

Project TNR
NJ's Humane Solution for Feral Cats



Post Office Box 174
Englishtown, NJ 07726
Phone: 732-446-6808
Web: ProjectTNR.com

What is TNR?

Trap-Neuter-Return, commonly referred to as “TNR”, is the only method proven to be effective, humane and cost-effective in controlling feral cat population growth. Using this technique, all the feral cats in a colony are trapped, neutered and then returned to their territory where caregivers provide them with regular food and shelter. Young kittens who can still be socialized, as well as friendly adults, are placed in foster care and eventually adopted out to good homes.

TNR has many advantages. It immediately stabilizes the size of the colony by eliminating new litters. The nuisance behavior often associated with feral cats is dramatically reduced including the yowling and fighting that come with mating activity and the odor of unneutered males spraying to mark their territory.

Another significant advantage to TNR is that, when practiced on a large scale, it lessens the number of kittens and cats flowing into local shelters. This results in lower euthanasia rates and the increased adoption of cats already in the shelters. For example, in San Francisco, after TNR had been widely implemented for six years, euthanasia rates for all cats, feral and domestic, declined by 71 percent. San Diego, after several years of TNR, also experienced substantially lower euthanasia rates.

In contrast to TNR, doing nothing, trap and remove or feeding bans have resulted in the current crisis where, in New Jersey, the feral cat population is likely to approximate 400,000 cats in summer and 200,000 cats in the winter.¹ Trying to “rescue” the cats and find them all homes is utopian and unattainable given their numbers and the futility of trying to socialize most of them. Trap and kill, the traditional technique exercised by animal control, is simply ineffective. If all the cats are not caught, then the ones left behind over breed until the former population level is reached. Even if all the cats are removed, new unneutered cats tend to move in to take advantage of whatever food source there was, and the cycle starts again. This explains why more and more animal control agencies are willing to try TNR.

Finally, TNR is an idea whose time has come. It recognizes there is a new balance in our urban and rural landscape, one that includes feral cats. It seeks to manage this new population with enlightened techniques that allow the cats to live out their lives and fulfill their natures, while minimizing any possible negative impact. TNR is a movement that will continue to grow as more and more people see its potential and, in time, it will become the predominant method of feral cat population control.

¹ New Jersey Animal Welfare Task Force Report, November 2004, Pg 70



Post Office Box 174
Englishtown, NJ 07726
Phone: 732-446-6808
Web: ProjectTNR.com

Who is a Feral Cat?

A "feral" cat is one who has reverted in some degree to a wild state. They originate from former domestic cats who were lost or abandoned and then learned to live outdoors in environments involving little human contact, such as warehouses, factories or abandoned buildings. In most cases, feral cats are not completely wild because they still depend on people for their food source, whether it's a caregiver who comes by once or twice a day, a dumpster outside a restaurant, garbage cans, or the like. Relatively few feral cats subsist only by hunting.

To what degree a feral cat is wild depends on several factors. Foremost, is the age of the cat; young kittens are more capable of being socialized and successfully re-introduced to domestic life than a feral adult. Another factor is what generation feral is the cat. A kitten born outdoors to a mother who was herself formerly domestic is likely to socialize easier than one born to a mother who is seventh generation feral.

The extent of daily human contact also plays an important role in determining how wild a cat will be. If cats have regular interaction with people, such as in a community garden, they will tend to be friendlier and more approachable than if they live in a back alley where people rarely venture. Finally, there's the wild card factor, which is the particular cat's personality. It's not unheard of for someone to tame an older, multi-generational feral who has been largely isolated from people, but this is the exception.

It's important to recognize that if a cat is truly feral, then the most compassionate choice might be to allow them to live outdoors. Trying to domesticate them would be no different than trying to make a squirrel or a raccoon a household companion - you might succeed somewhat, but never fully and only with a great deal of time and patience. Moreover, you would not be permitting the animal to live in a manner that suits him best. Many well-meaning people, convinced they are "saving" a feral cat by bringing him indoors, end up condemning the poor creature to a life of hiding under the bed and being in constant fear.



Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) respects a feral cat's wild state. The neutering of ferals prevents tremendous suffering and shields the cats from the hostility their behavior might otherwise draw from human neighbors. But the return of them to their own territory and the providing of adequate food and shelter gives them the opportunity to live among their own, to be free and to answer to their own unique natures.



Post Office Box 174
Englishtown, NJ 07726
Phone: 732-446-6808
Web: ProjectTNR.com

Managing a Feral Cat Colony – The Steps

Information supplied by Neighborhood Cats, www.NeighborhoodCats.org

So you've decided you want to help the colony of feral cats in your neighborhood. What do you do? In our experience, the process of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) offers the greatest chance of success both for you and the cats. TNR is the most humane and effective method available to end feral cat overpopulation. TNR involves trapping the cats in a colony, getting them spay/neutered, vaccinated for rabies and marked for identification, then returning the ferals to their territory. A caregiver provides food and shelter and monitors for any newcomers or other problems.

At its essence, TNR is not about rescuing cats, it's about population control and permanently reducing the number of feral cats in an area. It's not about getting a wonderful cat a great home, it's about lowering stray intake and euthanasia rates, reducing costs for animal control, and creating better, less hostile environments for the cats. In addition, spay/neuter of the cats eliminates common nuisance behaviors such as yowling and foul odor, and vaccinating them for rabies also provides a public health benefit.

1) Educate Yourself

First thing you should do is learn all you can about TNR. "The Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook" and instructional video are available from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) at www.asPCA.org/tnrkit. This packet contains the basics of TNR and the best practices. More extensive information can be obtained by visiting www.ProjectTNR.com, www.NeighborhoodCats.org and www.AlleyCat.org.

If you're interested in learning about practicing TNR on a large scale throughout your community, order "Implementing a Community Trap-Neuter-Return Program", authored by Bryan Kortis, Executive Director of Neighborhood Cats and published by The Humane Society of the United States see (www.humanesociety.org/feralcats).

2) Build Good Community Relations

In tackling your feral cat colony it is of paramount importance that you build good community relations. Unless the cats live in some remote setting, you must take their human neighbors into account and try to build positive, harmonious relations. A supportive, cooperative community will make your work considerably easier, while a hostile or uninvolved one will make it far more difficult.

3) Set Up Feeding Stations and Shelters

There are many benefits to beginning to manage the colony as soon as possible. Start by setting up a feeding station. By arranging a regular feeding schedule, you will train the cats to show up at a certain place at a certain time, and you'll be able to withhold food and get them hungry when you want. This will make trapping much easier. Improving the cats' nutrition by improving the quality of their food will better prepare them for the stress of trapping and neutering. Adequate shelter also promotes their health and assists in locating them.

4) Secure an adequate holding space for trapping and neutering

Depending on the size of the colony, trapping all the cats may take two or three days. A space is needed to hold the cats as the colony is being trapped, and for them to recover in for at least 48 hours following surgery. While they are confined, the cats remain in their traps – the traps are cleaned and the cats fed preferably twice a day. To learn how to do this safely, read [Caring for Cats Held in Traps*](#) below.

It's best to keep them in a secure holding space, protected from the elements and heated in cold weather. It could be a basement, a garage, an extra room, or a terrace using a tarpaulin, tent or lean-to. One word of warning, during warmer seasons fleas can be a concern in indoor holding spaces. To minimize the risk of infestation, keep the traps covered with light cloths and either flea bomb or vacuum thoroughly afterwards.

5) Decide what to do with kittens and friendly adults

It is important to decide what to do with kittens and friendly adults before you start trapping when you still have time to prepare. Ideally, adoptable cats and kittens will be removed from the colony and placed in good homes. Decide before you catch them who is going to do the fostering and how you'll go about adopting them. You can, for example, work with a traditional rescue group. If fostering or adopting resources are simply not available, don't let that stop you from getting the cats neutered and halting the reproduction cycle. You'll have accomplished a great deal of good by that alone.

