

Kern County Animal Services Feral Cat

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What is a feral cat?

A feral cat is a cat that was born and raised in the wild, never having had any contact with people, or her contact with people has diminished over time. She is not socialized to people and survives on her own outdoors. While some feral cats tolerate a bit of human contact, most are too fearful and wild to be handled. Ferals often live in groups, called colonies, and take refuge wherever they can find food—rodents and other small animals and garbage.

Outdoor cats have existed alongside humans for 10,000 years. They are not a new phenomenon. Feral cats are members of the same species as pet cats—and are therefore protected under state animal anti-cruelty laws. The difference between feral cats and your pet cat is that they have had little or no contact with people, and so they are wary of us, and cannot be adopted. They have a home—outdoors. They live and thrive in every landscape, from the inner city to rural farmland. Since feral cats are not adoptable, they should not be brought to animal pounds and shelters, because there they will likely be killed.

What is the difference between a stray cat and a feral cat?

Stray cats are socialized to people and can be adopted into homes, but feral cats are not socialized to people and are happy living outdoors.

A stray cat:

- Is a cat who has been socialized to people at some point in her life, but has left or lost her indoor home, as well as most human contact and dependence.
- Can under the right circumstances become a pet cat once again. Stray cats that are re-introduced to a home after living outdoors may require a period of time to re-acclimate; they may be frightened and wary after spending time outside away from people.

A feral cat:

- Is a cat who has either never had any contact with humans or her contact with humans has diminished over time. She is not socialized to people and survives on her own outdoors. Most feral cats are not likely to ever become lap cats or enjoy living indoors.
- Can have kittens that can be socialized at an early age and adopted into homes.

- Is very territorial and will maintain that territory, usually around a food source, for life. It's a reason the vacuum effect makes trap and kill an ineffective method of control because as cats are removed, cats in surrounding territories naturally hone in on the food source and repopulate the recently vacated territory. In a matter of months new cats are at a population level equal to the one that led to the original extermination attempt.

Where do feral cats come from?

Feral cats are not a new phenomenon. Outdoor cats are part of our rich history in this country and worldwide.

Domestic cats came into existence about 10,000 years ago, when humans began farming. According to scientists, cats are one of the only animals who domesticated themselves—choosing to live near humans to feed on the rodents attracted by stored grain. Evolutionary research shows that the natural habitat of cats is outdoors in close proximity to humans—and that is how they have lived ever since. In fact, it wasn't until the 1940s—and the invention of cat litter—that "indoor only" for cats was even a concept.

Cats have been living among us here in the U.S. for hundreds of years. Feral cats are the same biologically as domestic pet cats. Feral cats thrive in every type of environment, urban, suburban and rural and can be found on 6 continents from the tundra to the rainforests. Some feral cats are offspring of house cats but most are a generation or two removed and have been born and raised in the wild. Often the "wild" is urban neighborhoods in close proximity to people.

What is Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)?

Trap-Neuter-Return, commonly referred to as "TNR," is the only method proven to be humane and effective at controlling feral cat population growth. Using this technique, all the feral cats in a colony are trapped, neutered and then returned to their territory where caretakers provide them with regular food and shelter. Young kittens who can still be socialized, as well as friendly adults, are placed in foster care and eventually adopted out to good homes.

TNR has many advantages:

- It immediately stabilizes the size of the colony by eliminating new litters of kittens.

- The nuisance behavior often associated with feral cats is dramatically reduced, including the yowling and fighting that come with mating activity and the odor of unneutered males spraying to mark their territory.
- The returned colony guards its territory, preventing unneutered cats from moving in and beginning the cycle of overpopulation and problem behavior anew.
- Particularly in urban areas, the cats continue to provide natural rodent control.
- It decreases the number of kittens and cats flowing into animal shelters where most are killed. This also results in the increased adoption of cats already in the shelters.

TNR is not just the best alternative to managing feral cat populations - it is the only one that works. Doing nothing has resulted in the current overpopulation crisis. Trying to "rescue" the cats and find them all homes is utopian and unattainable given their numbers and the futility of trying to socialize most of them.

