats may not be well served by being confined in pens for several months.

Whatever decision is made for each individual kitten, it should be based on trying to achieve the best welfare outcome, based on scientific evidence.

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### **The most important factors to consider are:**

How old are the kittens?

Are the kittens suitable candidates for socialising (eg genetic background etc)?

Are there sufficient people with the time, resources and skills to socialise kittens?

Are there local vets who will carry out kitten neutering sufficiently early?

Are there suitable homes available if kittens are socialised?

### **Estimating the age of kittens – physical and behavioural (including photos)**

When deciding what to do with kittens it is essential to be able to estimate their age. The aging chart on page 68 contains photographs of kittens at different ages including a guide on their size and weight, what they look like and what they are likely to be doing from a behavioural perspective. This will help to determine whether an individual kitten is likely to be weaned or not, within their socialisation period or beyond that.

### **Unweaned kittens**

Usually the queen will have hidden unweaned kittens away but they may come out once they are starting to become more mobile. It is preferable that unweaned kittens stay with their mother as she can meet their needs appropriately including providing species specific milk and antibodies. Sometimes it may appear that young kittens have been abandoned but often the queen is simply hunting for food so if the kittens are under six weeks they are best left where they are. Most colonies are made up of related females and there is often a degree of cross-suckling between the queens to ensure that the kittens are well looked after while each queen has a chance to hunt and eat for herself.

Hand rearing is challenging and second best from a cat's perspective so unweaned feral kittens should only be taken into care if it is certain they have been abandoned.

### **Early neutering – when should we do it?**

Early neutering or kitten neutering usually describes neutering before a cat reaches puberty which is from around four months of age. There is a lot of scientific evidence that it is safe to neuter cats at any time

after weaning ie from six weeks of age as long as the protocol is adjusted to account for their age and size. See 'age of neutering' section on page 53.

If kittens are trapped that are beyond their socialisation period they should be neutered and returned to site.

If they are between weaning and the end of the socialisation period, ie six to eight weeks, there is the option either to neuter and return them along with their mother and siblings or to socialise them if there is the capacity to do that.

### **Socialisation of feral kittens**

The socialisation period is the crucial period of time in a kitten's life between two and seven weeks of age when the kitten's brain and sensory system are still developing and the stimuli they encounter influence how this development occurs. As a species, the domestic cat does not have an inbuilt 'need' or requirement to be with or live with people. A cat's ability to tolerate the presence of contact with people and desire to seek out that contact is a learned behaviour developed during the socialisation period. If a cat is to be a confident, happy cat when homed, positive experiences and handling by a variety of different people during this time is essential. Socialisation enables a kitten to learn how to recognise, interact and bond with their own or other species, typically people, other cats and dogs which are common in the domestic home.

### **Should we socialise them? If so, at what age and how?**

The question of 'should we socialise them?' is fundamental when trying to make good cat welfare decisions, and it is important to consider all the relevant factors carefully and objectively. Please consult the Veterinary department and Behaviour team who can assist and advise. The onset of a fear response or hazard avoidance response in kittens is by six weeks of age. It is extremely difficult to socialise kittens that have had no human contact after they are weaned and almost impossible after they have reached sexual maturity. Socialisation is more likely to be successful if it begins at a younger age and before the onset of fear responses. Socialising feral kittens is much more resource intensive than socialising domestic pet kittens, and needs to be done carefully to avoid overwhelming or stimulus flooding the kitten, which can seriously compromise their welfare. While feral kittens under eight weeks of age that are brought into a home environment can become socialised with people, it is worth bearing in mind that both the



kitten's genetic influence from the parents (eg fearful parents are more likely to produce fearful kittens) and the kitten's learnt responses before coming into human contact will play a role in the friendliness of the kitten into adulthood. Therefore, feral kittens may not be genetically predisposed to form social bonds with people, and are more likely to have heightened fear responses. Equally feral queens should not be brought into rescue care as the prenatal stress the queen experiences will have an effect on the unborn kittens, making them more reactive to stimuli and have greater fear responses. Extreme stress can be a risk factor for the queen to injure or cannibalise the young, and the distress experienced by the queen should not be underestimated.

Poorly socialised kittens that are placed into the domestic environment as a pet can suffer ongoing stress due to their persistent fearfulness around people. Due consideration is needed as to whether the kitten is sufficiently socialised enough to cope with life in a domestic household. Insufficient socialisation to such a setting is not fair on the kitten or the new owners. Desensitisation programmes are not effective on cats that were poorly socialised as kittens. In this situation, the cats are best homed to an outdoor-style home, which can be very challenging if the cat has already been homed to an owner as a pet cat and is therefore no longer under the care of the charity.

Another consideration is the varying needs of the kittens at the point of rehoming and thinking about the variety of homes which may be needed. If the decision is taken to socialise kittens which are under eight weeks old, caregivers need to be mindful that even if all the kittens are socialised the same way, some kittens may become friendlier than others and best placed in a domestic home, while others may remain fearful (most likely due to their genetics and potentially having a different father to the friendly kittens). At the point of homing, kittens which are fearful at eight weeks old (despite undergoing a socialisation programme) should be placed in an outdoor-style home, such as a farm, stables, place with outbuildings etc. They will need somewhere with accessible shelter, and be provided with food and water, since they are used to a certain level of care while being with CP.

In the interest of welfare, it is best that feral kittens found at eight weeks old or over are trapped, neutered and returned to their colony or original territory as this is the environment that they are born into and familiar with.



