



*For the Love of
Ferals*



*Implementing a community-wide
feral cat assistance program at
HSHV*

It is estimated that there are 60,000 feral cats in Washtenaw County. These cats can reproduce three or four times a year and roam the area looking for food, fighting and mating.

There have been attempts to trap and euthanize them, but the ones that are eliminated are replaced by other cats in the vacuum created by euthanizing the colony that was there. TNR is a technique that was started in the 90's and has been carefully studied as a humane way to deal with this problem.

The studies have documented that a TNR program, when properly run and monitored, creates colonies that are healthier, experience a gradual reduction in numbers, and present fewer mating and scavenging behaviors.

A feral cat is one that has always been outside or has been left on its own long enough to revert to a wild state. They are more often than not fearful of humans and may run away from people approaching them. They are most often seen at night and are often silent creatures finding their way on their own.

A stray cat is one that is domesticated and has become separated from its owners. Either it was abandoned or simply strayed from home and became lost. They often appear disheveled compared to ferals because they are not able

to care for themselves effectively in the wild.

TNR promotes improved health and longer life span for a feral cat. By sterilizing them, their need to roam is diminished, as is their need to fight with one another. The litters of kittens are no longer a problem. With a managed colony, a constant food source is available and the cats no longer need to search dumpsters for food. They will have shelter available close to their food source so that they will no longer need to seek shelter under your porch or car. It is the single most effective way to deal with the cat overpopulation our county is currently experiencing.

Our goal is to stop population growth and increase the well being of feral cats in our county. Stray cats trapped will be placed in new, loving homes when possible. Ferals will be trapped, sterilized and returned to the area they came from. Relocating feral cats is not an option due to the territorial nature of feral cats, and is not something we will attempt. A caregiver will be in charge of feeding the cats and monitoring them for general health and to watch for any newcomers. Contact with the shelter will be maintained on a monthly basis.

How does it work?

- HSHV will identify areas in need based on phone calls from the public, information gained from our Cruelty and Rescue staff, volunteers and other concerned individuals.
- Once an area has been identified and assessed for need, we will locate someone who is willing to manage the colony. This includes feeding on a regular basis, providing shelter and a constant source of fresh water. This person must be willing to follow our guidelines for care and be able to document and monitor the colony. HSHV will be responsible for the continued health care of the colony and will provide food to the caregiver when available.
- With a caregiver in place, the colony must be documented to the best of the caregiver's knowledge.
- Once the documentation process is complete, a timeline for trapping will be set. This timeline will be based on resources available to HSHV including, but not limited to, clinic availability, staffing and volunteer availability, supplies and financial resources.
- Once a date has been set, the caregiver must withhold food from the colony for 24 to 48 hours prior to trapping. On the day of trapping, HSHV will set live traps and remove the cats to be sterilized at the shelter. Please be aware that this may not, in many cases, be a one day event. Our goal is to trap the entire colony at once as this is the most effective way to sterilize the whole colony. Some cats will be wary of the trap and may have to be trapped at a later date.
- Once the cats arrive at HSHV, they will be held and cared for prior to surgery. The surgery will include ear tipping to identify them as ferals from a managed colony, rabies inoculation, flea treatment, distemper shot and possible felv/fiv test. Medical services are at the veterinarian's discretion and any cat that is in medical distress may not be returned to the colony.
- The cats will be held for up to 48 hours post surgery to recover. They will be cared for by HSHV staff and trained volunteers. Once fully recovered, they will be returned to their colony by staff and volunteers.
- After return, the caregiver will be responsible for monitoring the colony for newcomers or health problems. Contact will be maintained by caregiver and HSHV to ensure that all problems and concerns are resolved.

What about public health concerns?