Trap and kill, the traditional technique exercised by Animal Control, is simply ineffective. If all the cats are not caught, then the ones left behind breed until the former population level is reached. Even if all the cats are removed, new unneutered cats tend to move in to take advantage of whatever food source there was, and the cycle starts again. This explains why more and more animal control agencies are willing to try TNR.

Finally, TNR is an idea whose time has come. It recognizes there is a new balance in our urban and rural landscape, one that includes feral cats. It seeks to manage this new population with enlightened techniques that allow the cats to live out their lives and fulfill their natures, while minimizing any possible negative impact. TNR is a movement that will continue to grow as more and more caring people see its potential and, in time, it will become the predominant method of feral cat management

How Does TNR Help Feral Cats?

Through TNR, feral cats can live out their lives without adding to the homeless cat population. By stabilizing the population, cats will naturally have more space, shelter and food, and fewer risks of disease. After being spayed or neutered, cats living in colonies tend to gain weight and live healthier lives. Spayed cats are less likely to develop breast cancer and will not be at risk for ovarian or uterine cancer, while neutered males will not get testicular cancer. By neutering male cats, you also reduce the risk of injury and infection, since intact males have a natural instinct to fight with other cats. Spaying also means female cats do not go into heat. That means they attract fewer tom cats to the area, reducing fighting. If cats are sterilized and live in a colony that has a caretaker, they may live more than 10 years.

How Does TNR Benefit the Community?

First it should be noted that cats can live in amazingly varied climates and locations, as they thrive when paired with a human population. Where we live, they can live. Because of that and their ability to breed prolifically, it is virtually impossible to live without the existence of free-roaming, unowned cats. It is our role as humans to control their populations so that they are balanced ecologically with us (minimize nuisances) and birds/wildlife, as well as the rodent population, but does not require the extermination of the cats to achieve this balance.

There are numerous benefits to TNR. For instance, TNR significantly reduces shelter admissions and operating costs. These programs also create safer communities and promote public health by reducing the number of unvaccinated cats. TNR programs also improve the lives of free-roaming cats: When males are neutered, they are no longer compelled to maintain a large territory or fight over mates, and females are no longer forced to endure the physical and mental demands of giving birth and fending for their young. Additionally, fewer community cats in shelters increases shelter adoption rates as more cage space opens up for adoptable cats. Furthermore, sterilizing community cats curtails population growth while alleviating nuisances.

Equally important, TNR programs allow animal control facilities to take advantage of numerous resources typically unavailable to shelters that employ traditional trap-and-kill policies. Understandably, people are rarely inclined to volunteer for programs that fail to make them feel good about themselves. Through the implementation of TNR, volunteers know they are making a difference in the lives of the animals, and the community is benefiting from their charitable efforts.

Volunteers can help trap cats and also assist animal control in locating other cats in need of TNR services. Commonly referred to as caregivers, these volunteers also feed and monitor the health of the individual cats and the colony, when applicable, once the cats are returned. Frequent monitoring is an invaluable component of successful TNR programs because caregivers can easily identify new cats who join the colony so they, too, can be sterilized, vaccinated and ear-tipped. Another component of a well-managed TNR program is the collection of critical data that can be used to seek grant funding for expansion of current TNR programs.

What is the actual cost savings of TNR over the traditional trap-and-kill method of animal control?

The city of Jacksonville, Florida, is a fine example of an area that has capitalized on non-lethal alternatives for controlling free-roaming cats. Over a three-year period (2007-2010), Jacksonville saved approximately 13,000 lives and \$160,000. Equally important, feline nuisance complaints decreased during this period.

The Feral Fix Program in Salt Lake City, Utah, has also proven to be quite successful. From 2008 to 2010, Salt Lake City's "save rate" of cats improved 40.4 percent, equaling a total cost savings of approximately \$65,000. Shelter cat intake for

the years 2009-2010 decreased 21.8 percent. During this same period, there was no increase in feline nuisance complaints.