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### Ensuring healthy kittens

Before beginning to socialise a litter, an understanding of feline infectious disease transmission and appropriate strict hygiene measures to counteract this are crucial in order to ensure good health and welfare as kittens are particularly vulnerable. In the rescue environment where there are commonly a large number of different litters, originating from a variety of sources and therefore unknown disease risk and carrier status, this is especially vital. Infectious disease control measures include consistently washing hands before and after handling sessions with an appropriate antibacterial skin disinfectant, wearing disposable personal protective equipment (PPE) such as disposable gloves, aprons and shoe covers to protect against transmission from fomites, ie clothing and footwear, and only handling one litter per handling session to prevent infectious disease spread between litters.

If a couple of feral queens have pooled their kittens together and are communally nursing them, then this would count as a single litter from a CP infectious disease perspective. However, feral kittens from completely different locations should not be mixed together due to the disease risks.

### How to socialise kittens

CP has a structured kitten socialisation programme developed by Dr Rachel Casey to address these challenges and prepare kittens with a variety of experiences they may encounter later in life. The programme introduces and repeats various stimuli throughout the socialisation period of the kitten, which is recorded on a chart. The socialisation chart is a brilliant tool with lots of tick boxes to ensure that a kitten is provided with the essential positive experiences in order to cope with life as an adult cat. Using one chart per litter can help to keep track, particularly where caregivers are looking after multiple litters. The socialisation experiences can be easily incorporated into day-to-day care for ease. For example, giving a kitten weight check could be a good opportunity to introduce the kitten to a cat carrier (to transport them to the weighing scales) and perform some basic health check handling such as touching ears and paws.

For more general information about kitten socialisation, please see *The Behaviour Guide*.

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It is important that handling of the kittens is positive, so the handler needs to respond promptly according to each individual kitten's reaction to socialisation experiences. Handling kittens that are showing signs of distress, such as crying or struggling, in the hope that they will get used to the experience, is in danger of 'flooding' them, which is poor for their welfare and likely to make negative associations with people. If the kitten is not responding well to socialisation efforts or is persistently fearful, then advice should be sought from the Behaviour team.

### **Whether to split feral kittens**

Splitting feral kittens into single kittens with the hope that they will come around quicker, is very likely to cause traumatic bonding. Not only is this frightening for the kittens involved, but it risks the kittens not being truly socialised. The kittens will be subjected to being socially dependent on people in the absence of escape or choice, and this can cause psychological suffering. Kittens may be showing learned helplessness rather than being socialised (even though they may appear tolerant of people). It is also possible that feral kittens may simply show some level of 'taming' (similar to a fox that is used to an individual that feeds them) without this behaviour generalising to being sociable with all people or being able to enjoy social bonds with people. Again, this does not produce a kitten that is suitable to live as a domestic pet and thrive. While there is an absence of scientific research on the subject in cats, the general consensus among cat welfare and behaviour experts is that splitting a litter of feral kittens into singles is not advisable due to the risk of traumatic bonding. Feral kittens should therefore remain with their littermates to improve their feline social learning, reduce their cortisol levels, improve their emotional and behavioural development, and therefore result in better welfare. If they need to be split, it should be done with careful consideration due to medical reasons.

Ultimately, more scientific research is needed to better inform husbandry decisions and policies regarding the approach towards feral cats, and any intervention. It is important for practices to be regularly reviewed in line with ever changing and expanding knowledge to ensure the best possible cat welfare, which is appropriate for that individual, as well as at a population and species

level. In order to help increase our understanding of the outcomes of feral kittens, long-term monitoring with robust criteria to review their welfare is needed.

For CP branches and centres, please contact the Behaviour team about specific cases if you need advice and support.

For more information, check out the CP website which includes our free kitten socialisation sounds and CP kitten socialisation chart –

**[www.cats.org.uk/kitten-socialisation](http://www.cats.org.uk/kitten-socialisation)**

Also look at the Kitten Checklist by The Cat Group and supported by many animal welfare organisations to help owners choose a healthy, friendly kitten –

**[www.cats.org.uk/media/3722/the-kitten-checklist.pdf](http://www.cats.org.uk/media/3722/the-kitten-checklist.pdf)**

# Kitten aging chart



## Characteristics

The kitten's eyes are closed, their ears are folded and they cannot stand.

The umbilical cord falls off by day three.

Kittens suckle from their mother every two hours.

Kittens are unable to toilet unless the queen licks the kitten's perineal area to stimulate toileting.

## Weight\*

100g

## Length\*\*

7 inches/18 cm

Age  
neonate



## Characteristics

Kittens are still relatively immobile.

Eyes are usually still closed.

Kittens still require the queen to lick the kitten's perineal area to stimulate toileting.

Kittens should have doubled their birth weight.

## Weight\*

200g

## Length\*\*

7 inches/18 cm

Kittens are approximately the length of a pen from nose to base of tail

Age  
one  
week



\*weight is breed-dependent and may vary by around 50g either side of the average weight stated here.

\*\*length is an approximate measurement and will vary between individuals.

Age  
two  
weeks



### Characteristics

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Eyes and ears open.

Deciduous (baby) teeth begin to appear between two and four weeks.

Kittens begin to walk although coordination is not yet well-developed. Kittens will start to play with siblings.

Kittens are still feeding from queen.

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| Weight* | Length** |
|---------|----------|
|---------|----------|

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300g

8 inches/20 cm

Age  
three  
weeks



### Characteristics

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Ears now point upwards.

Deciduous (baby) teeth begin to erupt.

Walking more confidently but coordination is still poorly developed.