6) Arrange for spay/neuter

You'll need to find a clinic or individual veterinarian, preferably one who will give you a discount off the regular rates, and set a date to spay/neuter the cats. For a listing of veterinarians who participate in the state's low-cost Animal Population Control Program, call 1-800-123-4567 or visit www.SpayNJ.com.

7) Trapping

Trapping is the last step. Too often, well-meaning people trap first and think about what to do with the cats later. That's a recipe for disaster (we know, we've tried it!) To ensure the long-term success of your project, and to minimize the problems you will need to deal with, you should ensure that everything else is in place before you put the tuna into the first trap. This is true whether you're trapping one cat at a time, or the entire colony. For the how-to's of trapping, see the enclosed [Humane Trapping Instructions for Feral Cats](#).

Enjoy!

A few days after being released, the cats will return to their usual routines and you to yours. Although caring for feral cats is an ongoing effort, and the dangers they face are ever present, there is a strong sense of satisfaction in knowing you've prevented a great deal of suffering and have given the cats a better chance to live in a way that suits them and is acceptable to your community.

***Caring for Cats Held in Traps**

During the trapping period and following surgery, the cats will be held in their traps - they should never be let out except while at the vet and when they're being returned to their colony. We have encountered resistance at times from well-meaning people, including animal welfare professionals, who believe it's cruel to leave a cat in a trap for more than 48 hours. Our experience is quite the contrary. Feral cats don't act like domestics. Whether they're in a large cage or a trap, they will tend to remain still in one place. They also prefer to be in tighter rather than wide open enclosures - apparently, they feel more secure. As long as the trap is long enough (at least 36 inches) for them to huddle at one end and eat at the other, and the trap is kept covered with a thin sheet, they will be fine.

The instructions here are written with multiple cats in mind, but equally apply if you're dealing with one or two cats.

Materials needed

- Traps large enough to double as cages (preferably 36" long) and with rear doors (a must!)
- Trap dividers (at least two), sometimes called trap isolators - they look like small pitchforks.
- Newspaper
- Water dishes, small with flat bottoms
- Food dishes, small
- Cotton sheets (for trap covers)
- Towels, small
- Plastic ground cloth or tarp
- Long craft tables (optional)

Preparing the holding space

Spread the plastic ground cloth or tarp on the ground. This will protect any urine or other waste from getting on the floor. If you have tables, put them on the ground cloth - using tables to rest the traps on makes it easier to clean and feed, as opposed to having to bend down to the floor. If you use tables, cover them with plastic. Place the traps several inches apart either on the ground or on the table, each one covered with a sheet. Have the rear and front doors of all the traps facing the same way.



Trap dividers keep the cat at one end while you feed and clean at the other

The holding space itself should be secure, dry, quiet and warm. (*NOTE: In the hours after surgery, a cat's body temperature will drop, so the recovery space during this time MUST be warm. Do not place post-surgery cats in a cold room.*)

Cleaning and feeding

1) Use the trap dividers to isolate the cat on one end of the trap. You do this by lowering one divider through the bars of the trap from above, then by lowering a second divider right behind it, also from above. We highly recommend you use two trap dividers until you're very comfortable with the process and know each cat. We've seen aggressive cats push aside the tongs of a single divider that wasn't perfectly inserted and escape, especially soon after they were trapped and were still wired. If you want to be even extra-safe, lower one divider from the top and insert the second one horizontally through the trap from the side.

You can get the cat to move from one end of the trap to the other usually by uncovering the sheet on the end you want to work on. The cat will seek cover at the other end. Occasionally, you might have to poke him or give the trap a little shake to get him to move.

2) While the cat is isolated on one end (we recommend the trap door end), line the bottom with newspaper and put in the small towel. The cats like lying on it, especially when it's up against the slanted trap door.