Communities can save money with TNR, but the cost savings are undoubtedly location-specific and involve taking into account numerous variables for an accurate calculation. The immediate savings many communities experience are a result of tapping into volunteer support and other resources (e.g., private donations) that come from implementing a humane TNR program. Cost savings fluctuate based on the type of TNR program implemented, the extent of animal control involvement, the volunteer base available and the community's support of TNR programs. The point that needs to be stressed, however, is that over time, through attrition and sterilization efforts, fewer cats will be breeding and contributing to the population growth. Fewer live animals to contend with inevitably means a decrease in the demand on taxpayer dollars.

Until a TNR program begins, it is difficult to calculate accurately how much money will be saved. However, other benefits are equally important. A successful TNR program can improve the public image of a town, which may add to economic development. Employee satisfaction within the shelter and animal control facilities is also a huge asset and contributes to a positive image of the community. The hometown pride and enthusiasm generated from supporting a non-lethal, practical and effective solution to a community problem must be factored into the equation, even though it doesn't provide precise numbers in terms of cost savings.

What is an 'eartip'?

We use the word "eartip" to describe when a small portion of the tip of a feral cat's left ear is surgically removed during neuter surgery, to denote that the cat has been neutered and vaccinated. Eartipping is done while the cat is anesthetized and is not painful for the cat. Eartipping is the most effective way to identify neutered feral cats from a distance, to make sure they are not trapped or undergo surgery a second time.

Isn't it unsafe for feral cats to live outside?

The outdoors is the natural habitat for feral cats, and empirical evidence indicates they can live long and healthy lives: a 2006 study published in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery found that of 103,643 stray and feral cats examined in spay/neuter clinics in six states from 1993 to 2004, less than 1% of those cats needed to be euthanized due to debilitating conditions, trauma, or infectious diseases.

In addition, the lifespan of feral cats compares favorably with the lifespan of pet cats. A long-term study (published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association in 2003) of a Trap-Neuter-Return program noted that 83% of the cats present at the end of the observation period had been there for more than six years—

meaning that the cats' lifespans were comparable to the mean lifespan of 7.1 years for pet cats.

Feral cat caregivers can take steps to make feral cats more comfortable, like neutering them, feeding them, and providing shelter. These steps promote the cats' well-being, improve their relationships with neighbors, and assist the people who live nearby to understand and co-exist with the cats. But most feral cats don't require intervention beyond Trap-Neuter-Return.

Why can't feral cats be socialized and then adopted into homes?

A feral cat is a cat who has either never had any contact with people or her contact with people has diminished over time. They are not socialized to people and cannot be touched, except sometimes by a regular caregiver.

The ideal window for socializing feral kittens is 12 weeks of age or younger—beyond 12 weeks, feral cats may never socialize completely or at all. As a result, we do not recommend attempting to socialize feral cats older than 12 weeks—it is dangerous and stressful for both you and the cat. Feral cats live healthy lives in their outdoors homes and the best thing you can do to help them is Trap-Neuter-Return. Outdoor cats that are friendly and socialized to people are called stray cats, and they can be re-homed.

What happens to feral cats when they are brought to most shelters?

Because feral cats are not socialized to people, they are unadoptable as pets. In most shelters and pounds in the US, unadoptable animals are killed. In fact, 70% of all cats who enter shelters are killed there, according to the most reliable data available. That number jumps to close to 100% for feral cats.

Many shelters now realize that allowing feral cats to enter their doors is a death sentence and that Trap-Neuter-Return is the humane approach for their care. In recognition of this, some pounds and shelters have a "no feral cats accepted" policy, as well as a policy of returning eartipped cats to the place where they were initially trapped. Unfortunately, there are more pounds and shelters that still kill feral cats—some as soon as the cat enters the facility. Feral cats live full, healthy lives outdoors, but are killed in shelters.

Why doesn't removing feral cats from an area work?

Animal control's traditional approach for feral cats—catching and killing—is endless and cruel, and it does not keep an area free of cats. Cats choose to reside in a location for two reasons: there is a food source (intended or not) and shelter. Because of a phenomenon called the vacuum effect, when cats are removed from a location, survivors of the catch and kill effort and new cats who have moved in breed to capacity.

Cats have been living outside alongside people for 10,000 years—a fact that cannot be changed.

What is the vacuum effect?