Still suckling from the queen. Voluntary elimination of urine and faeces occurs.

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| Weight* | Length** |
|---------|----------|
|---------|----------|

---

400g

8.5 inches/22 cm

Age  
four  
weeks



### Characteristics

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Weaning begins. Kittens start trying to eat solid food.

Deciduous teeth continuing to erupt.

Start to interact with their litter mates. Four-week-old kittens will be confidently exploring and developing more coordination that allows them to walk, run, and even begin to play.

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| Weight* | Length** |
|---------|----------|
|---------|----------|

---

500g

9 inches/23 cm

## Characteristics

Eye colour begins to change from baby blue to the colour they will keep as adults.

Deciduous premolars erupt.

Kittens start to be able to right themselves, run, place feet precisely, avoid obstacles, stalk and pounce.

They start to groom themselves and others.

Kittens start to use a litter tray by themselves and show signs of trying to cover their waste.

**Weight\***      **Length\*\***

600g              9 inches/23 cm

Age  
five  
weeks



## Characteristics

Social play begins involving chasing, hiding and pouncing. Kittens can fully right themselves.

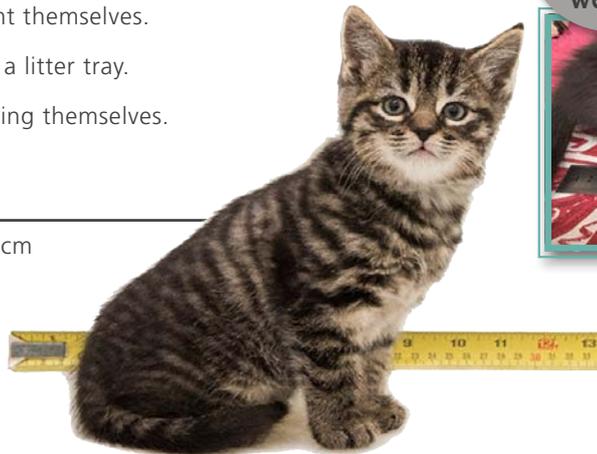
Kittens are still learning to use a litter tray.

Kittens are proficient at grooming themselves.

**Weight\***      **Length\*\***

700g              10 inches/25 cm

Age  
six  
weeks



## Characteristics

Weaning is usually complete at seven weeks and kittens should be eating solid food. Kittens are no longer dependent on their mother for milk but may still want to suckle from their mother.

Kittens' eyes will have completed the change from baby blue to the eye colour they will keep permanently. Kittens with grey, green or yellow eyes are likely seven weeks or older.

**Weight\***      **Length\*\***

800g              10 inches/25 cm

Age  
seven  
weeks



Age  
eight  
weeks



### Characteristics

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First core vaccination (for feline herpesvirus, feline parvovirus and feline calicivirus) can be given to the kitten depending on brand and vet.

| Weight* | Length** |
|---------|----------|
|---------|----------|

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|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| 900g | 11 inches/22 cm |
|------|-----------------|

Age  
10  
weeks



### Characteristics

---

The kitten will be a little bigger than last week, but not much. They now have all the physical and behavioural characteristics of an adult cat.

| Weight* | Length** |
|---------|----------|
|---------|----------|

---

|     |                 |
|-----|-----------------|
| 1kg | 11 inches/29 cm |
|-----|-----------------|

Age  
12  
weeks



### Characteristics

---

By this age kittens' limbs are growing steadily and they will have a 'leggy' appearance.

Kittens aged between 12 and 16 weeks will be reminiscent of human teenagers with their long, slightly disproportionate, limbs.

| Weight* | Length** |
|---------|----------|
|---------|----------|

---

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 1.3-1.5kg | 12 inches/30 cm |
|-----------|-----------------|

# Chapter seven

## Policies and guidelines

### General principles

CP believes that the most effective and humane way to help and control the feral cat population is by undertaking trap, neuter and return schemes wherever possible.

### Returning and re-siting cats

Cats are highly territorial and re-siting is stressful for them so they should be returned to their original site. However, if return to their original site is not feasible, they should be re-sited to other suitable outdoor sites such as farms or stables.

CP should not have feral enclosures as they result in poor cat welfare. These are fenced-off areas of rural land with small shelters in them where feral cats could be held on a temporary basis until a suitable permanent home could be found. However their use is problematic; several were developed at centres and branches but they have proved difficult to manage adequately and the welfare of the cats is compromised.

### Problems with enclosures:

- cats would need to be moved twice which is very stressful for them. In most cases they also have to be trapped twice, which is very challenging. They were also held in standard pens for three weeks while they were vaccinated
- the stocking density has to be low to avoid stress, disease transmission and fighting. Experience of the Bridgend feral garden showed around 80m<sup>2</sup> is needed per cat so only a limited number can be helped at any one time (18 in Bridgend's case) unless huge swathes of land are purchased
- they were intended to be temporary holding areas but sometimes cats were held in them long-term resulting in either overcrowding or a limited ability to help many cats

- 
- domestic cats with significant health and welfare issues that made them unhomeable eg incontinence, were kept permanently in some feral gardens
  - feral cats were mixed with ferals from other colonies which was stressful and lead to disease transmission and fighting

### **Working on a colony**

- Every cat in the colony must be neutered if at all possible, or at least every female
- Preparatory work must be carried out to estimate the size of the colony and assess the logistical issues for the individual situation
- Long-term monitoring of a colony is necessary to keep the population under control, by trapping any new arrivals
- Most feral cats will only be trapped once so it is important to do all necessary work at that time and to neuter if at all possible even if this means very early neutering or pregnant spays

### **Confining in pens or cages**

Adult feral cats should not be confined in pens for significant periods of time and attempts should not be made to try to 'tame' them. They must only be confined to pens or cages for the minimal time required for neutering or for minor health issues to be resolved due to the recognition that their welfare is severely compromised by confinement. In practical terms if a feral requires confinement for treatment for more than three to five days, euthanasia should be considered as a better welfare option.

