



The 5 steps to successfully Trap-Neuter-Return Feral Cats



Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is a humane method to control the feral cat population. Feral cats have not been socialized to live with humans. They survive outdoors in groups, called colonies, sharing a common food source and territory. Since many of these cats have not been spayed or neutered, the cat population will continue to multiply until the breeding cycle is halted. The goal of TNR is for the cats to be captured, neutered, vaccinated, ear tipped and returned to live in their colony family without reproducing. With time, the colony population will decrease naturally. TNR also helps to keep feral cats out of shelters, where they would be euthanized because they are not adoptable as pets.

The basic plan is to:

- Contact a TNR group or your local Humane Society offering a low-cost spay/neuter clinic for feral cats
- Set up an appointment to get *all* the cats in the colony vetted the *same day*
- Borrow enough equipment to trap the total/estimated number of cats in the colony
- Trap the day before the scheduled clinic. The regular feeder/caretaker will be the most effective trapper
- Transport the cats the morning of the clinic and pick up that afternoon/evening
- Release the cats the day after the clinic
- ***If you have tried to trap in the past and/or there is more than one feeder and/or there are newcomers to an existing managed colony (previously vetted)—Contact a reputable TNR group to discuss an alternative trapping method and the equipment needed to be successful***

What you will need:

- **Humane traps**—box trap with trip plate and two doors (see example below)
- **Newspaper**—to line the trap
- **Trap covers**—to help keep the cat calm while in the trap
- **Bait**—canned cat food or tuna in oil, cooked chicken (without bones) NO mackerel or sardines.
- **Small disposable bowls or paper plates**—for feeding after trapping
- **Tarp, Blanket or Pee Pads**—to put under the traps, to protect the vehicle used for transport and the floor where the cats will be housed
- **Temperature-controlled environment**—Such as a basement, garage or bathroom to house the cats in their traps after trapping and overnight after the clinic



1. The day before trapping

- Feed at the usual site, at the usual time
- If you feed in the AM and PM, feed ½ of the amount of a normal meal so the cats will be extra hungry on the day of trapping
- Always keep fresh water available

2. The day of trapping

- Be sure to place traps only at the feeding site and keep track of all traps you have set out
- Plan to trap in the morning and evening the day before the scheduled clinic
 - The best times to trap are 6AM-10AM and 4PM-9PM
 - Between 10AM-4PM the cats are generally sleeping and not searching for food
 - Do Not leave traps in area when not trapping
- To line the trap: Double 2 sheets of newspaper, folded the width of the trap and extended to cover the length of the trap
- Bait the trap with about a tablespoon of food placed directly on the newspaper *beyond* the trip plate
 - Make a trail using 3 small pieces of food from door to in *front* of the trip plate to lure them into trap
- Open the front door of trap and set the latch
- **DO NOT leave the traps unattended or left out overnight**
 - Station yourself where you can observe the cats and traps or hear the door close when it is tripped
 - If you can't see or hear the trap trip, check traps every 15-20 minutes
- When each cat is trapped, *cover the trap* and take it to the temperature-controlled area where it will be housed. If another cat is about to go into a trap next to the one already trapped, you may be able to wait to cover both at once, unless the trapped cat begins pacing
 - A cat panicking in a trap is very disruptive and should be removed from the area ASAP
- If a pregnant cat or lactating mother cat is trapped—Do not release her
 - A pregnant cat can be spayed
 - A lactating mother cat can be released early the next morning and returned to care for her litter. She will still produce milk after she is spayed.
 - Do not look for kittens. If not disrupted they will stay quiet in the nest until mom returns
- Release any cats that are known to have been neutered (as indicated by ear tipping)
 - If you know the cat hasn't been vaccinated in over a year or would like it examined bring it to the clinic
- Release any wildlife that may be caught in the trap by mistake
- Continue until cats are no longer coming to eat OR until you are certain you have trapped all the cats in the colony
 - If the cats are being reluctant to eat, you can revisit the traps and pretend to be putting out more food every 10 minutes
 - Tap on the can with a spoon or shake the dry food container to help stimulate their appetite
- Make certain you collect the same number of traps that you set out
- You can feed trapped cats the day before a clinic—CANNED WET FOOD ONLY. NO dry food or water. Use small disposable bowls or paper plates
- **Adult cats should NOT be fed after midnight the night before going to the clinic**
- **Kittens (three months or younger) should be fed until the morning of surgery**
 - If you can't safely pull food just let the clinic staff know



3. The morning of the clinic, transport the cats

- Place the traps in an area of the vehicle lined with plastic sheeting or tarp covered with newspaper or a blanket to absorb any urine or feces. Make sure the traps are secured in the vehicle so they cannot tip over and open accidentally.
- ALWAYS keep a trap covered once the cat is trapped
 - Do not attempt to touch the cats once they are in the traps
 - They will hiss at you and may attempt to scratch or bite
 - Do not let the cat out of the trap—you may never catch it again

4. Pick up the cats from the clinic

- After the surgery is complete and while still anesthetized, the cats will be returned to the trap to wake up
- The trap will be lined with clean newspaper
- The cats will need to remain in the traps to recover overnight in a quiet, temperature-controlled area
 - Keep the trap covered to minimize stress
- Observe the cats while recovering to make sure they are acting properly
 - Notify the clinic _____?
- **Feeding in traps**—once alert, cats can be fed by placing **WET, CANNED CAT FOOD** in a small disposable bowl or plate and sliding it under the slightly raised door. If trap has a back door, carefully use this to feed. If not, *carefully* raise the front door to slide food in.
 - If cat moves toward the door, do not open or feed.
 - NO dry food or water is needed
 - DO NOT use cans
- **DO NOT let cats out of the traps under any circumstances!**

5. Return/Releasing the morning after the clinic

- Take the cats in traps to their feeding site
 - **Release each cat at the same location where it was trapped**
 - Cats must be returned to a familiar area so they will know where to find food and shelter
- Make sure the feeding station has fresh food and water
- Place the trap on the ground with the door facing towards the feeding site
- Since you cannot predict which direction the cat will travel, survey the surrounding area to be sure it is safe to release. *Be on the lookout for approaching cars!*
- Once you open the door, the cat will dash out of the trap
- The cats may not be seen at the feeding site for a few days after being released because they are not sure it is “safe”. Continue to put out the usual amount of food and water whether you see all the cats or not. They are most likely eating when you are not looking. They will soon return to their usual routine.

For a video demonstration:

How to Trap a Feral Cat for TNR: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wF_omFE7Etc

Prepared by Metro Ferals, a 501c3 organization dedicated to TNR