Scientific evidence indicates that removing feral cat populations only opens up the habitat to an influx of new cats, either from neighboring territories or born from survivors. Each time cats are removed, the population will rebound through a natural phenomenon known as the “vacuum effect,” drawing the community into a costly, endless cycle of trapping and killing.

The vacuum effect describes what happens when even a portion of an animal population is permanently removed from its home range. Sooner or later, the empty habitat attracts other members of the species from neighboring areas, who move in to take advantage of the same resources that attracted the first group (like shelter and food).

Killing or removing the original population does nothing to eliminate these resources; it only creates a “vacuum” that will inevitably draw in other animals living nearby. Municipalities engaged in any type of catch and kill efforts are fighting a cruel, endless, losing battle against nature that is a gross waste of taxpayer dollars and ends hundreds of lives. If catch and kill had any long-term effect on cat populations, animal control officers nationwide—and their leadership organizations—would have observed it by now.

What Is Relocation and Why Doesn't It Work?

Many communities have rounded up colonies of feral cats either for euthanasia or to relocate them to another area. This never works. Feral cats are very connected with their territory. They are familiar with its food sources, places that offer—shelter, resident wildlife, other cats in the area and potential threats to their safety—all things that help them survive. “Relocation of feral cat colonies is difficult to orchestrate and not 100-percent successful even if done correctly. It is also usually impossible to catch all of the cats, and it only takes one male and one female to begin reproducing the colony,” Oldham states. “Even when rounding up is diligently performed and all ferals are removed, new cats will soon move in and set up camp.”

In high-tension situations, calls to “just move the cats” are extremely common. It can be tempting to offer the opposition an option they will easily accept, like relocation. But remember that you are always working towards a solution that is in the best interest of the cats—and relocation is not. Because of the negative impacts on the cats, relocation should be your last option, something to be considered only after you have exhausted

all other possibilities and you truly believe that the cats' lives are in imminent danger if they remain where they are.

A far better course of action is to resolve the problems that are causing the cats to be forced out of their home.

Is Relocation Ever an Option?

Relocation is something to consider only if keeping the cats where they are becomes a threat to their lives and all other options have been explored and have failed. Moving cats to another area is a great risk to their safety unless they are being moved to a protected area and procedures laid out by groups such as [Alley Cat Allies](#) are followed. "Relocation is an extremely difficult process. People should choose relocation only if the cats' territory is going to be demolished, there is no adjacent space to shift them to, and if the cats' lives would be at extreme risk should they remain where they are," says Oldham.

How Do I Deal with Difficult Neighbors?

To help your cats be better neighbors to your neighbors, keep in mind that kindness and patience are key. Find out what about the cats is bothering your neighbors and work with them on those specific issues. For example, deterrents such as motion-activated sprinklers, garden rocks and citrus smells will help keep cats away from the people who do not want them digging in their gardens or roaming their property. "It is also important to nicely explain to them that TNR is the most humane and effective way of managing feral cat overpopulation issues. TNR offers a solution that helps both the cats and the human residents, providing first and foremost permanent population control since the cats will no longer be able to reproduce," says Aimee Christian, ASPCA Vice President of Spay/Neuter Operations. "Let them know that it also drastically changes the cats' behavior—there will be less odor (since they will no longer spray), less roaming, less visibility, and no more yowling or fighting."

If you need help speaking to your community about TNR, here are some pointers to consider when dealing with difficult neighbors:

- Establish a friendly relationship with people living near a feral cat colony.
- Present information in a reasonable, professional manner and address individual complaints by listening patiently. Always maintain a constructive, problem-solving attitude.
- Explain diplomatically that the cats have lived at the site for a long time and that they have been or will be sterilized, which will cut back on annoying behaviors.
- Explain that if the present colony is removed, the problems will recur with new cats.

For educational resources please see [Alley Cat Allies: http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=694](http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=694)

How can I educate my neighbors about feral cats and TNR?

As you perform Trap-Neuter-Return or colony care, or even if you simply care about the welfare of your neighborhood cats, educating your neighbors and community members about the cats will begin a dialogue with them. For one thing, neighbors will know who “speaks for the cats” if a problem arises—and can speak to you first before Animal Control. For another, you begin to build goodwill toward your work and your cause.