3) Go to the other end of the trap and isolate the cat against the end you just worked on. Again, line the bottom of the trap on the other end with newspaper. This will serve as "litter." If you try to use regular litter in a pan, the cat will just trash it and create even more of a mess. At the rear door end of the trap, put in the food and water in their dishes. It's best to work on the trap door end first and the rear door end last. That way, there's no chance the cat will end up sitting in the food and water after you've just put it in. (*NOTE: NO FOOD OR WATER AFTER 10 P.M. THE NIGHT BEFORE SURGERY.*)

4) Ideally, repeat this process twice a day. This will keep the traps relatively clean and the cats calm. Don't try to be perfect - the space will probably end up smelling, but when the cats are released, you just roll up all the plastic, throw it away and the smell will dissipate. While the cats are being neutered, you can replace the ground cloth with a fresh one.

Humane Trapping of Feral Cats

Trapping feral cats in order to have them sterilized and vaccinated is the first and most important step in a humane, nonlethal management plan for the feral cats that you feed. While trapping may seem intimidating, following the steps Alley Cat Allies (ACA) has provided will help make your efforts successful.

Before You Trap

We recommend that you establish a routine feeding schedule. Feed the cats at the same time and place each day for at least one week prior to trapping.

You should assess the cat(s) you are trying to trap. Determine if some cats are tame (friendly) and can be adopted into homes. Decide how you will handle kittens you trap. Use the ACA tracking sheet to give each cat in the colony a name and document his or her features. This information will help you with the veterinary records as you begin your Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program.

Create a sign stating "Rescue in Progress (Do Not Remove)" and attach a copy to each trap. Insert the sign into a plastic freezer bag or other protective cover before placing it on the trap so that it will be readable even in wet weather.

WITHHOLD FOOD

You must withhold all food from the cats you intend to trap 24 hours before trapping. This will ensure that the cats are hungry enough to enter the traps. Also, surgery will be easier on the cats if they have not eaten for 24 hours.

SUPPLIES

In order to trap effectively you will need the following:

- One humane box trap per cat. You will be more successful if you trap as many cats as possible in the first trapping session. You may space out your traps by using a specially designed wire-sided transfer cage, designed to fit with a humane box trap, so that there is no risk of the cat escaping as she moves into the transfer cage;
- A can of tuna in oil, sardines in oil, mackerel, or other enticing bait;
- Newspaper to line the bottom of each trap;
- A large towel or cloth for each trap or transfer cage, large enough to cover the entire trap on all sides. Before a cat has been trapped, cover the trap's top and sides. This will calm the cat and lessen the risk of injury once it is inside the trap;
- Lids or small containers to hold bait (optional). You may also put bait directly in the trap or on the newspaper;
- Flashlight. If you are trapping early in the morning or late at night, you will need the flashlight to identify the cats you have caught;
- Pens or pencils and cage slips for each cat, and masking tape to attach cage slips to each trap;
- Tracking sheet to ID cats and to record information;
- Spoons or a scoop for the bait, and a can opener if you need one;
- Extra cat food and clean water to leave after you trap for any cats you have already TNR'ed or were unable to trap this time;
- Tools such as pliers, a pocketknife, and some WD-40 for traps that might not work properly. Always check traps prior to arriving at the trapping site;
- Hand sanitizer, jug of water, and gloves for your protection.

While this may be hard, particularly if the cats appear hungry, remember you are doing what is best for them. Continue to provide the cats with clean, fresh drinking water.

Start Trapping

To begin, prepare the traps near your vehicle or away from the trapping site. Place the trap on a flat surface as you bait and set it. Do this so that if a trap does not work properly or goes off too easily it will not scare off the cats.

Unlatch the rear door and take it off so you can get your hands inside the trap. Be sure to relock the rear door before trapping. If your trap does not have a rear door, secure the front door open with a twist tie so that it won't keep falling shut while you work.

If you use newspaper, fold it lengthwise and place it inside the bottom of the trap to disguise the wires on the bottom of the trap. Do not use newspaper if it is windy.

Place approximately one tablespoon of bait along the very back of the trap. You can use a lid or container for this if you wish. Now drizzle some juice from the bait along the trap toward the entrance in a zigzag pattern. Place about one-quarter teaspoon of bait in the middle of the trap floor on the trip-plate, and one-quarter teaspoon about six inches inside the front of the trap. The cat will move his or her paws while trying to get the zigzagged bait, thus springing the trap. It is important not to leave too much bait in the front or middle; this may satisfy the cat and she will leave without setting off the trap.

