

TNR Reality Check

UNCOVER THE DECEPTION...

Read this to clear up what is promulgated by Alley Cat Allies and other TNR advocates.

Alley Cat Allies is correct in stating that a stray cat is not a feral cat. Feral cats are unsocialized, however, *many adult ferals can be socialized given time and patience*. Four thousand years of domestication are not lost simply because a particular cat has not had human interaction.

True feral cats probably will be euthanized at most shelters, but again, they can be socialized for adoption in a foster care setting. We say euthanized and not killed not to coin a euphemism, but because there truly is a difference. While the end result is the same – death – *the process by which death comes is very different between TNR and a cat brought to a shelter*. A painless injection is a far kinder fate than returning a domestic companion animal to the wild to live a mediocre to miserable life and to die a tragic death. These cats typically do not die of old age. Instead they are mauled by fan belts, crushed by cars, ravaged by disease, abused by people, attacked by dogs and coyotes or other wild animals, and succumb to harsh weather extremes. These outcomes are tragic and violent and synonymous to killing. Euthanasia is compassionate.

There is not a “critical window” for taming young kittens. Many TNR advocates arbitrarily designate that after 8, 10 or 12 weeks (depending on the organization) kittens must be released to the colony – *destined to live and die outside*. Older kittens can successfully be tamed often effortlessly. At some point this process will become harder, but the time frame is different for every single animal.

The statement that feral cats have about the same lifespan and contract disease at about the same rate as pet cats or owned cats is **completely misleading**. The comparison should NOT be between feral cats and pet or owned cats. The comparison should be made between feral cats (who live outdoors) and pet or owned cats that are permitted to roam freely and may spend most of their time outdoors. Of course any cat that is outside is exposed to many dangers. But, 35% of pet owners keep their cats exclusively indoors and there is a remarkable difference in the health and longevity of indoor versus outdoor cats. All cats whether pet, stray or feral are domestic companion animals and their home is **not** outside.

To say that feral cats are not the cause of wildlife depletion is also terribly misleading! Free-roaming cats whether feral and part of a colony (managed or not), stray cats, and pet cats permitted to run at large *all negatively impact native wildlife*. Free-roaming cats are a cause of wildlife mortality. While habitat loss is the primary challenge native wildlife faces, cat predation is a significant factor as well. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women. *Shall we ignore breast cancer since this does not rank as number one?* Also, the creation and utilization of man-made structures or pesticides usually undergoes a scientific review process. *There are no environmental impact studies done before a particular cat colony is supported or maintained*. Not to mention that releasing a non-native predator into the environment is just one more way humans degrade habitat and place a further strain on wildlife, in addition to pesticides, pollution, etc.

Trap and Remove has been proven to work when the artificial food source is removed and/or corrected, unlike TNR. We never seem to hear of colonies that exist no more. Those cats that remain untrapped are artificially sustained and better able to breed, therefore colonies tend to grow in size. Migrants join the colonies, cats are dumped at colonies, and TNR participants are known to relocate cats from one colony to another existing colony. The colonies do not die out – TNR is based on *perpetual colony maintenance*. The “vacuum effect” as applied to feral cats is also misleading. Wild animals do move in to fill an ecological niche. Feral cats are not wild animals and only congregate due to the artificial food source.

Trap-Neuter-Return (Trap-Neuter-Release) has **not** been proven to reduce the number of feral cats and eventually to eliminate colonies through natural attrition. While a particular cat that is altered is no longer able to breed this does **not** have an effect on the overall population because TNR is practiced in an open system. Some annoying behaviors may lessen after altering, however, any free-roaming cat (altered or not) is still capable of killing wildlife, defecating in children’s sandboxes and gardens, scratching lawn furniture and cars, etc. These cats usually do not receive regular veterinary care and are difficult to re-trap. Vaccinations expire and they are at risk to spread disease again. In larger colonies not every cat is guaranteed food and water daily. No safety net is created and the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians has stated that, “There is no evidence that colony management programs will reduce diseases”.