For educational resources, such as brochures and flyers, please see [Alley Cat Allies: http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=694](http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=694)

Does TNR encourage the abandonment of cats?

Unfortunately, cat abandonment does occur. In fact, cats have been abandoned for as long as people have had pet cats, which is why TNR is necessary today. These periodic abandonments, however, will not derail the overall success of a TNR program because cat colonies can absorb the occasional newcomer yet still show a significant population reduction when the majority of the animals are sterilized.

It’s also important to stress that maintaining a local TNR colony is likely not the determining factor behind whether someone abandons a pet or not. Surely there are a variety of other issues that factor into this irresponsible behavior. However, efforts should be made to place feeding stations in out-of-the-way locations to minimize the likelihood of desperate people illegally abandoning their pet cats. Other strategies should also be employed to further reduce potential abandonment, such as posting signs about abandonment ordinances at high-profile cat colonies.

Learn more about caring for outdoor cats

I found a friendly outdoor cat, how do I find her a home?

First, do you know the difference between stray cats and feral cats? Stray cats are socialized to people and can be adopted into homes, but feral cats are not socialized to people and are happy living outdoors. To do what’s best for the cat, you need to know the difference!

When deciding what to do with the cats you have found, it’s important to know that if you take a cat to an animal shelter, most shelters will likely kill the cat. Seventy percent of cats entering shelters are killed, and that number jumps to nearly 100% of feral cats and kittens.

Stray cats will usually try to make contact with you, even if they are a bit fearful at first. If you find a stray cat, please take the following actions:

- Check with your neighbors to see if their cat is missing.
- Bring the cat to a shelter or veterinary clinic to be scanned for a microchip.
- Notify all local veterinary hospitals and shelters so they can post the information in their lost-and-found resources.
- Consider fostering the cat rather than bringing her to the shelter—most shelters only hold strays for a few days, often euthanizing them after the mandatory holding period.
- Check classifieds for lost pets and run a "found" ad of your own. Make sure your description is brief so that callers will need to truly identify the cat.

Follow these recommended steps from [Alley Cat Allies](#) to either return her to her home or find her a new one. <http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=287>

I have found feral kittens. What do I do?

When you come across kittens living outdoors, you may wonder whether it's better to take them into your home or leave them outside with mom. Whatever you decide, it should be in the kittens' best interest. You can find more information [here](#) (<http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=289>) but listed below are some suggestions to get you started:

- Whenever possible, kittens should continue to nurse until four weeks old—this can be done in captivity.
- Do not let feral kittens run loose—they can hide in tiny spaces and are exceptionally difficult to find and catch.
- Confine the kittens in a dog crate, cat condo or cage with a small litter box, food, water and something snuggly to cuddle in.
- Food is the key to socializing. Give the kittens a small amount of wet food by hand at least twice a day—eventually the kittens will associate your presence with food. For those who are more feral, start by offering baby food or wet food on a spoon through the cage.
- Younger and less feral kittens can be picked up right away. Make a kitty burrito by wrapping a kitten in a towel, allowing her head to stick out.
- Once the kittens no longer run away from you but instead come toward you seeking to be fed, held and petted, you can confine them to a small room.
- Be sure to expose the kitten to a variety of people.
- Do not forget about the mom—spaying her is essential as well.

I want to get some stray and feral cats neutered, how do I conduct Trap-Neuter-Return?

Trap-Neuter-Return is a great way to help the cats in your community; it improves the cats' health and stabilizes the colony while allowing them to live out their lives outdoors.