Now take the traps to the trapping site, near the feeding area. Place the trap on the ground and make certain it is stable and will not rock or tip.

If you are using multiple traps, stagger them and place them facing in different directions. Try to think like a cat and place the trap where it will be tempting. Move quietly and slowly, and try to remain relaxed so your movements will not frighten cats away.

SPECIAL TRAPPING TIPS

If certain cats will not go into the traps, try feeding them in unset traps for several days before trapping. Feed the cats in the same place and time as always. Wire the doors to the traps open and place the food inside. The cats will see other cats eating inside the traps and will likely try it themselves. Once they become accustomed to the traps they will be easier to trap.

If you are still unable to trap a cat or if the cat has learned how to steal bait without springing the trap, consider using a drop-trap instead. Alley Cat Allies has instructions available on how to build and use a drop-trap to catch an obstinate feral cat.

Set and cover the traps. Leave the area quietly. The cats are unlikely to enter the traps if you are standing nearby. You may want to go sit in your car or take a walk for a while. If you are trapping in your yard, you can go inside.

Traps should never be left unattended for more than two hours under any circumstances. It is preferable to quietly check the traps frequently from a distance. You do not want to leave a cat in the trap for too long. Also, traps may be stolen, damaged, or set off. Someone who does not understand your intentions may release a trapped cat.

Trapping a feral cat may take some time. Be patient. It may take the cat a few minutes to go into the trap. Make sure the trap is sprung, and the cat securely trapped, before you approach the trap. If you come out too soon you may frighten the cat away.

After Trapping

After the cat has been caught, cover the entire trap with a towel or cloth before moving it. Covering the traps will help to keep the cats calm. It is normal for the cat to thrash around inside the trap. It is very tempting to release him but he will not hurt

BENEFITS OF STERILIZING THE STRAY AND FERAL CATS YOU FEED

- Decrease the overall population of feral cats by stopping the birth of more kittens.
- Decrease mating behavior, like yowling, roaming, and spraying urine, which may cause complaints.
- Decrease the risk of certain types of cancer for cats in your colony.
- Improve the overall health of the feral cats in your colony. Sterilized cats live longer, healthier lives.
- Maintain medical records for your cats, proving they are healthy and vaccinated.
- Stop the tragedy of kitten mortality.

himself if the trap is covered. If a cat has already hurt himself, do not release him. Most injuries from traps are very minor, such as a bruised nose, scratched paw pad, or bloody nose. The cat will calm down once the trap is covered.

If you trap a severely injured or sick cat, rush him or her to the veterinary clinic.

Once you have trapped as many cats as you can, transport them in the traps to the veterinary hospital. If you need to hold the cats overnight, keep them in their traps and make sure they are dry and warm. They can stay in a basement or isolated room if the weather is poor. It is possible for a cat to die from hypothermia when confined in a trap outside in cold weather. A simple guideline—if it is too cold outside for you, then it is too cold for the cats. Do not leave cats in traps exposed to excessive heat or sun.

After surgery, allow the cat to recover overnight in the same trap, still covered. Usually the veterinarian's staff will replace any soiled newspaper in the bottom of the trap with fresh newspaper. If they do not do this, ask them to. Fresh newspaper will make the cats more comfortable during recovery.

Female cats usually need to be held for 24 to 48 hours after surgery. Male cats can be returned to the trapping site 12 to 24 hours following surgery as long as they are fully awake and do not require further medical attention. Make sure all cats are fully conscious and alert before release.

If a cat needs further care (longer than 48 hours), you will need to transfer her to a holding pen or cat playpen.

Release the cat in the same place you trapped him or her. Open the front door of the trap and pull back the cover. If the trap has a rear door, pull the door up and off, pull off the cover, then walk away. Do not be concerned if the cat hesitates a few moments before leaving. He is simply reorienting himself to his surroundings. It is not uncommon for a cat to stay away for a few days after release; he will return eventually. Keep leaving food and water out; he may eat when you are not around.

