

Fallacy or Reality?

Claim: TNR saves taxpayers money. Currently, there is a significant cost to towns because of the large number of feral cats clogging the shelter system.

This is not necessarily true. Some towns have voted to legalize TNR, under the impression that TNR will save them money, but this may not be the case as animal control officers (ACOs) still must be paid for time and travel to cat colonies. They may have to go multiple times rather than once to remove the cats. Also, the sale of dog tags and other fees provides services for dogs *and* cats in shelters. Cats are essentially “getting a free ride” because most municipalities do not require cat licensing and registration. Cat licensing is a way to generate income and promotes responsible ownership of companion animals.

Claim: Scientific studies grossly exaggerate the estimated number of deaths of wild animals by domestic cats.

Actually, even the most conservative estimates are in the millions nationwide. Extrapolations are acceptable as long as representative samples are utilized. Studies may underestimate the actual number of deaths, not taking into account prey completely consumed, prey killed elsewhere, and prey that escaped but died later from injuries. Just what level of predation is acceptable? How many wild creatures should die as a result of outdoor cats?

Claim: Cats will defend their territory and not allow new cats into the colony.

This is untrue. A number of scientific studies have proven this. Dr. Carol Haspell, who studied cats in Brooklyn, NY, found that, “cats occupying a certain area do not keep others out, particularly if there is a feeder.” In a study of managed cat colonies at Texas A & M, Dr. Sara Ash discovered that the feeding stations attracted new cats, including pets, and the original colony members did not defend their territory. Researchers from the Universities of Milan and Claude Bernard studied 81 cats at a public square in Rome, and concluded that, “abundant food led to high local densities of feral domestic cats and the disappearance of individual territories.” Furthermore, colony caretakers often relocate cats from one colony to another.

Claim: Many TNR advocates state that Trap and Remove does not work due to “the vacuum effect”.

Trap and Remove (whether cats are euthanized, socialized/adopted, or given sanctuary) has been proven to work when the artificial food source is removed. For TNR to work a very high number of cats must be trapped, there should be no migrants into the colony, and no addition of new cats through abandonment. This simply does not happen. TNR has been around for at least 15 years and we never hear about colonies that exist no more due to natural attrition. Often TNR advocates will claim that Trap and Remove will not work because of a so-called “vacuum effect” since not every cat can be trapped. In the wild, animals do move in to fill a niche; however, the only reason domestic cats are congregating is due to an artificial food source (a cat feeder or an improperly secured garbage dumpster). If the food source is removed, the cats will disperse and no longer congregate. Kind-hearted folks may want to feed these cats, but they are only exacerbating the problem.

Claim: Having a caregiver who regularly feeds the cats and knows their habits can significantly reduce their impact on wildlife.

False. Regularly well-fed cats are NO less motivated to hunt. The hunting instinct is separate from the urge to eat. This has been scientifically proven and well-documented. The *habit* of the domestic cat is to hunt. Any outdoor cat is a threat to wildlife – day or night year-round. Colony caregivers are not supervising the cats 24/7 and may not even be able to account for every cat, especially in the larger colonies. In fact, some caretakers simply drop off food and leave the site. Some ordinances require caretakers to observe the cats at least twice per week, but there is no minimum allotted time required.

For more information: www.TNRrealitycheck.com & www.abcbirds.org/cats