### **Neutering procedure**

The procedure should be carried out using dissolvable sutures. Analgesia (pain relief) must be given to every cat at the time of surgery.

### **Release after neutering**

Cats should be confined for as short a period as possible once the vet is happy they are sufficiently recovered from the surgery. Generally, they should be re-released within 24 hours of surgery.

### **Pregnant spays**

As confinement is very stressful for feral cats and that once trapped, they are unlikely to be trapped again, pregnant cats should be spayed as late in gestation as the vet feels is safe and then released rather than penned for several weeks until the kittens are weaned. Only vets who will do pregnant spays should be used for feral work. If a pregnant female cannot be spayed for any reason she should be re-released rather than be confined until the kittens are weaned.

### **Age of neutering**

Kittens can be neutered safely from weaning so any feral cat or kitten over the age of six weeks can undergo TNR. If kittens over eight weeks of age have not had any socialisation, they must be neutered and returned to site.

### **Socialisation of feral kittens**

Older kittens and adult cats that are beyond the socialisation period and have had no handling by people will not become suitable domestic pets. It is highly stressful for them if attempts to socialise them are made and often necessitates 'flooding' which has profoundly negative effects on their welfare and therefore must not be done.

Conversely, if young kittens are handled during the socialisation period they may become suited to the domestic environment. Socialising these kittens is hard work and requires a lot of time, patience and knowledge. As young kittens are the most vulnerable to infectious disease and starvation, if located early enough and if sufficient effort is put into their socialisation programme they may have a better quality of life as domestic pets. If adequate resources are not available to commit to this fully they should be neutered and returned to site.

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NB Ideally kittens should be handled before the age of six weeks if they are to be socialised, as the onset of fear responses starts around this age. Eight weeks is the absolute maximum age that socialisation should begin. For further information about identifying the age of kittens see our kitten aging chart on page 68. There is also relevant information in *The Welfare Guide* and *The Behaviour Guide*.

### **Health checks**

All feral cats must only be examined fully under general anaesthesia (GA). This is essential for feline welfare and human health and safety reasons. When a feral is anaesthetised for neutering, the opportunity should be taken to do as much for the cat as possible and a thorough health check should be carried out by the vet prior to surgery. Other preventative or minor treatments should also be carried out while the cat is under GA.

### **Treatment of illness or injury**

Minor conditions where a single treatment is feasible eg removing a loose tooth, cleaning a wound, treating a minor infection with long-acting antibiotic injections etc should be carried out under GA. Involved treatments requiring repeated intervention or anaesthesia are not feasible and are contrary to the welfare interests of feral cats. Veterinary advice should be sought on what is feasible and euthanasia should be considered for cats with conditions that cannot be resolved with one-off treatment or where their ability to lead a normal free-living life is significantly compromised.

### **Parasite treatment**

All feral cats should receive treatment for internal and external parasites while under GA, using spot-on products as recommended by the Veterinary department.

### **Vaccination**

Although cats require a primary course of at least two doses of vaccine to provide optimal cover, research shows that there is some benefit in giving a single dose, particularly against feline parvovirus (FPV) and particularly in adult cats. Although undertaking neutering and vaccinating at the same time is not ideal, studies in the USA have shown that vaccination at the same time as neutering works effectively. It is therefore recommended that the first dose of the combined FPV/feline calicivirus (FCV)/feline herpesvirus (FHV) vaccine

is given to a feral at neutering. It is not recommended that a single dose of feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) vaccine is administered.

### **Blood testing for FeLV and FIV**

All feral cats that are sick or where the vet has suspicion of infection must be tested for FeLV and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Otherwise it is advised that about 25% of a colony should be tested as a representative sample. If they are all negative, the rest of the colony does not need to be tested. If there are any positives, all cats should be tested.

Feral cats should be blood tested under GA using in-house kits. The test should be carried out immediately while the cat remains under GA. If positive for either FeLV or FIV, feral cats should be euthanased without confirmatory blood tests as they would have to be confined for a period of time that would be stressful and contrary to their welfare.

### **Ear tipping**

All feral cats that are neutered must be ear tipped ie about 10mm should be removed with a straight cut from the tip of the left ear of adults (slightly less in kittens) at the time of surgery. This is an internationally recognised, visible method of showing that a feral cat has been neutered and will avoid cats being re-trapped or re-anaesthetised unnecessarily.

### **Euthanasia**

Euthanasia of a feral cat or kitten should be carried out where all other alternatives available significantly compromise the welfare of the cat. Euthanasia must be carried out by a vet.

### **Microchipping**

There is no benefit in microchipping a feral cat as they have to be trapped to be scanned so it should not be done.

### **Feeding**

Colonies of feral cats should not be fed unless there is a concurrent TNR programme in place as it increases their fecundity. Ideally colonies should be fed as part of an ongoing management programme but there is still benefit in undertaking TNR even if there are no feeders. Feral cats should not be over-fed as obesity is contrary to their welfare and after neutering their calorific requirements may decrease.