Never release a cat into a new area. If the cat needs to be relocated, please use Alley Cat Allies' factsheet "Relocation: Guidelines for Safe Relocation of Feral Cats." Relocating a cat without the proper steps can endanger the cat's life. She will try to return to her old home and may become lost or attempt to cross major roads. Also, feral cats form strong bonds with other cats in their colonies. Separating a cat from her colony members and leaving her alone in a new environment will cause stress, depression, and loneliness. ■

RESOURCES

Alley Cat Allies' video *Trap-Neuter-Return: A Humane Approach to Feral Cat Control* will walk you through the steps of trapping, vetting, and caring for a feral cat colony. You will see colony caregivers plan and conduct effective trapping.

Information available from Alley Cat Allies:

- Help finding veterinarians who will provide free or low-cost spay/neuter services
- Guidelines for veterinarians who treat feral cats
- Information on feline health and zoonotic diseases
- "Taming Feral Kittens" factsheet
- Information on juvenile spay/neuter
- Rabies factsheet
- Guidelines for conducting your own free or low-cost, high-volume spay/neuter clinics
- Information on how to nurture cooperation with neighbors and property owners
- Relocation guidelines
- Instructions for building cold-weather shelters
- Alley Cat Allies' quarterly newsletter containing helpful articles and updates
- Alley Cat Allies' bi-annual newsletter for feral cat caregivers

Humane box traps are available from the following companies:

Tomahawk Live Trap Co.
P.O. Box 323
Tomahawk, Wisconsin 54487
1-800-272-8727
www.livetrap.com

ACES (Animal Care Equipment & Services, Inc.)
P.O. Box 3275
Crestline, California 92325
1-800-338-ACES
www.animal-care.com

Heart of the Earth Marketing
205 High Street
Fruitdale, South Dakota 57717-4208
1-800-526-1644
www.animal-traps.com

Holding pens and cat playpens can be purchased from the following companies:

Drs. Foster & Smith
1-800-381-7206

R.C. Steele
1-800-872-3773



Post Office Box 174
Englishtown, NJ 07726
Phone: 732-446-6808
Web: ProjectTNR.com

Hard to Trap Cats

1. Camouflage the Trap

Disguise the trap so that it blends in with its surroundings. This can be done by draping burlap over the sides of the trap (though not the rear - the cat needs to see all the way through) and on the trap floor. Then cover the burlap with leaves, branches - anything that will add to the camouflage. Sometimes even simpler things work like leaning a large board against a wall and putting the trap behind it so it's hidden. Even draping a sheet over the sides might do the trick.

2. Training the Cat

Cats can be trained to go into traps as follows: With a wire, secure the front door in an open position. Then place the trap in the cat's territory, preferably near the normal feeding spot.

Begin by placing the cat's daily meal on a small plate a few inches in front of the front entrance to the trap. Once you see the cat is eating from this location, then the next meal, move the plate a couple of inches just inside the front of the trap. When the cat is eating from there, move the food again, this time a few inches further into the trap. Continue this process of gradually moving the food inwards until the cat is going far enough in that you can set the trigger and the cat will step on the plate.

If you will not be nearby during this period of training, the rear door of the trap should be removed so that no one can come along in your absence and catch a cat. Loosely tape a clear piece of plastic or even a piece of paper to the rear of the trap instead.

3. Attract the Cat

Try different baits: chicken baby food, sardines, mackerel, tuna, etc. After placing the bait at the rear of the trap, drizzle some of the food or oil from the can in a zig-zag pattern leading out of the trap to lure the cat in. Cats are attracted to Valerian: boil the herb in water to make a broth and douse the trap in it. You can also try sprinkling catnip on the trap.

4. Use a Drop Trap

Do a search on www.youtube.com for drop traps. You will see many in action. Contact Project TNR if you would like to rent one, or for instructions building one.

5. Play!

Use a flashlight or laser pointer to play "laser tag" with her at night. When she's in a frisky mood, draw her closer to the entrance of a set trap with the light beam until she's drawn to the back of the trap.

