

Feral Cat Q&A

Q: Why are there so many stray cats?

Many cats are left behind when their owners are no longer willing to look after them or their owners have moved house. In some cases cats have been dumped, are lost or sadly their owners have passed away. Many of these cats are starving and scavenging in order to survive. Their offspring will be feral not having any human interaction and continue to multiply.

Q: What is the difference between stray and feral cats?

While both terms describe the same species, there is a distinction between stray and feral cats. Stray cats are cats that have been socialised to humans at some point in their lives, and have been abandoned or lost, losing contact with humans. Feral cats are cats that have never had contact with humans and are generally quite fearful of people. Over time some stray cats may display more feral behaviour as they go longer without human contact, while some feral cats and kittens can be socialised, and some may even be able to be adopted into homes as pets.

Please be aware that some cats that appear to be strays may not be. If you are concerned for the welfare of a cat you believe to be a stray, make inquiries in your area to see if anyone owns it, or knows who does. As a last resort you can attempt to trap the cat and bring it to the vet to be scanned for a microchip. The ISPCA encourages all cat owners to microchip their cats in the event that they get lost, as this is universally recognised as the best way to make your pet permanently identifiable and gives you the best chance to be reunited with your beloved pet if they go missing.

Q: What is TNR?

TNR means that feral cats are humanely trapped and neutered by a vet. During their time at the vet, one of the cats' ears is also tipped, meaning the end is removed to denote that they have been neutered. They are also health checked and treated for parasites, and healthy cats are returned to the trap site

Q: Why is TNR the best solution?

Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) is the most humane solution to stabilising feral cat populations, and has also been shown to be the least costly. Over time the number of cats in the colony will be naturally reduced as no new kittens will be born. In addition, undesirable and disruptive behaviours associated with mating, such as fighting, spraying and yowling are eliminated. This should mean that local community residents will be less concerned about noise, smell and out of control breeding of the colony.

Q: Should I feed a feral cat colony?

If you are already feeding a colony of feral cats, please ensure that they have been neutered. Once you have finished the TNR process with the cats, providing clean, fresh drinking water, food, and shelter is an acceptable way to maintain the colony. Often providers of these basics are called colony caretakers.

If you are feeding a colony, keep your eye out for any health issues, and if you notice any of the cats are sick, trap them and bring them to the vets. Some health issues, such as FIV, can spread through a colony and even to peoples' pets if it is not controlled.

Without the support of a caretaker, the average lifespan of a feral cat is less than two years, while a cat living in a colony with a caretaker could live for ten years.

Q: How do I avail of TNR?

There are a number of organisations around the country that provide support for members of the public looking for TNR for their local feral colonies, including the ISPCA and our affiliated member societies. You can find the contact details for the ISPCA in Longford and Mallow, as well as our affiliated member societies around the country on our website here www.ispca.ie/member_societies/.

Feral Cats Ireland has lots of useful information on TNR projects and important information about feral cats on their website as well (www.feralcatsireland.org).

Q: What are the health benefits of spaying or neutering a cat?

There is significant evidence that early spaying or neutering can have important benefits for the health of the individual animal. These include reducing the risk of certain cancers, having a positive benefit for health and lifespan, and curbing unwanted behaviour and marking.

For females these benefits include reducing the risk of mammary cancer, prevents pyometra (infection of the uterus), and prevention of unwanted pregnancy and litters. Spaying also eliminates or reduces the occurrence of certain unwanted feline behaviours.

For males, benefits include reducing fighting and unwanted territorial behaviour, reducing the risk of cat bite abscesses, and the risk of FIV and Feline Leukaemia Viral Infection. Neutering also significantly reduces male urine marking behaviour.

Q: Are there other benefits of TNR?

Apart from population control and the benefits for animal welfare discussed above, having a healthy, neutered population of cats in your area can actually help to control rodent populations as well. The smell of cats' urine alone is a deterrent to mice and rats and the presence of a small number of healthy animals can help to keep them at bay.

Please visit www.ispca.ie for more information.