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# FAQs

## **Is there any TNR training offered?**

Yes, we have a structured TNR training programme in place where volunteers and employees can take part in our online face-to-face Cat Welfare Learning TNR workshops. Once the workshops have been completed then volunteers should spend time shadowing an experienced trapper to gain practical skills using different types of traps and trapping in different environments.

## **Where can I access all of the TNR related resources?**

We have created a TNR resource library where you can find most of the resources referred to in this guide. They can be found in the **TNR Resource Library on CatNav**.

## **Where can I purchase TNR equipment?**

We recommend buying TNR equipment from MDC Exports.

## **What can I do to help ensure I'm not trapping an owned cat?**

There are a number of things you can do to help identify whether a cat is owned. You can check for a microchip and put a paper collar on the cat if they are friendly enough. You can share pictures to local lost and found groups and you can also put up posters/deliver flyers in the local area to see if anyone can help identify the cat. Prior to carrying out TNR you should make the local community aware that you will be trapping on set days by posting leaflets through doors.

## **What if I trap and end up neutering an owned cat?**

A friendly cat should not be neutered immediately just because they were trapped. Efforts should be made to find an owner and then if they are a stray and we decide to take the cat in they should be admitted using the admissions process and be held for a week before neutering.

## **What if I trap a cat that turns out to be pregnant?**

At times it may be obvious that a cat is pregnant but at other times you may be unaware until the cat is at the vets under general anaesthetic. In both of these situations a pregnant spay is the best welfare outcome as long as the vet is happy to do so. Confining a feral to allow her to give birth is not an option as this would be extremely stressful for her. If the vet is unwilling to carry out a pregnant spay then the best option is for the queen to be returned to her environment straight away and then re-trapped once she has given birth and the kittens weaned. As the cat has already been trapped this will be more challenging to re-trap her. The vets that we work with for TNR should be on board with carrying out pregnant spays.

## **What if I trap a nursing queen?**

Lactating females can be spayed. They should be spayed on the flank and spayed as early as possible in the day to allow them to be returned as soon as possible to site.

## **What if the caretaker or feeder doesn't want the cats to be ear-tipped as part of the TNR process?**

All cats that we are TNRing must be ear-tipped. You can explain to the feeder/caretaker that ear-tipping is in the best welfare interests of the cat as it protects them from any future unnecessary veterinary intervention. Cats Protection will not pay for any cats to be TNRed if they are not ear-tipped.

## **I've trapped a cat as part of a TNR programme but I'm unsure as to whether they would be best suited to a domestic environment. What should I do?**

It is not always easy to identify straight away if a cat is feral or is possibly a long-term stray. If the cat's welfare needs are being met and the cat has caretakers/feeders and is healthy our advice would be if in doubt leave them out. The cat can be neutered and returned to site where the cat's behaviour can be monitored over time and if it's decided it's appropriate the cat can be taken into care at a later date.

## **I've taken a cat from a TNR job into care as they appeared friendly and I thought they may be suitable for rehoming but the cat isn't coping well in confinement.**

If this happens then it is absolutely fine to change your approach and to return the cat back to the original site. Unowned cats in urban areas may have had some level of positive human interaction and so may tolerate a degree of human contact. However, when placed in confinement whether that is in a pen or a foster home the cat may become stressed and unable to cope with being in that type of environment. In this case it is in the cat's best welfare to return the cat.

## **Health and safety**

### **Are risk assessments to be carried out going forwards even when COVID-19 is no longer an issue?**

The TNR risk assessment will stay in place and should always have been in place. Branch risk assessments were included in the total review of CP's health and safety documentation that was being undertaken by the Health & Safety team immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This review will continue when COVID-19 ceases to be an issue and assessments currently being put in place can, where appropriate, be adapted for 'normal' CP operations.

### **Who should record the risk assessments and where should they be kept?**

Someone who is familiar with carrying out risk assessments should complete them along with the person who will be carrying out TNR. The Volunteer Champions Programme (VCP), Volunteer Champions at Home and Volunteer Champions in Practice (VCiP) covers guidance and information on risk assessments so anyone who has completed either of these will be familiar with the risk assessment process. Where the person carrying out the assessment has no risk assessment training the

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completed risk assessment should be sent to the Health & Safety team to be signed off prior to trapping. A copy must be filed by the branch.

### **Who will decide who can carry out risk assessments and what if we don't feel confident in completing them? Can we get some training?**

Who carries out the risk assessment can be decided by the branch. The Health & Safety team will be available for additional support and guidance on risk assessments and plan to develop a bespoke risk assessment training module for the learn on line portal. Those of you who have completed the Volunteer Champions Programme (VCP) course will have access to the VCP modules in Learn Online portal where you will be able to complete a refresher module on risk assessments if needed. If you do need any additional support please do contact the Branch Support Unit (BSU) who will direct your enquiry to the relevant team.

See 'resources' section on page 78 for 'guidance on how to complete TNR risk assessments'.

### **Should we be referring TNR volunteers to the lone working policy ie advising that this activity shouldn't be done alone?**

Yes, we do advise that TNR is an activity that should not be done alone but in pairs if possible. If you do TNR alone then make sure you are following our buddy system mentioned in the risk assessment where someone else knows where you are going and when you will be back.

### **Can volunteers use their own vehicles for TNR?**

It is preferable to use a CP vehicle (van) for TNR purposes but if a private vehicle is used the seats should be covered with a plastic sheet that can be easily cleaned and the carrier must be secured using the seatbelt or other fixed strap in case of an accident.

## **TNR in Scotland and Nature Scot licence requirements**

### **Why do we need a licence for TNR from Nature Scot (formerly known as Scottish Natural Heritage)?**

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, amended in Scotland by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 states that it is an offence to release any non-native species in Scotland without a licence. Cats as a non-native species fall under this Act.