To successfully trap, neuter, vaccinate, eartip, and return feral cats to their outdoor home, you need a plan. We recommend following the guidelines for humane trapping, available from [Alley Cat Allies' How to Conduct Trap-Neuter-Return](#) section of their website: (<http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=889>)

- When possible, trap in dry, temperate weather.
- Do not feed the cats for a full 36 hours before trapping, as they must be hungry to enter the trap.
- If you'll be trapping in an area where pet cats are roaming, please inform your neighbors.
- Human-grade tuna, mackerel, sardines and salmon work well as bait. Avoid canned cat food; stray cats are used to it. Place the food inside the trap, behind the trip plate, so the cat is sure to step on it when eating.
- Transport the trapped cat to your veterinarian for spaying or neutering immediately upon capture.
- To reduce anxiety, place a sheet or towel over the trap so the cat feels secure.
- Ask that the cat be ear-tipped—have the tip of one ear snipped during surgery—to help future rescuers identify him. This is a painless and risk-free procedure.

If you're looking for help at the local level, check out our list of local Kern County vets [here](#). Or you can contact **KCATNiP at 661-868-6999** or email KernTNR@gmail.com to receive guidance on how you can work with Kern County Animal Control to trap cats in your area for TNR.

How do I trap hard to trap cats?

Cats can become trap-shy—frightened to go near or enter a trap, or trap-savvy—mastered the art of removing food without triggering the trap. Don't be discouraged. There are several unique but straightforward techniques to humanely trap hard-to-trap cats. You can find suggestions here: <http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=340>

I can't find anyone to help me with TNR. What do I do?

The good news is, you will never be alone! There are very valuable resources available on the Web and via feral cat organizations that will help guide you through the process. Visit the [Alley Cat Allies online community](#) (<http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=379>) to gather ideas and expertise. It's a good idea to reach out and connect with others, even if they aren't close by. Also,

Neighborhood Cats offers an online workshop, "[How to Manage a Feral Cat Colony.](http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/)" (<http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/>)

Contact **KCATNiP at 661-868-6999** or **KernTNR@gmail.com** to receive guidance on how you can work with Kern County Animal Control to trap cats in your area.

I don't want cats in my yard. How can I deter cats and peacefully live with them in my neighborhood?

Thank you for searching out peaceful solutions to living with cats!

It's important to understand outdoor cat behaviors and what draws cats to certain areas. We have simple solutions to divert outdoor cats away from places they are not wanted! Learn how to carry out these tips in "How to Live with Cats in Your Neighborhood" (http://acaweb.alleycat.org/large_docs/deterbrochure-rev3.pdf)

Or you can watch the following YouTube video as it discusses each one of these products: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avTQbP0BtII>.

Don't Feral Cats Kill Birds?

According to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Web page entitled "Threats to Native Birds" (birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/conservation/planning/threats), the largest threat to birds is loss (or degradation) of habitat, which results from human development and agriculture. Other significant hazards to bird populations include chemical toxins and direct exploitation from hunting and capturing birds for pets.

There are no studies that show conclusively that pet cats are responsible for declines in wildlife populations. Although no studies support the misleading claims that cats are destroying songbird populations, there's no disputing that cats do in fact kill birds. The point that must be highlighted, however, is that fewer cats mean less bird predation. That being the case, TNR should not be condemned because of potential wildlife predation, but rather embraced so that free-roaming populations can be curtailed as efficiently as possible to minimize potential predatory behavior.

How Can I Keep Feral Cats Out of My Yard?

Whether feral cats are roaming your yard, digging up your garden, rooting through your trash or making a home under your porch, there are several types of harmless cat repellents available to help. From sprays and motion-activated sprinklers to ultrasonic animal repellents, these quick and easy solutions, coupled with TNR and ongoing management, can help you coexist with your neighborhood cats! Just make sure your product of choice is nontoxic to animals.

Here is a great video that highlights some of the most popular and inexpensive cat deterrents available. A list of some deterrents is highlighted below.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nnOibq6nYc&feature=youtu.be>)

Top Cat-Deterrent Products

Some people just don't want cats on their property. For these people, there are a number of humane cat-deterrent products they can try. Most of these products can be purchased online; lawn and garden supply stores may carry some of them.

Scarecrow: With this motion-activated sprinkler, an infrared sensor responds to motion and releases a three-second blast of water. The sprinkler, which "fires" 1,000 times on only one 9-volt battery, covers an area approximately 45 feet wide by 35 feet long. Search online or call Contech, the manufacturer, for the nearest retailer: 1-800-767-8658.