- Rabies is more prevalent in wildlife than ferals, but part of a TNR program includes vaccinating the cats against rabies.
- Ferals are naturally afraid of humans and don't normally lash out unless cornered and frightened. The best way to avoid a bite is to teach children not to touch or approach wildlife and to let a parent or guardian know if they find an injured animal.
- Although all wild animals carry parasites, exposure to things like ringworm, roundworms and tapeworms can be avoided by wearing gloves when dealing with feral cats. Washing hands immediately after coming in contact with feral cats is an important part of caring for them and yourself.
- Keep in mind that feral cats and owned cats share a similar health status. Feral cats that are part of a managed colony have been vaccinated and have a similar life span as that of a housecat. In many cases, these cats have been exposed to a variety of diseases and have built a natural immunity to them.

How to deal with nuisance complaints

- Bird predation complaints concerning feral cats are unfounded. More dangerous for the birds of the area are things like habitat loss, pollution, pesticides, and drought. Feral cats have low success at bird predation. The bulk of their diet is garbage, insects, plants and other scavenger materials.
- For cats using gardens and planters as litter boxes, caregivers can provide their colony with sand filled boxes in the colony. This will give them an alternative to close by gardens. Another idea is to place rocks or pinecones in the dirt of a garden to prevent the cats from using that area as a litter box.
- In order to keep cats from sleeping under homes or decks, block off the area or seal it with fencing or other available material.
- To keep cats out of trash, try sealing the trash securely. This will keep wildlife out of the trash as well. Moving the food source will also help with this problem.
- TNR is the most effective way to keep cats from fighting, spraying and mating. Once sterilized, the need to do these things is eliminated because the cats are no longer searching for mates and have a constant food source to rely on.
- Cats sleeping on or near cars can be eliminated by moving the food source and providing adequate shelter for the cats.

Medical services for TNR cats

- Rabies shot
- Ear tipping to identify cat as a sterilized, managed feral cat
- Flea treatment, worming when necessary
- Dissolvable stitches
- Distemper shot
- Felv/fiv test at veterinarian's discretion
- Observation at HSHV for at least 24 hours post surgery.
- Continued care for colony after release. Caregiver must contact shelter for more information.

Stray cats trapped in a mass trapping

- Two weeks prior to trapping event, the area will be posted with information regarding trapping. People in the area with indoor/outdoor cats will be notified of date and time of trapping to keep their cats inside for the duration of trapping event.
- Any cats determined to be stray and not feral may not be returned to the colony area. HSHV will hold these cats for the required stray period. Once the stray hold is up, the cat will be assessed for adoptability.
- If the cat meets criteria for adoption, the cat will be checked in and put up for adoption. If the cat does not meet adoption criteria for behavior reasons, either litter box issues or an inability to adapt to the shelter environment, every attempt will be made to find suitable placement for the cat. This does not include declawed cats, as they have no defense to survive outside.
- If an owned cat is trapped and taken to HSHV after posting the area, the owner is responsible for paying all fees associated with the return of an animal from HSHV. This will include a redemption fee and any associated board fees.

Caregiver Instructions

- HSHV will assist in resolving any disputes with neighbors or municipalities if necessary. It is important to gain permission from any involved parties prior to the trapping process. If we are unable to gain permission, other arrangements must be made for the cats in that area, if possible.
- Caregivers must agree to follow our guidelines regarding the care of the colony. They must be willing to provide suitable food, water and shelter for the cats in the colony. They must be willing to maintain contact with the shelter at regular intervals (at least once a month) to discuss the health of the colony or to coordinate trapping of new members. They also must be able to maintain the colony indefinitely. If they at any point are unable to do so, they are responsible for both contacting the shelter as well as assisting to find a new caregiver. This does not need to be a once person job; more than one person can care for a colony as long as they can do so following our guidelines.
- HSHV will be responsible for the continuing health care of the colony, and will provide food and other supplies as available.
- Prior to trapping, the caregiver will need to document the colony to the best of their ability so that the HSHV has an idea of the numbers of cats we will be trapping. This is easiest to do if food is provided at a regular set time every day. Observe the cats and try to use their regular food source as a feeding spot. Pick a spot away from human activity and feed at the same time every day. Food can be used as a tool to monitor the colony regularly. Use dry food and try to feed during the day to avoid attracting other wildlife. Make fresh water available to the cats every day. It may take a couple of weeks to have a clear idea of the cats in your colony.
- Once documented, contact HSHV. We will plan to trap at the regular feeding time to attract largest number of cats possible. Withhold food for 24 to 48 hours prior to trapping.
- Once returned to the colony, keep a close eye on the cats at feeding time. Contact HSHV if you notice any newcomers or any unhealthy cats in the colony.
- In colder months, shelter must be provided for your colony. This could be a barn, shed, or something handmade. Shelters can be made

with 15 gallon Rubbermaid containers with a hole cut out for an entrance with straw inside, or a simple dog house can be used with straw inside.