Nature Scot are trying to do all they can to protect the Scottish wildcat which is of course native to Scotland and so this requires Cats Protection to apply for a licence which we have done and this permits us to release feral cats as part of the TNR process.

### **Why are other rescues able to TNR without a licence from Nature Scot?**

Anyone carrying out TNR in Scotland is required to have a licence and it is their own responsibility to apply for this.

### **What happens if we don't comply with the conditions of the Nature Scot licence?**

If we fail to comply with the conditions of the licence then Cats Protection will lose this licence meaning that we will be unable to carry out any TNR in Scotland. We do appreciate that this is extra work for you, but it is important that we comply with licence conditions so that we are not breaking the law and risking our permissions to TNR in Scotland being taken away.

### **What type of cats fall under the conditions of the Nature Scot licence?**

Under the conditions of the licence it is cats that do not have a landowner or caretaker assuming responsibility for them.

### **If it's only cats without a landowner or caretaker then why do we need to record all cats TNRed?**

We need to record all cats TNRed in Scotland so we can then send this information back to Nature Scot to show that we are complying with the conditions of their licence. For the purposes of our licence Nature Scot wanted to make a distinction between owned and non-owned cats but, as we know, in reality the distinction is as much about behaviour and circumstance as it is about ownership. Nature Scot were then happy for us to treat farm and community cats as 'owned' cats and so we didn't have to report releases of this type of cat.

However, when we didn't submit any returns Nature Scot then challenged us as they were concerned that we may be categorising all cats as owned cats to avoid having to do the reporting. Therefore, the best way to ensure compliance with the terms of the licence is to ensure we record all TNR releases.

### **Can we let members of the public borrow our traps?**

Under the conditions of our licence only Cats Protection volunteers and employees can carry out TNR in Scotland.

### **How often should we be submitting our records of TNR activity?**

These should be submitted to Katie.Fisher@cats.org.uk on a monthly basis at the end of each month.

### **Where can I find a copy of the Nature Scot licence should I need it to prove I am legally allowed to TNR?**

You can obtain a copy of the licence should you require it by contacting your Branch Development Manager (BDM) or your Cat Welfare Manager.

### **Where can I find the coordinates of the sites where I am carrying out TNR?**

You can find the coordinates by visting either of these links:

<https://osg.scot/>

<https://gridreferencefinder.com/>

# Chapter eight

## Resources

The following section has information on many useful documents and resources that can be used to support your TNR activities through different stages of the process.

These resources can be found on our TNR Resource Library page on CatNav or through the online addresses provided.



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# More useful resources

## Chapter one

- Ferals 'Our future direction' webinar

LOCATION: [TNR Resource Library/CatNav](#)

## Chapter two

- Help! I found a cat
- Feral cats a Cats Protection Essential Guide

LOCATION: [TNR Resource Library/CatNav](#)

## Chapter three

- Cats Protection *Behaviour Guide*

LOCATION: [TNR Resource Library/CatNav](#)

## Chapter four

- TNR Risk Assessment (including video)
- Cat Log Sheet
- Colony information form
- Photo flyer for reported strays
- Attention residents form
- TNR 'Thank you' letters for residents
- Purina body scoring tool
- Make your own outdoor shelter
- Assessing a site as being suitable for feral relocation
- Paper collars (Warehouse)
- Paper collars to print
- Cat bite guidance
- Cat bites and scratches card
- Voucher guidance (including video)
- Community neutering trapping videos - how to set, bait and use automatic and manual traps, transferring cats with a restrainer-container (trap transfer cage), trapping on site plus trapping tips
- Cats Protection approved feral shelters

LOCATION: [TNR Resource Library/CatNav](#)

WEBSITE: [www.cosycages.com](http://www.cosycages.com)

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## Chapter five

- How to manage feral cats – best practice
- Treatment decisions

**LOCATION:** [TNR Resource Library/CatNav](#)

- Kitten Neutering database
- Cat Population Control Group (CPCG) summary of evidence
- Early neutering principles

**WEBSITE:** [www.cat-kind.org.uk](http://www.cat-kind.org.uk)

## Chapter six

- Kitten aging chart

### Cats Protection guides and resources

- Cats Protection *Behaviour Guide*
- Cats Protection *Welfare Guide*
- Cats Protection *Vet Guide*
- Cats Protection *Cat Care Guide*
- Cats Protection Cat Watch report
- Branch Neutering Toolkit
- Cats Protection Community Neutering report

**LOCATION:** [TNR Resource Library/CatNav](#)

## Useful contacts

- [Branchneutering@cats.org.uk](mailto:Branchneutering@cats.org.uk)
- [Veterinary@cats.org.uk](mailto:Veterinary@cats.org.uk)
- [Behaviour@cats.org.uk](mailto:Behaviour@cats.org.uk)
- MDC Exports [www.mdexports.co.uk](http://www.mdexports.co.uk)

## Resources for members of the public

- Lending traps to members of the public (not permitted in Scotland due to Nature Scot licensing requirements)
- Instructions for setting and using a humane cat trap

**LOCATION:** [TNR Resource Library/CatNav](#)

- Trapping feral cats 2021 – a guide to the equipment and resources available

**LOCATION:** [TNR Resource Library/CatNav](#)

- Trap, neuter and return video

**LOCATION:** [Cats Protection YouTube](#)

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# Treatment decisions for cats during community neutering

This document should help with decision making around the treatment of cats brought in for neutering by the Community Neutering teams, however the decision-making process is relevant to any cat brought in for trap, neuter and return (TNR). Make sure you and your vet are aware of the contents of this document, but also our extensive protocols and information in our *Veterinary Guide* found at: [www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-protocols-and-resources](http://www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-protocols-and-resources)

Following this guidance should make those calls from your vet when a cat is under anaesthetic easier to answer. If you are still uncertain about the best way forward for a cat please contact the Veterinary department.

