

# THE *PETA* GUIDE TO FERAL CATS

There are an estimated **80 million** homeless cats in the U.S., a staggering number of animals in desperate need of help. But what's the best way to help them?



## HOW TO HELP LOST AND HOMELESS CATS

- Humanely capture and take homeless cats to a reputable open-admission shelter. There, they will be safe, and social cats will have a chance at being reunited with their guardians or finding a loving home. Even if a cat cannot find a new home and must be euthanized, a painless injection by a trained professional in a peaceful environment is preferable to a prolonged death on the streets from untreated illness or injury and is often the most compassionate thing that we can do for unwanted, unadoptable animals.
- If your local shelters refuse to admit homeless cats (as an increasing number are doing), lobby for a change to this irresponsible and inhumane policy. And in the meantime, consider stepping up and sterilizing, vaccinating, and finding homes for socialized cats yourself. Be sure to screen adopters carefully and require that the cats be kept indoors, where it's safe. (Visit **PETA.org** for information on screening adopters.)
- Maintaining a feral cat colony is a big commitment and requires as much (if not more) time, patience, and resources as having indoor feline companions. There are no holidays for dedicated feral cat caretakers—if you decide to take on the responsibility of caring for feral cats, they will need care 365 days a year, including veterinary care to treat illness and injuries.



## FERAL CATS ARE **NOT** WILDLIFE

Unsocialized cats are domestic animals, just like the cats who share our homes. They all rely on humans to provide them with food, water, and veterinary care and to keep them safe.

## FEEDING IS **NOT** ENOUGH

Two unaltered female cats and their offspring can produce dozens of cats within a few months. Please, never stop at just feeding feral cats—doing so only contributes to the overpopulation crisis and exacerbates the suffering of cats who are often seen as a nuisance even though they're just trying to survive.

## RABIES AND OTHER **DISEASES**

Putting food out for cats contributes to the spread of rabies because it attracts additional cats as well as wildlife such as raccoons and foxes. Cats can also contract and spread typhus, plague, and toxoplasmosis.

## IT'S A **JUNGLE** OUT THERE

The life expectancy of a homeless cat is less than three years. Minor cuts and puncture wounds can easily turn into raging infections, and parasites, such as worms and fleas, often lead to anemia and even death. Every year, cats die of exposure during cold snaps and of heatstroke during heatwaves. Free-roaming dogs and wild animals attack, injure, and kill feral cats, and cruel people who dislike cats shoot, poison, and drown them.

## PUTTING **NATIVE WILDLIFE** AT RISK

Cats are non-native predators who disrupt ecosystems and threaten native animals, whose populations are already under stress from habitat loss and other factors. Cats kill billions of songbirds and other wild animals every year. Anyone who cares about animals must consider the undeniable pain and suffering that roaming cats inflict on wildlife populations.





## HUMANE TRAPPING GUIDELINES

- If the cats are not on your property, **get written permission from the owner of the property** where they live to care for them.
- **Obtain a humane box trap.** You can borrow one from your local animal shelter or buy one from a hardware or feed store or online.
- Before setting the trap, **place an unset trap with food in it outside for a night or two** so that the cats become accustomed to it.
- **Set the trap on firm ground** to prevent it from wobbling when the cats step inside.
- **Line it with a small, light towel** or piece of folded newspaper, being careful not to interfere with the trip mechanism.
- **Place a tiny bit of food at the entrance** and a trail of additional food leading to a larger amount all the way at the back of the trap. Don't put the food in a bowl or leave it in a can because a panicky, thrashing cat can easily be injured by these containers. Use a paper towel or paper plate instead.
- **Trap cats the night before sterilization surgery** so that they won't be forced to stay in the trap for too long.
- **Never leave a trap unattended.** A trapped cat is vulnerable to attacks by other animals and cruel humans.
- **As soon as the door closes, cover the trap with a towel or sheet to reduce stress.** If it's a hot day, use a lightweight sheet, and be sure there's enough air.
- **Gently and with both hands, carry the trap to your vehicle.** Avoid anything that could frighten the cat, such as talking loudly, playing music, or slamming car doors.

## FERAL CAT COLONY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Every cat is spayed or neutered, and caretakers actively attempt to trap, sterilize, and find homes for any new cats who show up.
- ✓ Caretakers monitor, feed, and water the cats daily and provide veterinary care as needed.
- ✓ Cats are kept in a large secure, escape-proof enclosure that has resting platforms and elevated walkways; have access to a warm, dry shelter; and are not subjected to harsh weather conditions.

## WHEN TRAP-NEUTER-RELEASE (TNR) KILLS

- **Santa Catalina Island, California:** Four cats in a "managed" colony died after being attacked by predators or poisoned with antifreeze.
- **Sams Valley, Oregon:** Over three dozen cats in a TNR program died of panleukopenia, also known as "cat parvo" or "cat distemper."
- **Modesto, California:** More than 100 cats who were being fed behind a shopping center were violently killed by an unknown assailant.
- **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:** Unknown assailants set fire to cat shelters and hanged, stabbed, and drowned cats.
- **Havre de Grace, Maryland:** A member of a feral cat colony was found dead next to a note that read, "The cats must go." Other cats had previously been shot or poisoned.
- **Avon, North Carolina:** Three cats who were part of a "well-established colony" were shot and killed, and their bodies were thrown into a dumpster.



For more information on minimum standards for feral cat colony maintenance, please read PETA's factsheet "Trap, Neuter, Return, and Monitor Programs for Feral Cats: Doing It Right" at **PETA.org**.

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