

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY OF CONTROLLING EXISTING FERAL CAT POPULATIONS?

Feral cats are the product of human neglect. As such, the OHS believes that their care is society's responsibility and that their management warrants a humane approach.

While some believe that euthanasia of all feral cats is the most humane, and quickest, solution, studies have shown that unless the vast majority of cats in the colony are removed, which is very difficult to do, other stray cats will simply fill the void that has been created in the colony.

Ignoring the problem, however, is inhumane in that it leaves feral cats exposed to harsh lives, especially in a city with such a severe climate. Also, without intervention, the size and number of feral colonies will increase, which will only worsen the situation.



The OHS supports a feral cat management program that has met with wide success and approval within the international humane movement. The program's acronym is TTVNR (often shortened to TNR), which stands for Trap, Test, Vaccinate, Neuter and Return.

The theory behind the TNR program is that if a colony has a stable population of sterilized cats who have an adequate food source, these cats will stay within their colony, but no more cats will come in. By having a caretaker monitor the colony and its food source, cats that eventually die will not be replaced because the food source will be adjusted to meet the demands of the remaining cats. The colony will just gradually "age out."

In the OHS's TNR program, community caretakers humanely trap feral cats in live traps and bring them to the OHS, where one or more colony members are tested for FeLV and FIV.

Although a feral cat's temperament has become "wild", its ability to fend for itself is usually inadequate.

Because those illnesses are extremely contagious among cats and have serious health implications, if one cat in the colony tests positive, it is likely that the entire colony is positive, so it would be recommended that the entire colony be euthanized for the greater protection of other cats in the community. If the cat or cats test negative, all colony cats are then vaccinated for FVRCP (Feline Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus and Panleukemia) and rabies. The cats are then spayed or neutered and identified by a microchip in the caretaker's name. The colony caretaker then releases the cats back into the area where they were trapped and continues to feed and monitor them.

Stray cats or very young feral kittens that are caught and put through the program may be able to be socialized and adopted out. However, studies have shown that feral kittens that have had no human contact before six to eight weeks of age are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to socialize and would therefore never adapt fully to being household pets.

The success of the OHS's TNR program relies on the dedication of community caretakers. In instances where feral cats are trapped and brought to the OHS, but where no community caretaker is in place for the ongoing care of the cat or colony, the OHS will reluctantly euthanize the animal given its compromised existence.

For more information on the OHS's feral cat program, contact us at ohs@ottawahumane.ca.

For more information on feral cats:

Feral Cat Coalition: www.feralcat.com

Alley Cat Allies: www.alleycat.org

FERAL CATS



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Please support the animals in our community.



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WHAT IS A FERAL CAT?

A feral cat is an unowned, free-roaming cat that has never lived with humans — sometimes called a second-generation stray cat. Many people think that feral cats are actually wild, but feral cats cannot be defined as “wildlife” since they are not a naturally-occurring wild species. Rather, feral cats are a domesticated species that, due to human neglect, now live as wild animals. Although a feral cat’s temperament has become “wild”, its ability to fend for itself is usually inadequate.

WHERE DO FERAL CATS COME FROM?

An ancestor of a feral cat was at one time a stray, lost, or abandoned cat that previously had an owner. This cat then had kittens, which joined other cats to form colonies, usually centred around a source of food, water and shelter. When cats in the feral colony leave or die, new stray cats come in from other colonies or from the owned cat population. While the size of the colony is limited by the amount of food, water and shelter available, cats will remain in the colony even when only sustenance levels of those resources exist.

DON'T FEED STRAY CATS!

While you may think you’re doing the cat a favour, you may be unwittingly contributing to cat overpopulation. An unneutered stray cat will breed continuously and may pass on diseases to other cats. As an alternative, bring the cat to the Ottawa Humane Society — someone may be looking for it, or we may be able to find that cat a good home!

WHAT ISN'T A FERAL CAT?

While you may notice many free-roaming cats around your area, chances are that none of them is feral. Most are simply roaming house cats, stray, or “loosely owned” cats. “Loosely owned” cats, also known as “porch cats”, are stray cats that are fed by one or many people. All of these cats are largely approachable and trust humans, unlike feral cats.

WHY DO COLONIES GET SO LARGE?

Feral cat colonies range in size from a handful, to dozens of cats. Colonies will increase in size as cats within the colony reproduce, as long as a minimum amount of food is available to sustain the colony.

In one year, a female cat can have three litters with four to six kittens per litter — that’s twelve to eighteen kittens a year! Approximately half of these kittens survive; they grow up to produce their own litters within a year. On average, an adult feral cat will live only about five years. This is due to the high incidence of disease, accidents, starvation or predation in their environment.

WHERE DO FERAL CATS LIVE?

In Ottawa, feral cats are found both in the city and in rural areas. They typically form colonies wherever they can find food, water and shelter; for example, in parks, restaurant alleys and barns or on hospital or college/university grounds.



WHAT DO FERAL CATS EAT?

Cats in urban colonies raid garbage containers, scavenge for food or are fed by well-meaning people. Studies also show that many feral cats kill and eat small mammals such as mice, voles and shrews. They hunt birds to a lesser extent.

AM I OR IS MY OWNED CAT AT RISK IF WE COME INTO CONTACT WITH A FERAL CAT?

Feral cats can carry diseases such as respiratory infections, feline leukemia (FeLV), feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and panleukopenia. If your owned cat comes into direct contact (such as a fight) with a feral cat, he has a risk of catching these diseases, especially if he is not properly vaccinated. Possible risks to humans who come into contact with feral cats (or their feces) include ringworm, rabies, and parasites such as hookworm. As feral cats do not willingly approach people, the risk of catching these conditions from feral cats is extremely low except in people whose immune systems are suppressed, such as those living with HIV/AIDS.



A PROACTIVE APPROACH: BE A RESPONSIBLE PET OWNER

Any free-roaming cat that is not spayed or neutered can contribute to the growing number of feral cats in our community. By being a responsible cat owner, and by encouraging those around you to follow suit, you are doing your part to prevent the feral cat population from increasing. Make sure that you are part of the solution by:

- Having your cat spayed or neutered;
- Ensuring that if your cat goes outside, he remains on your property and under your control at all times;
- Ensuring that your pet is properly identified using a collar, tag and microchip; and,
- Ensuring that your cat’s vaccinations are always up to date.