The Issue of Releasing FIV and FeLV Positive Cats

Neighborhood Cats opposes the euthanizing of any feral cat simply because he or she tests positive for the FIV or FeLV virus. We believe if the cat shows no active signs of ill health, they should be released back into their colony regardless of the test results. In fact, because we know we will release asymptomatic feral cats no matter what, we don't test in the first place. The reasons for these policies are many:



1) First and foremost, we don't euthanize positive, asymptomatic cats because we believe they have as much of a right to live as any being. Euthanasia is defined as the mercy killing of a *suffering* being, not imposed death for purposes of convenience or concern about possible future consequences. Too often, when it comes to feral cats and other animals, euthanasia is resorted to as a solution to whatever may be the problem- no place to house them, too expensive to treat, etc. In our view, such actions demonstrate a lack of respect for life and ultimately cause damage to us all. When euthanasia is eliminated as an alternative, other solutions are found.

2) Initial test results are not always reliable, but with ferals, life or death decisions are often made based only on the first test. Reliability issues differ depending on whether FIV or FeLV is in question and what kind of test is being used.

For FIV, most veterinarians use the ELISA (Enzyme Linked Immunoabsorbent Assay) test, which detects whether FIV antibodies are present in the blood - not whether the virus itself is present. As a result, the test is completely unreliable for cats under six months of age who may have received FIV antibodies from their nursing mother, but may never have been exposed to the actual virus. For adult cats, because of the recent introduction of the FIV vaccine, there is now the possibility a positive test result means a cat has been vaccinated, not infected.

For FeLV, again the ELISA test is almost always the initial test used. In contrast to FIV, the FeLV ELISA does not detect antibodies, but whether the antigen of the virus is present in the blood. In other words, a positive test result indicates the presence of the actual FeLV virus in the blood. But, the test is extremely sensitive and is prone to false positives from improper handling. In addition, a cat in the early stages of FeLV infection can still fight it off. The disease does not take permanent hold until it enters the cat's white blood cells, which only another type of test, the IFA test (Immunofluorescence Assay, also known as the Hardy test) can determine. The IFA test must be performed at a lab and is more expensive. Consequently, if a cat appears otherwise healthy, a positive ELISA test should always be confirmed with an IFA test. Only if other severe pathological symptoms of FeLV are present should an initial positive ELISA ever be relied upon alone.

Given these facts, the practice of killing cats based on a one-time test inevitably leads to the death of animals who were never infected in the first place or who would have successfully fought the infection off given enough time.

3) FIV positive cats have been known to often live long lives and may never get sick. The mortality rate is higher for FeLV positive cats, who usually contract the disease as kittens. A study showed most die by the age of two to three years old (33% at 6 months, 63% at 2 years, 83% at 3.5 years). Still, while they are alive, they can live symptom free if properly fed and sheltered.

4) Euthanizing positives is ineffective colony management. Removing a positive cat from a colony does not eliminate the risk of infection to other cats, who have likely already been exposed to the virus, anyway.

5) The primary cause of infection relates more to proper colony management than to a particular positive cat or cats. In our experience, colonies with lots of sick cats are ones that are poorly managed - poor nutrition, inadequate shelter and/or unneutered animals. These conditions lead to weakened immune systems and susceptibility to disease. Indeed, some veterinarians believe it is rare for a healthy adult cat to ever catch FeLV. The best way to prevent the spread of disease is thus not by killing individual cats, but by improving the quality of food, making sure the cats have warm, dry shelter in winter and getting them neutered.

Neutering helps for a couple of reasons. The primary means of transmission of FIV is deep bite wounds and neutered cats tend not to fight. FIV can also be transmitted by an infected mother to her kittens if she was exposed to the virus during gestation or while lactating. On rare occasion, FIV can also be passed on to females through infected semen. Neutering eliminates both kittens and sexual intercourse and removes these means of transmission, too. With respect to FeLV, kittens are the ones most susceptible to infection due to their undeveloped immune systems. Neutering, again by ending the birth of new kittens, eliminates this possibility.

