

## Cats in the Neighborhood

### **Why are there cats in our neighborhood?**

When you notice cats outdoors, they are either neighbors' pets, lost or abandoned pets, or feral cats. Feral cats are the "wild" offspring of domestic cats. Kittens that grow up outdoors without human contact are naturally fearful and inclined to stay away from people.



Feral cats are the result of owner abandonment and failure to spay and neuter pets. Colonies of cats can be found behind shopping malls or businesses; in alleys, parks, and abandoned buildings; in urban as well as rural areas; across the country and around the world.

### **Won't the feral cats just go away if people stop feeding them?**

While you might expect it to work that way, feeding the cats (and getting them neutered) actually keeps the situation in check. If caregivers are prevented from feeding them, the cats are instead forced to forage and scavenge for food, possibly in nearby trash bins and on neighboring property.

Feeding locations can be established away from public areas to help reduce encounters between cats and people.

### **Couldn't we just have these cats trapped and removed?**

Removing the cats is not really the solution it might appear to be. In reality, when cats are removed, new cats and other animals migrate into the area to fill the void. This is known as the vacuum effect.

Removal of cats is also a very expensive strategy, especially considering that it provides only short-term results. Removed cats are housed and killed at taxpayer expense, costing on average over \$100 per animal.

Fortunately, there is an effective, long-term solution: Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). With TNR the cat population is controlled and the resident cats maintain their turf, preventing other animals from migrating into the area. TNR is typically done by volunteers, at no cost to taxpayers.

Surveys conducted in San Francisco and Chicago suburbs found that whenever a neighborhood TNR program was implemented, the number of cats in the area decreased. Conversely, locations that employ lethal methods continued to struggle with cat population growth.

### **Do the cats pose a risk to public health?**

A study conducted by Stanford University's Department of Environmental Health and Safety found virtually no risk to human health or safety from feral cats. Research at the University of Florida has found that feral cats and owned cats share similar health status, confirming that the cats do not pose a risk to public health or to other cats.

People sometimes worry about rabies, but this is unjustified. Cats are not natural carriers for rabies. There has not been a single human death from rabies attributed to transmission from a cat in the United States in over three decades. Also, as part of a TNR program, cats are vaccinated against rabies and then provide an immune barrier between humans and wildlife in the community.

In relation to toxoplasmosis, the *British Medical Journal* states that: "contact with cats, kittens, cats' feces, or cats who hunt for food was not a risk factor for infection. . . No significant associations were detected between infection and presence of cats. . ." The study concludes that eating undercooked meat is the primary risk factor in contracting toxoplasmosis.

### **Are feral cats vicious?**

Feral cats are naturally wary of people and will not approach humans they do not know. Feral cats will not attack anyone unless they are cornered.

It's always a good practice to avoid touching or cornering any animal you are not familiar with. Parents and caregivers should teach children to not approach or touch any unknown animal.

### **Wouldn't the cats be better off brought to an animal shelter?**

Over 99 percent of the feral cats who are taken to animal control are killed. Since they are not friendly toward humans, they are not candidates for adoption. Feral cats are at home outdoors, and TNR is truly the most humane way to deal with them.

Even if the cats are friendly, there are not yet enough adoptive families for every friendly stray cat in our city.

### **Don't the cats live short, miserable lives?**

Generally, feral cats are healthy animals, experiencing no more or worse medical issues than housecats. Spaying /neutering, a key part of a TNR program, further improves cat health by reducing wandering, mating, and fighting. It is not uncommon for feral cats to live ten or more years, a lifespan comparable to many pet cats.

While feral and abandoned cats may face hardships, we don't believe that death is better than a less-than-perfect life. Many animals, such as raccoons, foxes, and field mice, face similar hazards and do not live extraordinarily long lives, yet we would never consider "euthanizing" them "for their own good."

### **Don't the cats kill many birds?**

Studies have shown that the bulk of the feral cat diet consists of insects, plants, and scavenged food. In terms of their hunting ability, cats are rodent specialists, widely recognized to have low success at bird predation.

The World Watch Institute lists habitat loss, pollution, pesticides, and drought as the primary factors affecting bird populations today. Other significant factors include collisions with windows, cell phone towers, and automobiles. Cats do not make the list.

If you feed birds, use hanging or pole feeders, rather than feeding them on the ground. Place the feeders away from shrubbery that may provide cover for predator animals.

### **What is TNR?**

Trap-Neuter-Return, or TNR, humanely controls and effectively reduces outdoor cat populations.

Each cat is trapped in a humane trap and taken to a veterinarian. The cats are tranquilized, examined for general good health, vaccinated for rabies, and neutered. After a brief recuperation they are returned to their home turf, where they are fed and monitored daily by volunteers.