- Remember that feral cats are wild animals. They are happiest in their environment outside and are not adjusted to living cooped up inside. They may allow you to come near them as your caregiver but do not attempt to pick them up or bring them inside. All cats carry bacteria in their teeth and claws and any scratches or bites must be cleaned immediately and medical attention sought. Any cat that bites must be quarantined; please contact the HSHV clinic immediately following a bite. Remember to wear gloves when feeding or interacting with cats to avoid any parasites that the cats may be carrying.
- Kittens born in an HSHV colony may be socialized by the caregiver (we will provide training if necessary) but must be placed through the shelter to ensure that they are sterilized at the time of adoption.
- Because our goal is to reduce the numbers of unwanted cats in Washtenaw County, pregnant females will be spayed. Lactating females can be spayed and released and continue to nurse effectively. Every attempt will be made to find and trap the kittens. Kittens over the age of four weeks will be removed from the colony and socialized by trained volunteers with the intention of adopting them into loving homes.

Caring for feral kittens

- Kittens can be left with the colony and sterilized at eight weeks or pulled out at four to six weeks for socialization.
- Prior to bringing the kittens into your home, make sure your pets are up to date on all vaccinations.
- Early, repetitive human contact with men, children and women is important. Feral cats bond easily with one person and it is imperative that the kittens are comfortable with all types of people to be good adoption candidates.
- Expose them to all aspects of home life: vacuum cleaners, televisions, radios and other pets will all help to socialize the kittens.
- Following a few simple guidelines to socialize the kittens will greatly help them adapt to a new home:
 - 1) Contain the kittens in a cage in a small room. Don't attempt to handle them for the first couple of days in your home. Let them adjust and feel safe. Visit them often in their "den", talk to them in soothing tones, move slowly around them. Have a radio playing softly in the background.
 - 2) Start periodic handling. Select the least aggressive kitten and pick it up in a towel. Go slowly! The kitten may hiss, growl, spit or try to bite. Don't approach it from the front with your hands, but gently place a towel over it and lift the kitten from the cage. Place the kitten in your lap and gently stroke it and speak to it. If the kitten is calm, remove the towel and stroke it with your hand. Make the first contact brief and repeat this process with each kitten. Give each kitten a special treat after handling to gain their trust. Repeat as often as possible.
 - 3) After a week or so, once the kittens trust you a little more, try letting them have the run of a small room. Leave the

cage accessible to them. If one kitten is still having problems, separate it from the rest of the litter in another small cage. If necessary, separate the entire litter. If left together, they will reinforce the fearful behavior and socializing them will become more difficult. Continue to handle the kittens as often as possible.

- 4) Use treats regularly and begin to play with toys. Older, calm cats can be wonderful for kittens if they can tolerate them because the kittens will imitate the behavior of the older cat. When the kittens are no longer hissing and trying to scratch or bite, allow family and friends to handle them. At eight weeks, with proper handling and socializing, the kittens should be ready for adoption. The key is to handle them as much as possible and expose them to as many people and things as possible.

Resources

- Alley Cat Allies www.alleycat.org
- For the Love of Cats www.tlconline.org
- Indy Feral www.indyferal.org
- Best Friends Animal Sanctuary
www.bestfriends.org
- Defenders of Wildlife www.defenders.org
- Animal Welfare Federation of New Jersey
www.awfnj.org

If you have internet access, there is a wealth of information out there on the subject of feral cats. These are some of the resources used to create this pamphlet