6) Testing is a waste of resources. The literature shows the prevalence of FIV and FeLV positive test results in the feral population is low - and the same as in the domestic population (about 4 percent for FeLV, 2 percent for FIV.) So to identify six positive test results means paying for the testing of 100 cats. Even at a low cost of \$12 per cat, that adds up to \$1200 or \$200 per positive cat. And even then, it doesn't mean the six positive cats actually have the disease, will ever get sick, or will ever transmit it. At a time when there is a crisis in feral cat overpopulation, the money should go towards neutering and proper colony management, not a dubious investment in testing.

7) It isn't true that you are responsible for all the cats that die if you release a positive. This is the "guilt trip" which is the primary argument of those who still favor testing and euthanizing if a feral cat tests positive. First of all, we have knowingly released FIV and FeLV positive cats and have yet to see a colony wiped out or any empirical evidence to support the "guilt trip" theory. As mentioned, a well-fed, well-managed colony is going to have strong immune systems and a natural resistance to the viruses.

But even assuming the released cat does transmit the virus and another cat does get sick, this is not your responsibility. TNR does not mean creating a world without risk for feral cats - it's about improving the situation, not about making it perfect. The disease was present before you came along. By getting the cats neutered and implementing a managed colony, you've vastly improved the quality of the cats' lives and no one should criticize your decision to let the animal return to his family and not euthanize him because of a test result.

Information provided by Neighborhood Cats, www.neighborhoodcats.org

Distributed by:
Project TNR
a program of Animal Protection League of NJ
PO Box 174, Englishtown, NJ 07726
732-446-6808 / www.ProjectTNR.com

Testing - Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)

FIV and FeLV are incurable viruses that only affect cats. Humans cannot catch or transmit these diseases.

Cats who test positive for FIV often live long, healthy lives. Many veterinary spay and neuter clinics do not test feral cats for FeLV or FIV because most feral cats enjoy excellent health and are no more likely to be infected with disease than companion cats. In fact, companion cats and feral cats contract FeLV and FIV at an equally low rate (about 4%).

Alley Cat Allies does not support testing feral cats for FIV and FeLV for multiple reasons:

- The percentage of feral cats infected with either FeLV or FIV is low. Approximately 4% are infected with FeLV and 4% with FIV. This is similar to the infection rate in companion cats;
- Spaying or neutering cats inhibits the spread of the viruses. Since spaying and neutering reduces or eliminates the primary modes of transmission, such as fighting and breeding, infected cats pose little risk to other cats.
- Infected cats are often asymptomatic and can remain healthy with no sign of illness for many years;
- Removing and euthanizing a cat that tests positive will not necessarily prevent spread of the infection within the colony—it's likely that the other colony members have already been exposed to the virus;
- Tests can be unreliable, so cats testing positive should be re-tested at least 28 days after the cat's last possible exposure to the virus;
- And testing can be prohibitively expensive. The cost of testing (and often re-testing because of false positive test results) may hinder the success of a spay and neuter program. If the goal of the program is to spay or neuter as many cats as possible, then the resources allotted for testing feral cats would be put to better use by spaying and neutering more cats. Focusing on the goal of an increased number of spays and neuters decreases the incidence of virus transmission.

Alley Cat Allies does not support the euthanasia of healthy cats who test positive for FeLV and FIV.

The **American Association of Feline Practitioners** agrees, recommending against routine euthanasia of healthy FeLV- and FIV-positive cats. **Alley Cat Allies believes that euthanasia is only necessary for cats who are suffering from pain or injury that is beyond hope of recovery.** It is Alley Cat Allies' philosophy that only under these circumstances should a cat be euthanized to alleviate extreme suffering.

FIV- or FeLV-positive cats should be monitored closely for signs of deteriorating health. If they become ill, they should be trapped and taken to a vet for medical treatment.

Copyright 2008 Alley Cat Allies



Distributed by:
Project TNR
a program of Animal Protection League of NJ
PO Box 174, Englishtown, NJ 07726
732-446-6808 / www.ProjectTNR.com