Animal Protection League of NEW JERSEY

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Managing a Feral Cat Colony – An Outline

So you've realized those cats who have been wandering about probably are not someone's inside/outside cats and no-one has stepped up to take any responsible action for these cats.

Research has shown us that the process of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) offers the most desirable outcomes both for the community cats are living in and for the cats themselves. 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 cats to their territory. A caregiver provides food and shelter and monitors for any newcomers or other problems.

Wherever possible socialized or friendly cats and kittens are removed for rescue and adoption. However, it is important to remember that, at its essence, TNR is not about rescuing cats, it's about population control and permanently reducing the number of roaming 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. Our first priority is always to sterilize and immunize for rabies as many roaming cats as we possibly can with available resources.

So, what's next?

1) Educate Yourself
First thing you should do is learn all you can about TNR. "The Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook" is a fantastic resource which you can download from their website directly or can be found here: https://tinyurl.com/5azjkc3c

Alley Cat Allies and ASPCA also have a handbook here: TNR_workshop_handbook.3.pdf (aspcapro.org)

Read through all the items in our own Education section here: Education – Animal Protection League of NJ (aplnj.org)

If you're interested in learning about practicing TNR on a large scale throughout your community, this is an excellent handbook written by Bryan Kortis of Neighborhood Cats Layout 1 (humanesociety.org) and another excellent guide written by Alley Cat Allies: How to Implement an Organizational Trap-Neuter-Return Program | Alley Cat Allies

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Our TNR Director always welcomes any questions and is happy to help you formulate the best plans of action. Email catlady@aplnj.org, or call the office 732-446-6808 and press 1 for the cat lady.

2) Build Good Community Relations
In tackling your community 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. Ideally you are planning to conduct TNR on your own property, but if you are planning TNR on property you do not own you must make every effort to get permission to move forward with a TNR plan at this location from the appropriate person – owner, manager or renter at the location. If you are unable to secure permission in one area, scout surrounding areas where the feeding stations and trapping can be moved to and thereafter maintained where you can secure permission.

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 if necessary. A routine 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 and gives them a warm place to recover from surgery.

4) Secure an adequate holding space for trapping and neutering
Depending on the size of the colony, trapping all the cats may take several days. A space is needed to hold the cats as the colony is being trapped, and for them to recover in for at least 24 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 under "Doing TNR" on our website here: Resources – Animal Protection League of NJ (aplnj.org)

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.

It is always easier in the long run to plan to trap the entire colony in the shortest possible time frame – "mass trapping". However, if this is not possible due to limited resources, you would need a plan that enables you to sterilize at least 75% of the population within 2 months in order to get ahead of the population curve and start making a big difference.

TNR of just one cat will always be the best thing you can do to help that one cat, therefore regardless of the scale you are able to accomplish, every single TNR has value.

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 low cost spay neuter options please check our website here: Low Cost Spay and Neuter 2 – Animal Protection League of NJ (aplnj.org)

7) Trapping
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 set the first trap. This is true whether you're trapping one cat at a time, or the entire colony. For step by step instructions of how to actually use different types of traps see "Doing TNR" on our website here: Resources – Animal Protection League of NJ (aplnj.org)

8) Colony Maintenance
Keep a sharp eye on your colony. Watch for any newcomers and get them taken care of as soon as they show up. Re-trap for any sign of illness and for rabies boosters. Keep records up to date, and in a safe place.

Enjoy!
A few days after being released, the cats will return to their usual routines and you to yours. Although caring for community 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.

Wherever possible look into "Catio" options to offer these community cats the security of a safe confined space. Find some inspiration and ideas for catios on our website under "Beyond TNR" here: Resources – Animal Protection League of NJ (aplnj.org)