## **But how can anyone afford to get these cats spayed or neutered?**

Free (or low-cost) spay/neuter services are available in our community through. For more information call Nevada Humane Society 775-856-2000 ext 306 or e-mail [animalhelp@nevadahumanesociety.org](mailto:animalhelp@nevadahumanesociety.org).

### **Concerns about cats and how to address them**

#### **“The feeding area is messy and attracts insects.”**

- Ask the caregiver to keep the cats’ feeding area neat and free of leftover food and trash.

#### **“Too many cats around!”**

- Ensuring that all of the cats are neutered, and adjusting the physical location where the feeding occurs, can usually address the number of cats you are seeing. Ask the caregiver to move the feeding area and to be sure that all the cats are neutered.

#### **“Cats are sleeping under my porch.”**

- If cats are sleeping under a house, in a shed, or other locations, they are seeking a warm, dry, safe, shelter from the elements. You may ask the caregiver to provide a shelter (similar to a small doghouse) for the cats. Meanwhile, physically block or seal the location the cats are entering with chicken wire or lattice when you are sure the cats are not there.

#### **“Cats are getting into my trash.”**

- Cats and many wild animals are opportunistic scavengers. This behavior can be reduced by caregivers providing a regular food source at a set time in an out-of-the-way location, during daylight hours.
- Keep trash properly covered and secured to avoid attracting raccoons, skunks, and possums, in addition to cats.

#### **“Cats are hanging out in my yard.”**

There are many safe ways to discourage feral cats from hanging out where they are not wanted.

- Ask caregiver to be sure the cats are neutered. This curtails the urge to roam.
- Use a repellent to keep cats out of the area. Options include the following:
  - Chemical repellents such as Repel Away From My Garden, Havahart Cat Repellent, and Reppers can be used around the edges of the yard, the top of fences, and on any favorite areas.
  - Motion-activated water sprinklers, such as The Scarecrow, repel cats.
  - Ultrasonic devices, such as Cat Stop Automatic Outdoor Cat Deterrent or Yard Control Cat Repeller, Model P7810, emit a high-frequency sound annoying to cats, but not perceptible by people (be sure to match device to size of area to be covered).



- Household items and herbs that repel cats include cayenne pepper, citrus peels, coffee grounds, pipe tobacco, citrus-scented sprays and oils of lavender, lemon grass, citronella, peppermint, eucalyptus, and mustard.

**“Cats are digging in my garden.”**

- Use one of the repellents listed above.
- Create a physical barrier to digging: Gardens and flowerbeds can be protected with Cat Scat plastic mats that can be purchased online and pressed into the soil. Heavy plastic carpet runner (pointed side up) also works. Cover exposed ground in flower beds with attractive rocks. Branches from a thorny plant, like the rose of Sharon tree; wooden or plastic lattice fencing material; or chicken wire can be placed over the soil. Pinecones, wooden chopsticks, skewers, or plant stakes can be embedded into the soil every eight inches.
- Ask the caregiver to create an outdoor litter box for the cats in an acceptable place (works especially well when combined with a deterrent to digging in the old favorite spots). We can advise caregivers on how to do this.

**“Cats are drinking from my swimming pool.”**

- If cats are coming to drink from a swimming pool or landscaped pond, ask the caregiver to provide an alternative water source away from the pool.

**“I can smell cat urine.”**

- Eliminate the smell of cat urine by spraying the area thoroughly with white vinegar, which is sold inexpensively by the gallon at supermarkets.
- Neutering the cats is the best way to eliminate their desire to spray-mark. Ask caregiver to ensure that all of the cats are neutered.

**“Cats are making a lot of noise, fighting and yowling.”**

- These are behaviors associated with feline mating. The solution is to humanely trap and neuter the entire colony. Once cats are neutered the hormones leave their system within three weeks, and the behaviors usually stop.

**“Cats are walking on my car.”**

- Use a car cover to protect the car from cat prints.
- Ask the caregiver to move shelters and feeding stations away from the area where cars are parked.

**“We’ve tried these solutions and are still having difficulty with the cats and/or the neighbor.”**

- Contact Nevada Humane Society 775-856-2000 ext 200 or e-mail [animalhelp@nevadahumanesociety.org](mailto:animalhelp@nevadahumanesociety.org).

**“No one seems to be taking care of the cats in our neighborhood.”**

- Contact Nevada Humane Society 775-856-2000 ext 200 or e-mail [animalhelp@nevadahumanesociety.org](mailto:animalhelp@nevadahumanesociety.org).

Special thanks to Alley Cat Allies, City of Berkeley (CA) Animal Care Services, Indy Ferals, Cat Welfare Society, No-Kill Solutions, and Neighborhood Cats. Photos by Molly Wald.