Feral Cats

TNR for Dummies

To animal lovers, killing feral cats is not an option. But for people who are bothered by stray cats messing up the garden, or howling into the wee hours of the night, getting rid of the nuisance seems like a sound, practical idea.



The trouble is, it just doesn't work.

"Why not?" you ask. "If you remove the problem, the problem goes away, doesn't it?"

Nature Abhors a Vacuum

There may be some peace for a while, but, sooner rather than later, more cats will move into that territory because there is most probably shelter and a reliable food source of rodents or scraps.

Then the messing, howling cycle starts all over again. Each time a group of cats is removed, the door opens for another group to move in. There is no shortage of cats out there looking for a nice place to live.

The lasting solution is trap/neuter/return (TNR).

The key word here is neuter. Neutered cats do not exhibit mating behaviors or the associated noise. There is no guarantee about the flowerbeds, but a neutered cat is usually content to stay close to home, rather than roam about the neighborhood.

Feral cat colonies can be of various sizes, but they are finite, and the cats know how many an area can support. They also defend their territory; new, unaltered cats who arrive in the neighborhood may be unwelcome and are driven away, keeping the numbers stable.

Ear-Tipping

In all TNR programs, the tip of the cat's left ear is removed during the spay or neuter surgery to indicate that the cat has been fixed. It's easy to spot a new cat that has been accepted into a group, and that cat can then be fixed.

TNR has been practiced in Europe for many years, and people have come to accept that this is the best way to regulate feral cats, and, ultimately, reduce the numbers to manageable amounts.

Feral cats serve a purpose as part of the ecological system by keeping rodent populations under control. If we tried to eliminate free-roaming cats altogether from the urban or rural landscape, we might end up regretting it.