CatStop: This deterrent uses a motion sensor and emits a high-pitched, ultrasonic alarm that can't be heard by humans but will frighten most cats and small dogs. You place the unit facing the area you want to protect and it covers about 300 square feet. It requires a 9-volt battery, and can operate up to nine months with one battery. CatStop is a good choice for areas where children may be at play. Search online or call Contech, the manufacturer, for the nearest retailer: 1-800-767-8658.

Cat Scat: This non-chemical cat and wildlife repellent consists of plastic mats that are pressed into the soil. Each mat has flexible plastic spikes that are harmless but effective. You can purchase this product at www.gardeners.com.

Shake-Away: This nontoxic granular deterrent contains the scent of fox, bobcat and coyote, animals that prey on cats. A 20-ounce bottle will cover 600 linear feet. One drawback is that it must be re-applied to remain effective. For more information, visit www.critter-repellent.com.

Other ideas for deterrents:

- Concrete pavers, river rocks, large pinecones, chicken wire (sharp edges down) or large bark can cover loose soil, discouraging cats from eliminating there.
- Plant the herb rue or coleus canina (scaredy-cat coleus), decorative plants that repel cats.
- Generously sprinkle cayenne pepper, coffee grounds, pipe tobacco, lemongrass oil, citronella oil, eucalyptus oil, or mustard oil on the ground to deter cats.

Odor Control

To reduce the incidence of cats eliminating on neighbors' properties, community cat caregivers need to provide them with an appropriate place to do their business.

Caregivers should provide the cats with litter boxes and scoop them regularly. To make

a large litter-box area, use plastic concrete mixers or a child's sandbox.

One useful product for odor control is NaturVet Yard Odor Eliminator, available online at www.naturvet.com or by calling 1-888-628-8783. It's a nontoxic odor eliminator safe for use on grass, plants, patios, concrete, fences, or any other surface where pet odors are a problem.

I think someone poisoned/injured my cat(s). What can I do?

Physical threats—or worse, actual violence or cruelty—toward any member of your feral cat colony present a serious and frightening situation for you and for the cats. However, it is important to stay focused and calm—that will help you better protect the cats.

Intentionally hurting a cat is animal cruelty, and it is illegal in every state and the District of Columbia. Direct threats to cats should be taken seriously.

If someone has physically harmed your cats:

When a cat you care for is harmed or killed, it can be very difficult to know what to do. There are steps you can take to protect the cats remaining in the colony and bring justice for the cat who is injured or who you have lost.

First, if the cat is injured, trap her and take her to the veterinarian immediately. Find a feral-friendly veterinarian. Next, call the police and begin gathering as much evidence as possible. Make sure you take pictures and document as much evidence as you can find—write all of your observations in a journal and include dates and times. We know how difficult this will be if the cat was killed, but you must document how you found her with photographs. If at all possible, get a necropsy (an autopsy for animals) performed on the cat in order to find out the cause of death. Most states have a state laboratory that performs post-mortem tests on animals. Costs vary, but may be worthwhile if evidence aids in prosecution of the case.

At this point you may want to involve a lawyer. In order to protect the remaining cats you may consider installing a video camera on your property in order to have documentation of activity at all times of the day. This would not only aid with evidence in future cases, but could also serve as a deterrent for anyone coming onto the property with ill intentions. If the situation has escalated to the point where you want to involve a lawyer, these tips can help find one. Arm yourself with knowledge about local government structures as well as how to learn about your local ordinances.

How do I build/where can I find shelters for my outdoor cats?

Building a shelter for feral cats can keep them safe from the elements and help you control their location and deter them from neighbors' properties.

At www.alleycat.org/BuildAShelter, (<http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=296>) you'll find instructions on how to build your own inexpensive do-it-yourself wooden shelter, as well as Feral Cat Shelter Options, list of shelter ideas from organizations and individuals all over the country sorted by ease of set-up.

Learn more about advocating for cats

The property manager in my community/at a local store/office park wants the cats removed. What do I do? (conflicts with property management)

When a property manager wants to trap and remove cats, your goal is to try to protect the cats. Here is an overview of steps you should take:

Set up a Meeting - Call to schedule a meeting with the owner or property manager; be professional and diplomatic.

