

Community Cat Colonies at Risk



HCMT believes that the most effective and humane way to manage colonies of free-roaming cats is the practice known as trap/neuter/return (TNR), in which cats are trapped, spayed or neutered, and then returned to their colonies to live out their lives.

However, not everyone is a fan of community cats (free-roaming or feral cats). It's not uncommon for these cats to come under siege from neighbors and public authorities who may not understand the concept of TNR. Establishing an open line of communication with the public and working to address their concerns will make it easier and safer to provide for the long-term care of a feral colony.

Keeping the peace

In order to keep peace with the neighbors, there are some tactics you can employ to make the presence of a feral cat colony as invisible as possible.

A tip for maintaining a low profile is to set up (or move) the feeding station to a location that is out of the way, hidden from public view. Colony caregivers sometimes feed feral cats right outside their apartment door or just next to the dumpster, which aggravates other residents. By placing the feeding area a few yards (or even a hundred yards) away and providing safe housing for the cats a short distance from that new feeding station, you'll likely reduce the number of complaints by neighbors.

If the station has to be moved some distance, do it gradually, over the course of a few days, to allow the cats to adjust. Another key is getting full compliance from all the colony feeders - no food outside the new feeding station, etc. You can use this strategy to move the cats off of property where they are unwelcome and onto the property of someone nearby who is more sympathetic. This relatively small change can help keep the peace even in cases where people are threatening the cats.

You'll also want to educate residents about the benefits of TNR: Community cats tend to leave behind "gifts" by urinating or defecating on people's property, but once the cats are neutered, a high percentage of them will stop spraying. Spay/neuter also helps cut down on nuisance behaviors such as yowling.

Additional suggestions can be found at:

[Alley Cat Allies](http://alleycat.org) – alleycat.org

What to do if tensions escalate

People who don't understand TNR, or who just don't like cats, may threaten to hurt or eliminate the cats in the colony; to them, it seems like the best way to solve the problem. Start by asking them what their concerns are regarding the cats, empathizing with their issues, and offering some possible solutions. It's important for you to remain polite and calm, since your goal is to defuse any tensions over the cats and ensure that they can safely remain in their established colony.

If cats in the colony are being abused or even killed, immediately contact your local humane officer for guidance. Animal Friends and the Western PA Humane Society have resident humane agents.

Getting community support

This is vital to TNR success, so you may also want to consider starting a petition in support of saving the cats. Whoever you approach, be sure to defend the cats in a rational and calm manner. Know your facts about feral cats and present them clearly; it's easy for people to write off an overly emotional or hysterical plea.

Involving the media

If you have not done so already, you may want to go to the press on behalf of the cats. A sympathetic TV or newspaper reporter can get the word out to rally support for the cats. If a property owner is threatening to injure cats, the prospect of negative media attention may deter them. Most businesses are concerned about their public image and will take steps to avoid adverse reactions from the public.