## Points to check ahead of general anaesthetic

Being prepared and knowing how you would likely proceed if something were to come up while a cat is under general anaesthetic (GA) will help make that decision much easier.

- ✓ My vet is aware of Cats Protection's veterinary policies and procedures and our information about feral cats in the Cats Protection *Veterinary Guide*
- ✓ I have established how well socialised this cat is. This is the most important thing to establish and will be crucial in decision making later on.
  - If this cat has not been socialised with people and is feral they will find confinement extremely stressful. We would not confine feral cats for longer than three to five days as an absolute maximum
  - Stray cats have been socialised to humans and would be coming into Cats Protection's care but the Cats Protection stray policy must be followed
- Community cats can vary in their level of socialisation; some are truly feral whereas others may have had some degree of socialisation and may be comfortable only with those individuals that provide food on a regular basis. Others may fall under the category of 'stray' and are abandoned, fully-socialised pet cats. Depending on the category of cat they should be treated accordingly
- ✓ Have you checked for a microchip?
- ✓ What is the cat's feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)/ feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) status? – this will in most cases be checked once under GA – ensure your vet is aware of the protocols in place and the results will be important in decision making

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## Community cats

When making treatment decisions about cats in the community there are many factors to consider, the most important consideration being the level of human socialisation. Community cats are free-living outside and not attached to a particular household or owner. They may receive some care, often in the form of feeding, but it is common for them not to be provided with vet care. There may be a feeling that the cat belongs to the community and members of that community may be very attached to them, however community cats vary in their level of socialisation and many are only comfortable around their caretakers or feeders; community cats will often sit in the feral category. Ahead of neutering a community cat it is worth doing some fact finding both about the cat and what members of the community caring for them would be happy to do. This would include:

- is this cat feral, a friendly stray or do they sit somewhere in between in terms of socialisation to people?

Would the community be happy for this to occur? If the cat cannot have their needs met and the cat was suited to a home environment then the cat would be taken into care if appropriate
  - is the cat being regularly fed? Will the treatment affect the cat's chance of survival? If the cat is relying on hunting to get food then making decisions such as leg amputation or eye enucleation would not be appropriate. Although some community cats may have a feeder they would still be affected by operations such as enucleations or leg amputations and these would need careful consideration
  - would members of the community be able to give the cat oral medication if needed and get close enough to check for wounds etc? Establishing caregivers' level of participation in treating any medical conditions (along with assessment of how well the cat will cope with them) is important ahead of time. If caregivers are able to give oral medication, and bring the cat back into the vets for regular check-ups the range of treatment options is far greater. If the community don't feel giving medication is feasible, is there another option the vet can suggest? If not consider bringing into care if there would be a good prognosis in a home environment or euthanasia
  - does the cat visit any homes, would it be possible to house them somewhere for a short period during recovery?
  - does the cat live with other cats? This is important to consider if there is evidence of infectious disease that may spread throughout the community
  - there may be some disease conditions that a cat will not cope well with if they are living a life out on the streets – for example allergic skin disease, osteoarthritis. In these cases if the cat is well socialised then the best thing for their welfare may be for them to come into care and be homed.
- questions often come up about dentistry. While it is hard to make set rules as there will always be individual variation, things to consider include:
    - how many extractions is the vet recommending? Multiple extractions and treatment of significant gingivostomatitis will not be suitable for cats returning to life on the streets (although might be reasonable if the cat can come into care)
    - how easy will it be for the cat to eat? If a few teeth from one side of the mouth are removed the cat is likely to still be able to chew on the other side, however if the vet is suggesting the removal of teeth all through the mouth this may impact on the cat's ability to eat and thus survive
    - will the cat still be able to hunt and defend themselves? If the cat is left without their upper canines (the large sharp teeth either side of their incisors) hunting and fighting ability will be limited, so again should only be considered if cats would be suitable to come into care
    - how long does the vet think the procedure will take? Costs for dental work do vary, but we wouldn't expect a community cat to have dental work that would take longer than about half an hour under general anaesthetic

## Socialised cats we are bringing into care (stray cats)

Cats that are stray will have been socialised with people, and will generally approach people for reasons other than food. If these cats are brought into care, confining them for further treatment and diagnostics is not contrary to their welfare in the way it would be for feral cats. When dealing with a stray cat it is always vital we follow the CP stray policy. If a vet calls about a condition picked up under anaesthetic with a stray cat, things to consider are:

- have we checked for a microchip and are we following the CP stray policy?
- does the condition fit within one of CP's veterinary procedures? If so follow the instructions for treatment in this document
- what does the vet feel the likely long-term prognosis is? If likely to be very poor then euthanasia is recommended

Some examples of conditions we'd be happy to treat are listed below, but in general reflect the conditions we would treat for any CP cat in care (there would be no difference between treatments for stray or relinquished cats).