Prepare for the Meeting –The key to any response is to remain calm at all times and to make sure that any comments you make are grounded in truth and fact. When preparing, always look for the positive way to present your case.

Prepare for Negotiation - Find common ground and a resolution.

Mediate with your Opponents - Find out what your opponent's specific concerns are relating to the cats and provide possible solutions for them. Many times concerns or complaints can be easily addressed.

Use Bargaining Chips – Part of negotiation is offering services in exchange for getting what you want for the cats.

Educate Property Managers - Use educational materials and outreach tools to help you explain to the property manager what you're doing and why.

Get Input from Local Feral Cat and Trap-Neuter-Return. Feral-friendly organizations and individuals may be able to provide you with further advice and guidance.

Can I donate to Kern County Animal Control and KCATNiP?

KCAC gladly accepts monetary or in-kind donations, including supplies for the cats in our adoption program as well as those for TNR. We are always in need of the following to continue our work sterilizing Kern County's feral cat population:

- Canned cat food (fish flavored preferred) and cans of tuna fish

- Tomahawk humane live traps
(http://www.livetraps.com/index.php?dispatch=categories.view&category_id=589)
- Newspaper
- Paper plates
- Trap covers (ACES trap and cover- <https://www.animal-care.com/index.cfm/id/10/category/151/secondary/314/traps-baits?>)
- Feral dens (<https://www.animal-care.com/index.cfm/id/10/category/151/secondary/311/Carriers?>)

IF you have any questions about other types of donations, please contact 661-868-6999 or KernTNR@gmail.com.

Are donations made to Kern County Animal Control tax deductible?

Unfortunately no because we are not a nonprofit organization. If you'd like a tax write off you can donate to our partner nonprofit organization Friends of **Kern County Shelters Foundation** (<http://www.friendsofkernshelters.org/>).

Find answers to some general questions

Will Kern County Animal Control pick up the cats in my yard?

KCAC does not pick up free-roaming or owned cats in the field unless they have been involved in a bite on a person, or are involved in a neglect/cruelty call for services. We are able to provide resources which will give you the know how to care for cats in your area, and put you in contact with local advocates, caregivers, and veterinarians.

Contact KCATNiP via email: KernTNR@gmail.com or call our hotline at 661-868-6999 for more information.

Do you spay or neuter cats? Are you low cost?

Kern County Animal Control currently does not provide spay/neuter services for the public. We will work with local trappers to schedule surgeries with KCAC's medical team, but because our medical team is also responsible for the 30,000 animals that come through our doors each year, they can only do a limited number of surgeries for feral cats each week.

We recommend trappers consider local feral-friendly veterinarians or contact KCATNiP to see what other options you may have. Email is KernTNR@gmail.com and 661-868-6999.

Can I rent a trap from Kern County Animal Control?

At this time KCAC does not rent traps to the public. There are, however, many locations that you can rent and/or buy humane live traps to use responsibly and safely to trap cats for TNR.

Does Kern County Animal Control test feral cats for feline leukemia and FIV?

Most large TNR programs do not routinely test cats destined for release back into their colonies for the feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) or the feline leukemia virus (FeLV) primarily for economic reasons but also because the “math” and the “science” on this issue support spay/neuter only as the best practice.

Do the Math: FIV/FeLV testing for 1000 feral cats per year @12.00 per cat \$12,000
Average cost to spay/neuter a cat is \$50.00. Thus, cats NOT altered because of funds spent on testing is 240 cats. It makes more sense to spay/neuter more cats.

Look at the science: Approximately only 4% percent of free-roaming cats are infected with FIV or FeLV, similar to the pet cat population. Spay/neuter helps reduce the transmission of the viruses. FIV is contracted primarily through deep bite wounds, the kind of injury associated with unaltered males fighting; neuter the males and you minimize aggressive behavior.

FeLV disease is primarily transmitted from infected mothers to their kittens; spay the females and you have no kittens to pass it to. It would be reasonable to conclude that money spent on spay/neuter will control the spread of FIV and FeLV better than testing and removing the occasional positive cat.