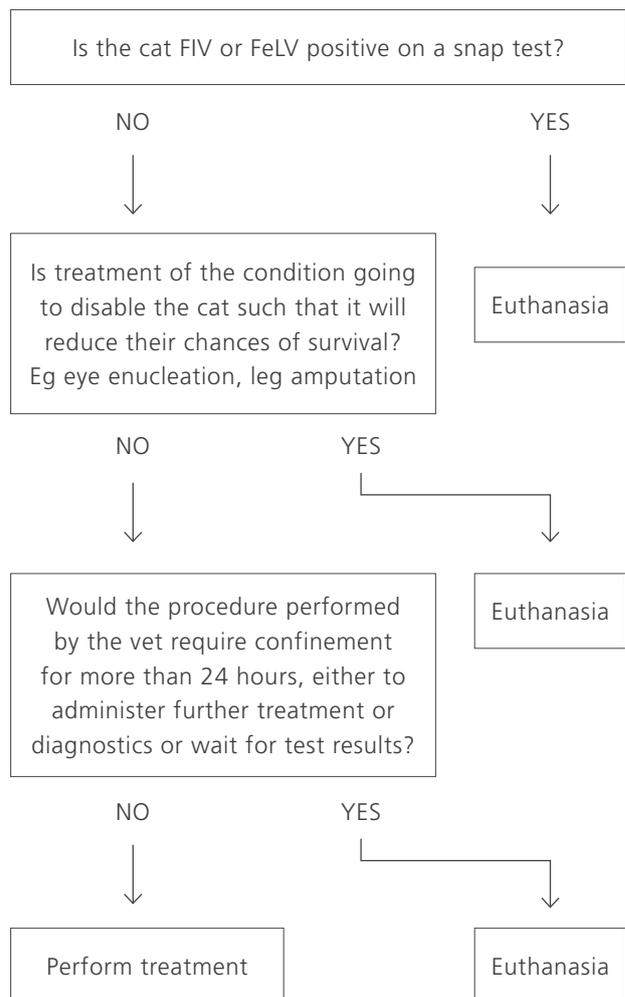
- Dentistry (including the treatment of gingivostomatitis)
- Removal of masses from the skin with histopathology
- Leg amputation
- Skin work-ups
- Enucleations

Procedures that carry a poorer prognosis and we would be unlikely to recommend include:

- investigation of abdominal/thoracic masses
- treatment of conditions likely to be symptomatic of FIV/FelV in cats that test positive on a snap test

## Feral cats

Feral cats have not received sufficient interaction with humans in the crucial socialisation period as kittens (between two to seven to eight weeks) and subsequently will find being around humans and confinement extremely stressful. Confinement beyond 24 hours will be significantly detrimental to their welfare: this underpins the decision making for treatment of all feral cats. If a vet picks up a condition under general anaesthetic the following decision tree should be followed.



Examples of conditions treated in feral cats

- Minor dental work – eg a few extractions. Dental treatment for cats where dental disease is very severe or gingivostomatitis is present is not recommended (euthanase in these circumstances)
- Treatment of minor wounds/abscesses by cleaning and giving injectable medication (may be followed up with oral medication in food if feeder present)



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# Assessing a site as being suitable for feral relocation

There are a number of considerations when assessing a site as being suitable for feral relocation. This information should support you in making a decision as to whether a site is suitable and can be used to guide you in conversations with the new caretaker. This has been developed based on the welfare needs of feral cats.

Even if we have followed relocation best practice, in some cases a feral cat may decide to leave the new environment. If this should happen there is likely nothing that could have been done to prevent this and we just have to accept on occasion this may happen.

The need for a suitable environment

Unlike socialised cats, feral cats require an environment where they can maintain a safe distance from people. They will require somewhere to shelter from the elements and sleeping/hiding places where they can feel safe and secure. They will also require a feeding station that is protected from the rain and heat where the cats can be fed at regular intervals. This is especially important during the initial relocation phase as providing a food source at regular times in the same area helps build routine and should encourage the cats not to move on. The cats will also require a suitable toileting area.

The need for a suitable diet

Although feral cats will hunt they will still require to be fed regularly with good quality cat food. This will be particularly important during the winter months when hunting opportunities will be limited. Some cats that have needed to be relocated may have come from an urban environment where they will have been fed and it is unlikely these cats would survive on hunting alone. The new caretaker should ensure there are enough resources for all of the cats.

The need to be with or apart from other animals

Ideally feral cats from different colonies should not be mixed and relocated to the same environment. Newcomers may or may not be accepted by the existing colony and so this should be avoided. Consideration should also be given to other animals that may already be living within this environment, in particular if there are free-ranging dogs.



The need to exhibit normal behaviours

Confinement for any period of time is extremely stressful for feral cats and must be kept to an absolute minimum. When the cats have just been relocated they should be held in an outbuilding such as a stable or shed or large outdoor enclosure for around one week. Ideally the holding area should have a safety door to allow safe feeding and cleaning. The cats should never be confined to a crate during this time as this is just too small and would be contrary to their welfare. The cats should be monitored for stress during this time. The holding environment should be protected from the elements and somewhere that is away from noisy machinery and other animals. The caretaker should ensure that the cats have somewhere within the enclosure that provides a suitable area for the cats to sleep and hide. The cats should be provided with regular food and water during this time as this helps the cats to see this new site as their territory. Once released the cats should still continue to be able to access their shelter quarters and be fed in the same area.

The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

The cats that we have relocated will be neutered, will have had their first vaccination and will have been treated for parasites. Once relocated the new caretaker should consider how they will provide any ongoing care such as parasite control or veterinary treatment if needed. Re-trapping and transporting the cats to the vets should this be needed must be considered by the new caretaker prior to the cats being relocated.

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Thank you for taking the time  
to read through this guide.

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